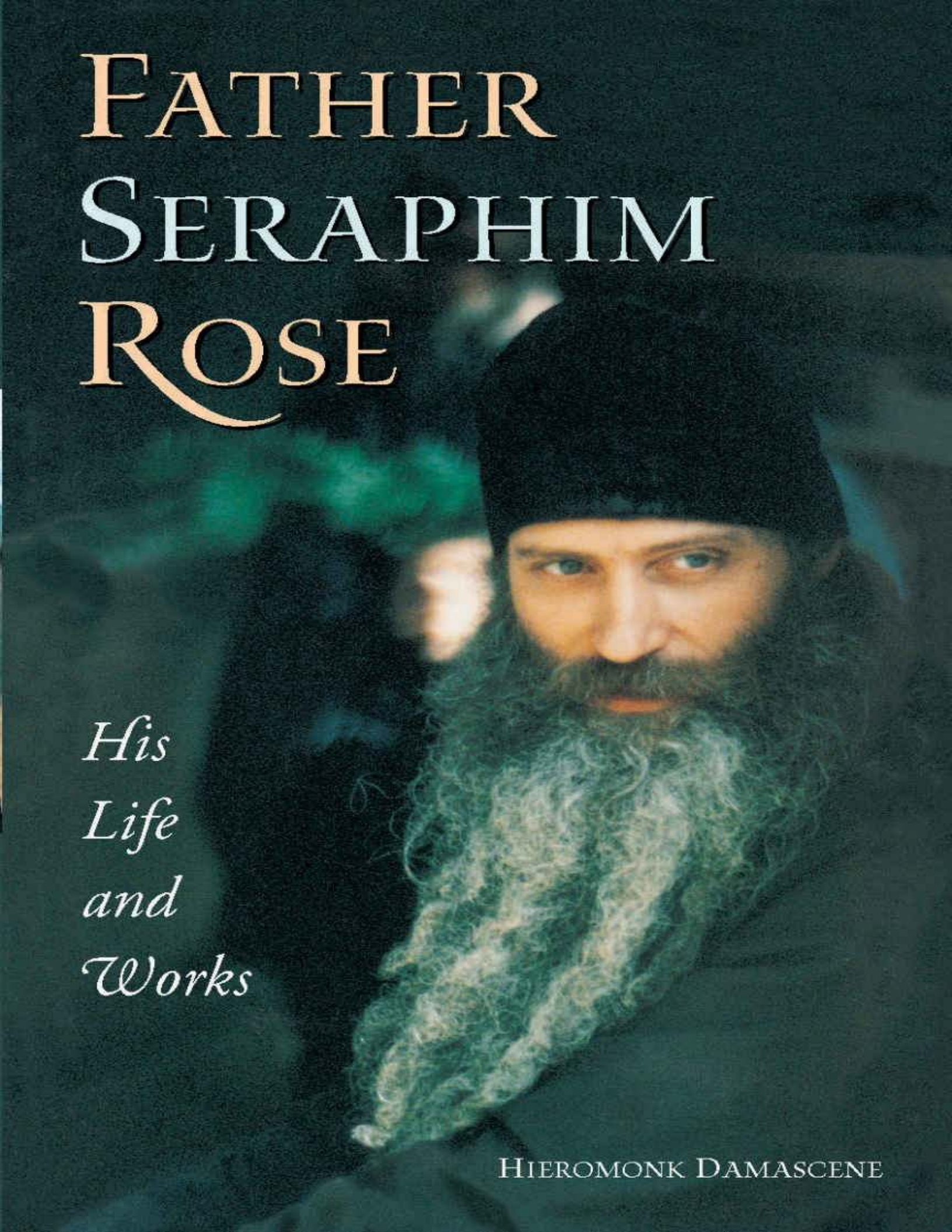


# FATHER SERAPHIM ROSE

A portrait of Father Seraphim Rose, a man with a long, flowing white beard and mustache, wearing a black monastic cap and robe. He is looking directly at the camera with a gentle expression. The background is dark and out of focus, with some greenish light visible on the left.

*His  
Life  
and  
Works*

HIEROMONK DAMASCENE

**FATHER SERAPHIM ROSE**

**His Life and Works**





Fr. Seraphim lecturing at the St. Herman Summer Pilgrimage, 1980.

# FATHER SERAPHIM ROSE

*His Life and Works*



Hieromonk Damascene

*Third Edition*



ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA BROTHERHOOD  
2010



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St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood  
P. O. Box 70  
Platina, California 96076

St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood online catalogue:

<http://www.sainthermanpress.com>

First Edition: September 2003

Second Edition: February 2005

Third Edition: February 2010

Printed in the United States of America.

Note: pagination in e-book readers will vary. References to page numbers refer to the paperback edition.

*Front cover:* Fr. Seraphim at the St. Herman of Alaska Monastery, Platina, California, 1979. Photograph by Gary Todoroff.

*Back cover:* Fr. Seraphim atop Mount Yolla Bolly, October 11, 1981.

*Photo on spine:* Fr. Seraphim at the St. Herman Monastery.

*Frontispiece:* Photograph by Fr. Lawrence Williams.

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Publishers Cataloging-in-Publication

Damascene, Hieromonk, 1961–

Father Seraphim Rose: his life and works / Hieromonk Damascene.—3rd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN: 1-887904-07-7

1. Rose, Hieromonk Seraphim, 1934-82. 2. Orthodox Eastern Church — United States — Biography. 3. Orthodox Eastern Church — Clergy. 4. Orthodox Eastern Church — United States. I. Title.

BX310.D35 2003

281.9/092 [B]—dc2

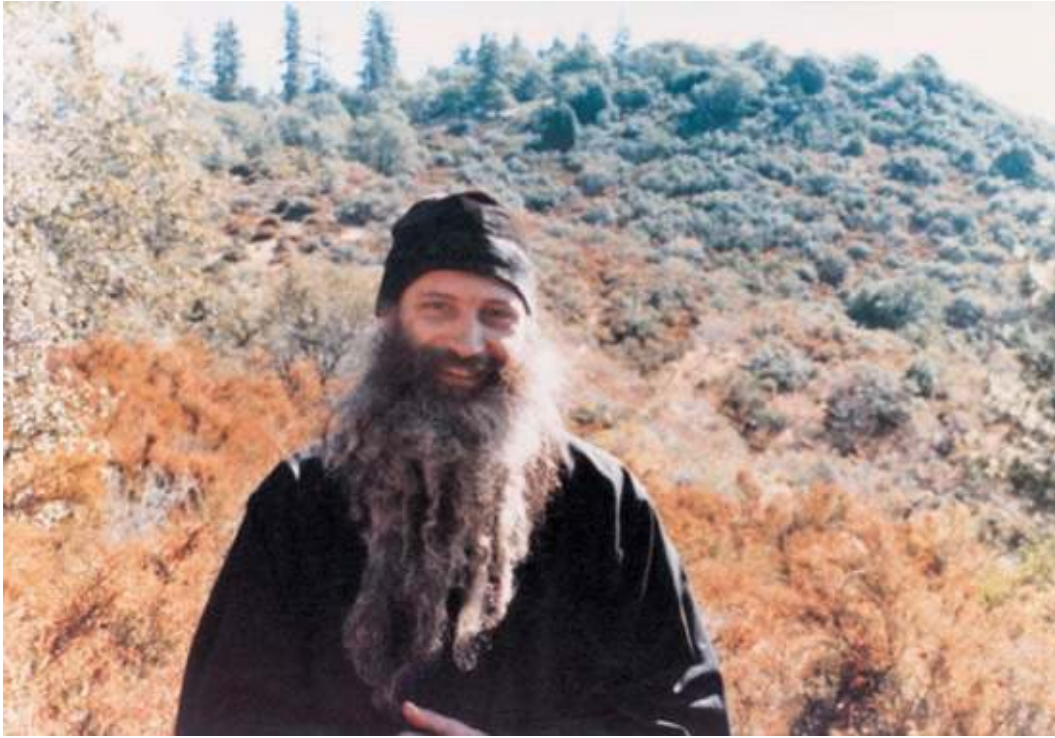
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*THEN PILATE entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto Him, “Art thou the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered him, “Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me?” Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?” Jesus answered, “My Kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence.” Pilate therefore said unto Him, “Art thou a king then?” Jesus answered, “Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the Truth. Every one that is of the Truth heareth My voice.”*

John 18:33–37



Fr. Seraphim at St. Elias Skete on Noble Ridge, with the top of Mount St. Herman in the background. St. Herman of Alaska Monastery, Platina, California.

*Photograph by Solomonia Nelson.*



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# PREFACE

*... And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit.*

—Mark 4:20

**N**OT long after the untimely death of Hieromonk Seraphim in 1982, Archbishop Anthony of Western America and San Francisco (Russian Orthodox Church Abroad) observed that Fr. Seraphim had been the first American *podvizhnik* or Righteous Struggler — a specific category or type of righteousness in the Orthodox Christian tradition of sanctity. Undoubtedly, Archbishop Anthony had in mind St. Paul, who said that those who truly follow Christ must *put to death [their] members which are upon the earth... having put off the old man with his deeds and having put on the new, which is renewed after the image of Him Who created him* (Col. 3:5, 9–10). This biography is the record, the true story, of how an American convert to Orthodoxy became a *podvizhnik*.

There have been other *podvizhniki* or Righteous Strugglers in North America — most notably St. John (Maximovitch) of Shanghai and San Francisco, Fr. Seraphim’s own mentor, and St. Herman of Alaska, the patron saint of this continent — but Fr. Seraphim was the first American-born *podvizhnik*. As such, he is both a clear example and a gentle “shower of the way” for American Orthodox. In one of his homilies, St. John Chrysostom said that “a good example is better than a thousand sermons”; and the Blessed Greek Elder, Gabriel of Dionysiou, who reposed only a year after Fr. Seraphim, wrote that “holiness of life is the best kind of preaching.” <sup>1</sup> Although he is justly famous for his books, articles, short but pithy sermons and learned lectures, those who knew Fr. Seraphim personally were primarily influenced by the

example of his righteous struggle to come closer to Christ, which culminated, ultimately, in genuine “holiness of life.”

Thus, Fr. Seraphim’s patient lifelong struggle is itself the most important sermon or lecture he ever gave. That is why this present biography, by Hieromonk Damascene, is so important.

When I was in Russia in 1998 I met some ardent young Russian men and women in St. Petersburg who had read Fr. Seraphim’s books in translation. They asked me to share my own memories of Fr. Seraphim. I spoke to them about personal details, such as what his sermons were like, how he served the Divine Liturgy, how his monastic cell was arranged, his personal appearance, what his speaking and chanting voice was like, and so forth. When I finished there was a long pause. Then one of them observed, “You know, Fr. Seraphim is really for us young *Russians*.” Surprised, I said, “That’s funny; I always thought he was for us *Americans*.” And then I realized: this is one of the signs of a saint: that he appeals to everyone, everywhere, in all languages and cultures, with an immediacy and conviction not to be found among this world’s “celebrities.”



Hieromonk Ambrose (at left) holding a memorial service for Fr. Seraphim at the latter’s grave, on the eve of the twentieth anniversary of his repose.  
St. Herman of Alaska Monastery, Platina, California, 2002.

Truly, in the years since his repose, Fr. Seraphim has, by God's grace, emerged from the quiet, almost hidden but extremely productive, "Platina years," and become now a "shooting star" — no longer a steady small flame burning on a mountaintop in northern California, but now part of the fiery firmament of heaven itself.

This biography is the story of how that happened.

Hieromonk Ambrose (formerly Fr. Alexey Young)  
Hermitage of the Holy Cross, Wayne, West Virginia  
2003

# INTRODUCTION

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM ROSE is an American known and loved today all over Russia. Anyone in Russia who knows anything about his ancestral Faith — Orthodox Christianity — knows Fr. Seraphim's name. His books, the people there say, change lives.

An American Orthodox convert who spent several months in Russia has written: "When I would meet Russians, invariably, after finding out I'm an American, they would excitedly ask: 'Did you know Fr. Seraphim Rose?' It is a startling fact that almost everyone knows of him, even the children. They consider Fr. Seraphim, his writings and the witness of his life in Christ, to be pivotal to the resurrection of Holy Russia in our days." <sup>1</sup>

During the era when their religion was being mocked and undermined by an atheist state, Fr. Seraphim spoke openly to people in Russia against the spirit of international godlessness, making them unashamed of their ancient Faith, giving them strength and courage to continue struggling. He spoke to their hearts and souls in a way that made sense out of their long decades of persecution, suffering, and purification.

Thirty years ago, Fr. Seraphim's works reached Russia from America, were translated, and were clandestinely distributed in typewritten manuscripts from one end of Russia to the other. Later, with the advent of freedom in Russia, they began to be published there openly in mass quantities in books and magazines, and began to be talked about on television and radio. His books have been made available everywhere — even on book tables in the Metro (subway) and in kiosks on the street. Thus, just as Russia once brought the fullness of Truth — Orthodoxy — to America, so now America, through Fr. Seraphim, is bringing that Truth back whence it came.

In other Orthodox countries — especially those formerly dominated by

Communism — Fr. Seraphim is also widely loved, his works published and studied, and his name held in great reverence. His works have been published in Greek, Serbian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Georgian, Latvian, Polish, Italian, French, German, Chinese, and Malayalam (south Indian).

**W**HO was this man who, although known to only a small segment of people in the affluent, pluralistic West, has made such a tremendous impression on suffering Eastern Orthodox lands? Who was this penetrating spiritual philosopher who appears to have emerged out of some ancient Patericon? Who was this “desert-dwelling” monk whose name in Russia became surrounded with legends about his remote life in the wilderness?

The answer is that this man who came to be called Fr. Seraphim Rose was basically a simple, straightforward, and above all *honest* American. He was raised in sunny southern California, a few hundred miles from Hollywood and Disneyland, by parents who knew next to nothing of Eastern Orthodoxy. His mother only wanted him to be successful; his father only wanted him to be happy.

The story of Fr. Seraphim Rose is not just the story of one individual; it is the story of what can occur in the conscience of the American soul, when God stirs there the chords of righteousness.

Fr. Seraphim’s basic honesty enabled him to pierce the darkness of his times, not only for his fellow countrymen, but for those in far-off, enslaved lands as well. At an early age he rebelled against the superficiality of modern American society: against its worldliness, materialism, light-mindedness, and boring rationalism. As part of his rebellion he partook of the restlessness, despair, nihilism, and moral anarchy of the “angry young men” of his generation: the progressive intellectuals, bohemians, and beatniks. His forthright, self-sacrificing character, however, pulled him out of the self-indulgent and forbidden escapes that his peers were making. Even the ideas and practices of Buddhism, which were just becoming popular in the West at that time, left his

soul empty and yearning.

It was then that God revealed Himself to Fr. Seraphim's sorrowing soul, and the conversion from modern American rebellion to ancient, apostolic Orthodoxy was begun. When he *did* come to the Orthodox Church, he cut through all the externals and went right to the essence and heart of otherworldly Christianity. He has blazed the path for other honest, forthright American souls to follow, as they too heed God's call to righteousness.

But there was another aspect of Fr. Seraphim, one that especially endeared him to the hearts of Orthodox Christians behind the Iron Curtain. As his monastic co-laborer of many years observed: "Fr. Seraphim was a man who knew how to suffer." He knew the value of redemptive suffering, saw it manifested in the Christian martyrs and confessors of his own time, and consciously embraced it — not only outwardly through the hardships of his wilderness monastic life, but also inwardly, in the "pain of heart" that characterizes true Christian love. Before he found the Truth, he had suffered for the lack of it; now having found it, he suffered for the sake of it.

**T**HE author of these lines was a spiritual son of Fr. Seraphim, having been returned to the love of Jesus Christ through him. My initial impressions of him were, first of all, that he was the wisest man I had ever met, and secondly, that he was as one dead: a man who had died to himself and to everything in this world because he had set his sights on the Kingdom above. I was in awe of him. During my subsequent visits to his monastery and my talks with him, I gradually came to know more deeply the One Who lived within him. But I did not know *him*: I did not know the story of how he became the man he was. It was only after his repose that I learned of his former life, of the darkness from which he had emerged. And I was even more in awe — of Christ Who had transformed him into a new being, and of Fr. Seraphim himself, who had allowed his old self to be put to death so completely and, along with the Apostle Paul, had been "dying daily." [\[a\]](#) I saw that not only had my first impression of him been true,

but that it had only scratched the surface of a profound mystery which the world can never comprehend: the re-creation of a soul through the grace of Jesus Christ.

As I stood beside Fr. Seraphim's coffin in his simple monastery church, beholding the radiant, heavenly image of his face in repose, I shed tears of gratitude, thanking him for giving me the Truth — the pearl of great price, for which it is worth selling everything that is in the world.

Today, now that nearly three decades have passed since his repose, I see the tremendous potential of what he accomplished in his all-too-brief life of forty-eight years. Mine is only one of the millions of lives that his has deeply touched.

I feel compelled to make his message known, to give back to others what he has given me. Through him, modern America brings forth, out of its own soil, a harvest of ancient, mystical Christianity. It is a depth of Christianity that America as yet scarcely knows: hidden from all earthly tumult and vanity, and partaking of the otherworldly Kingdom of God.

Hieromonk Damascene  
St. Herman of Alaska Monastery  
Platina, California





Fr. Seraphim during the “New Valaam Theological Academy” course, 1980. *Photograph by Fr. Lawrence Williams.*

# PART I





Eugene's maternal grandparents, John and Hilma Holbeck. Wedding picture, 1896.



Eugene's paternal grandmother, May Vandenboom Rose.



Eugene's parents, Frank and Esther Rose. Wedding picture, 1921.



Eugene's father, Frank Rose.

# 1

## *Beginnings*

*This man... is not a wellborn member of a famous house; he's one of many, yet he's a true nobleman.*

—Euripides [1](#)

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM ROSE—who has been called the first American-born link to the mind of the ancient Holy Fathers — was born into a typical white, Protestant, middle-class family in a typical California coastal city, San Diego. The name given him at birth was Eugene, which means “wellborn” or “noble.”

Eugene’s parents were second-generation immigrants to the United States. Both of his mother’s parents came from Norway. John Christian Holbeck, his grandfather, arrived with his family when he was thirteen. Hilma Helickson, his grandmother, though born in Norway was actually Swedish; she was brought to America at age three. The Holbecks and Helicksons settled in the small town of Two Harbors, Minnesota, where John and Hilma grew up, met, and were married in 1896. John worked as a driller in a diamond mine and then tried his hand at farming. He and Hilma had five children. Their third child, Esther, born in 1901, was Eugene’s mother.

Esther was raised on a forty-acre farm that her father had bought at ten dollars an acre. It was poor land — “stumpland,” she used to call it — and she remembered her father using dynamite to get rid of the stumps. John had to augment the income of his growing family by working a night shift in town. Later, he had cows and peddled milk from house to house.

The Holbecks had their children baptized and raised them in the Lutheran Church. Great emphasis was placed on education. They sent the oldest son, Jack, to college at great financial sacrifice, and he repaid them after he became established financially. Although only two of the Holbecks' children were able to attend college, nearly all their grandchildren and great-grandchildren earned at least one college degree. As a matter of pride, everyone was expected to be successful.

John Holbeck was the epitome of the sober, hardworking immigrant. His daunting task of hewing out a living from the land left no room for pastimes. Once, when his daughter Esther returned from a walk in the woods singing and carrying flowers, he immediately looked on this in terms of its practical value. "You can't eat music or flowers!" he told her in his heavy Norwegian brogue.

Later in life, Esther did take time out to pursue music and to paint (mostly flowers). But the experience of growing up in such a hardworking family gave her a no-nonsense practicality that never left her. She was always concerned with the financial side of things.

The man she married, Frank Rose, was of a different stamp. A humble, quiet, agreeable sort of fellow, he was one to take what comes in life.

Frank was of French and Dutch stock. On his father's side, he had a French ancestor who had been a soldier in Napoleon's army and had married a Hungarian Gypsy. If there was any passionate Gypsy blood in the Rose lineage, however, it certainly skipped a generation in the person of Frank.

Frank's father, Louis Deseret (L. D.) Rose, had emigrated from France to Canada, and then to the United States, and had opened an ice-cream parlor and candy store in Two Harbors. He had a wooden leg, the result of a train accident as a young man. "No one pitied him for this or talked about it," recalls one family member; "it was just something that happened, and life went on." Although from a Roman Catholic background, Louis was a confirmed atheist with sympathies toward socialism. He claimed to have read the New Testament before the age of twelve — the impressiveness of this claim evidently being

intended to lend weight to his atheism. Louis' views on religion, however, did not prevent him from marrying a devout Dutch Roman Catholic, May Vandeenboom, whose family had settled in Marquette, Michigan.

Louis and May had four sons, one of whom drowned at the age of twelve. Frank, their second child, was born in 1890. According to his mother's wishes, he served as a Catholic altar boy for several years. May died at the age of forty-eight, when Frank was only fourteen, but he continued serving in the church for four more years.

Frank Rose fought for his country in the Army during World War I, going to France and returning home as a sergeant. He met Esther Holbeck when she was working at his father's shop, "Rose's Candy Store." She was eleven years younger than he, and had just graduated from high school. In 1921 they were married in Two Harbors. Frank tried his hand at the candy and ice-cream business, even opening his own store after his father's had closed down. Later he worked for General Motors, during which time his first child, Eileen, was born.

In 1924, when Eileen was two years old, Frank and Esther moved to southern California, away from the bitter Minnesota winters. In San Diego they opened another candy store, a franchise "karmel-korn" shop, which did good business only when the navy fleet came into town. They eventually had to close it, and Frank got a steady job as a janitor for the San Diego Park and Recreation Department. His work consisted mostly of taking care of the sports stadium.

Two more children were born to the Rose family in San Diego: Franklin, Jr., who was born four years after Eileen, and Eugene, who was born another eight years later. All three of the Roses' children were intelligent, good-looking, and above average in height.

Eugene Dennis Rose was born on August 13, 1934. This was during the depth of the Depression. The Roses had bought stocks and lost them, and at times they had scarcely enough to eat. Although Eugene was probably too young to remember this period, Eileen recalls the family standing in bread lines. "When there is hardship because of lack of money," she said, "this is something that is

not easily forgotten. Success becomes equated with monetary reward.” Esther, already inculcated with the values of hard work and thrift, now became frugal in the extreme. She remained this way throughout her life, even after Eileen and Franklin Jr. were on their own and the family was comfortable financially. She never gave up her practice, learned during the Depression, of saving slivers of soap from the household sinks and then boiling them down to make new soap cakes. All of her children were raised with a no-frills attitude toward life.

Frank Rose was already in his mid-forties when Eugene was born. Because he was so much younger than his brother and sister, Eugene was raised essentially as an only child. When he was born, his parents called him their “Extra Dividend.”

When Eugene was only four years old, his sister Eileen (then sixteen) graduated from high school and left to go to business college in Los Angeles. Two years later she married, and in subsequent years saw her younger brother only infrequently. Before she left home, she would take care of Eugene at home when her parents were working at the karmel-korn shop. “I remember him as a happy, lovable child,” she later said.

Eugene’s surviving grandparents moved to San Diego after his parents did. Louis Rose died when Eugene was only seven years old, but John and Hilma Holbeck lived until he was full-grown. In later years he was given a family heirloom: a grandfather clock which had been given to Louis and May Rose as a wedding present. To the end of his life, Eugene treasured this clock as a link to family tradition, and continued the custom of winding it every night, long after it stopped telling the correct time.





Eugene at age one and a half.



Eugene with a bunny at Easter.

**E**STHER, having a decisive, strong-willed personality, was the unchallenged ruler of the Rose household. She had to be on top of all that was happening. Nothing was hidden from her, and to make sure of this she dug through her children's drawers and read their letters and papers. A strict disciplinarian, she was very demanding of her children, expected them to be perfect, and seldom if ever accorded praise. She was from a generation of parents who felt that it was not good to compliment children too much lest they

become conceited. But although she would not praise them to their faces, she would rave about them to her friends and relatives when they were not present. Above all, she would brag about Eugene.

“We were not a demonstrative family,” Eileen recalls. Even Frank, although he was a very warm and loving man, was embarrassed to display affection. Eileen says that he never kissed her while she was growing up.

“Mother was tough when crossed,” Eileen says, “and Father kept out of harm’s way.” It seems that Frank had little choice but to be dominated. When Esther expressed her strong opinions — which was not infrequently — Frank listened attentively and generally responded with nought but silence and a smile. He scrupulously avoided conflicts and usually expressed assent by saying “Betcha!” He rarely if ever harbored bitterness or ill will toward anyone.

Like his father, Eugene responded to his mother’s will without complaint. From his father’s example he learned to listen attentively but silently to Mother. She set the standard for the family, and Eugene did his best to live up to it. He was remembered in the family as the “perfect son,” the proverbial dutiful child. “If there was a favorite child,” Eileen recalls, “it was Eugene, because he always tried hard to do what was expected and did not cross Mother.”

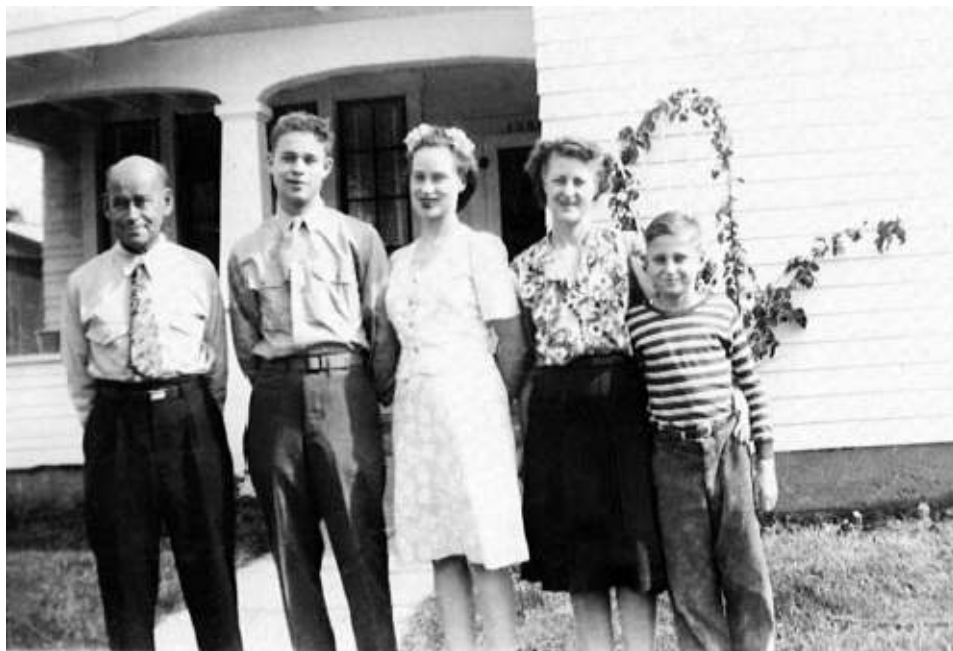
“Eugene was a joy,” Esther said in later years. “His father thought the sun rose on him.”

According to his wife, Frank was “satisfied with a little bit. His interest was to be at home with me; he was happy just to be at home and take care of the yard. He was a contented man, having no need of outside interests. He always took a lesser job, and never told Eugene what to be in life or pushed him to make money.”

“Frank was not a practical man,” Esther affirmed. “He was the ‘intelligentsia,’ and I was the ‘practical one.’” Compared with Esther, Frank was an avid reader, going through two newspapers a day and faithfully keeping abreast with the magazines *U.S. News and World Report*, *Business Week*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. He did not, however, read many books.

Frank's docility, together with Esther's strong-willed personality, made it inevitable that the natural order of the family would be reversed in the Rose home. This was the only truly unfortunate factor in Eugene's upbringing. Yet, in all fairness, it must be said that Frank was not simply a doormat. If one looked hard enough, one could see hidden strength in him. He displayed that shy, dogged integrity, that deeply loving nature which is embarrassed to express itself, characteristic of the common man who (so the populist books and movies of the period claimed) *could* become a hero if placed in the right circumstances. In his later years, there would even be times — although few and far between — when he would stand up to his wife or at least express disagreement with her, especially when he felt this was needed for the sake of his son Eugene. Eugene would one day remember these rare incidents with gratitude.

Like all boys, Eugene looked up to his father; like many, he took from him his best qualities. Growing up, Eugene emulated his father's practice of never exalting himself. He too, at least when it came to worldly honor and material things, was "satisfied with a little bit." Above all, he showed forth his father's quiet integrity.



The Rose family. Left to right: Frank, Franklin, Jr., Eileen, Esther, and Eugene.



Eugene, “the only child,” with his mother and father.

From his mother Eugene acquired a down-to-earth practicality, a touch of stubbornness, and a clear, concise, lively language which often made use of folksy words and phrases and yet was spoken with perfect articulation. And from both parents he acquired old-time American honesty, integrity, and straightforwardness, which later enabled him to see through various forms of hypocrisy.

All these parental influences — both the good and the bad — were not lost on Eugene; like everyone else he was a product of his family and social environment together with innate qualities. But into the midst of this family setting another, unpredictable element was ushered in. It was as if, into an average American family, a true nobleman had been born. In some ways Eugene was absolutely different from the rest of his family, although during his boyhood and adolescence this difference was not nearly as apparent as it was later on. At first it could be seen only in the fact that he was a remarkably thoughtful and quiet child, with a restraint in behavior unusual in boys his age.

“Eugene was a serious, studious boy from early childhood,” his mother has

said. He was extraordinarily intelligent. His natural genius was first noticed in his ability to grasp things right away, before children of his own age and sometimes before adults. One of his elementary school teachers once said of him: “I feel hurried when he walks into the room. I feel that I have to get right down to business so as not to waste his time.”

Eugene’s reserved and studious nature, however, did not keep him from participating in some of the usual pastimes of American boys, such as playing cowboys and keeping a chart of baseball scores. He became a member of the Cub Scouts, where his “den mother” happened to be the mother of actor Gregory Peck. When he was six years old he began taking piano lessons, which he continued in college. Between the ages of ten and twelve, he was a traffic patrol officer at his elementary school, a duty which his mother remembered him taking very seriously. Upon graduating from the school, he was given an honorable discharge with the rank of “sergeant” — just as his father had from the Army.

Eugene had a great love for nature. During all three summers of his junior high school years, he attended courses in zoology at the Junior Summer School of Science, sponsored by the San Diego Society of Natural History. As part of the courses he was able to study animals firsthand at the famous San Diego Zoo. Living near the ocean, he had a special interest in marine life and kept preserved octopuses and other sea creatures in his closet. He also had a small butterfly collection. A fascination with the night sky inspired him to paint his bedroom ceiling with stars, all in their proper places.



The little cowboy Eugene.

On Friday evenings he and his father would walk together to the neighborhood library. This was a weekly ritual — their night out. Eugene would come home loaded with books. During summers he took part in the library’s “Vacation Reading Club.”

Eugene began reading the works of Charles Dickens at a young age. He especially loved *The Pickwick Papers*, the book that had once brought Dickens overnight fame. His mother later remembered him laughing aloud while reading it. When it came time for him to go to sleep she would barge into his room and turn off the light. Later, she would be awakened by the sound of giggling. Returning to her son’s room to see what was going on, she would discover him under the blankets with a flashlight, continuing to read the book.

Eugene had a little dog named “Ditto.” Ditto was not too smart, but it was Eugene’s *own* creature, and he had exceptional love for it. He would thoughtfully look into its eyes. When Ditto was run over by a car, Eugene cried inconsolably. This was his first encounter with death. Others thought his reaction was exaggerated. Someone said, “It’s unnatural to love a dog like that — a dog!”

Together with his uncommonly loving nature, the young Eugene had strong religious inclinations. His mother, a churchgoing Protestant Christian, was the one to encourage this interest. His father had dropped out of the Catholic Church at age eighteen. No one talked about this, and no one knew why. Although Frank Rose was not like his father in being anti-religious (Frank was not anti-anything, for that matter), he never showed any incentive to going to church. In later years he attended a Protestant church, but according to Esther this was only to please her.

“As children,” Eileen remembers, “we went with Mother to various Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches, where Mother always sang in the choir. We usually changed churches because she had some disagreement with the minister.”

As a young boy, Eugene went to a Bible class at a Presbyterian church near his home. He often surprised his parents with his knowledge of the Scriptures, which he quoted to them from memory. According to his mother, the Old Testament books of Esther and Samuel left a deep impression on him. When he was in the eighth grade he went — entirely on his own initiative — to be baptized and confirmed as a Christian in a Methodist church.

**I**N high school Eugene ceased to pursue an interest in religion. “Eugene was not religious at all,” recalls his best friend from that period, Walter Pomeroy. To compensate for this lack of religion, he zealously sought knowledge in science and mathematics: biology, algebra, trigonometry, etc. “We went to high school at a time when science was expected to save the world,” Walter explains. “Most of the people who were preparing for college were

planning to become scientists, physicists, engineers, or medical doctors.”



Eugene, fourth from left, with his Cub Scout group.



Eugene and Ditto.

San Diego High was an ethnically diverse school, with the majority of its students coming from families on a lower-middle-class income. The college-prep students formed a relatively small percentage of the student body. These



intellectual achievers were in the same clubs and took the same courses in the pre-college curriculum together, but within their ranks was a clear social division. The main group of them, by far the larger, was composed of students from wealthy families from the “good” part of town. The smaller group was composed of six or seven boys from middle- to lower-middle-class families, three of whom were Jewish and one of whom was of Mexican descent. Eugene and Walter belonged to the latter group.

The members of the wealthy group were active in student government, seeking election as class officers, and made up the membership of the school’s social clubs of the pre-fraternity/sorority type. Although they were friendly to the other students (“After all,” says Walter, “you were a vote”), they generally kept their own company. They were the social elite of the campus.

The smaller group was united by a common interest in music, literature, and art. During lunch breaks, the boys would discuss books they had read or the works of classical music they loved. They never listened to the pop music of their era. (“We were hardly aware that such a thing existed,” Walter recalls.) Although Eugene and some of the others had athletic ability and received A’s in gym class, they did not try out for team sports. Says Walter: “We were what today would be called the ‘nerds.’”

The students in Eugene’s group were very well-read and culturally advanced for their age. Walter felt privileged to be a part of the group and to learn from it, since he had been exposed to relatively little culture prior to high school. The Jewish boys had been raised on classical music and had some strong opinions on the subject. They especially praised Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms, but had no use for the modern composers. Walter, on the other hand, preferred the moderns, and so would enter into debate with the others on the relative worth of, for example, Debussy and Brahms.

Where did Eugene stand in these discussions? “He was more attracted to the distinctly classical than to the modern composers,” Walter says. “But he listened to everything and gave it all a chance. He was slow to pass judgment.”



Eugene (left) with classmates at San Diego High School.



Eugene beside school bus on an outing to El Monte Park, November 1951.



Eugene (second from right) with friends at El Monte Park, November 1951.  
*Photographs by James Knott.*



Eugene (right) during high school gym class.



Eugene, second from left.  
*Photographs by James Knott.*

Eugene's favorite piece of music at this time was an aria in the last act of Puccini's *Tosca*, in which the hero, about to be executed, writes a letter to his beloved, beginning with the words, "And the stars were shining." Eugene especially liked the recording of this aria sung by Ferruccio Tagliavini. "We listened to it many times," Walter says, "and rhapsodized about how great we thought it was."

When the group of friends argued over intellectual matters, Eugene was not wont to express his own opinion. "Mostly he would examine things," Walter says, "and if you made a blunder in your argument, he'd be quick to show it. The most quiet and introspective among us, he was more likely to be a commentator than an agitator."

**E**UGENE studied intensely in high school, "burning the midnight oil," as his mother said. Once Esther told him, "At the rate you're studying, you'll be a very smart man someday." "I don't want to be smart," he said, "I want to be wise."

"With his native intelligence Eugene could have received B's without doing anything," Walter attests, "but he worked harder than anyone I ever knew. He was so incredibly thorough in everything he put his hands to. When we were assigned a science report, he would cover all the ends of the subject. He had an

analytical way of looking at things. His slowness in passing judgment was especially helpful in chemistry, because he would carefully look at all parts of an experiment before forming a conclusion.”

In the words of Eugene’s nephew Mike Scott, who was only seven years his junior, “Eugene was phenomenal academically. He was off the scale.” Sometimes his class marks were so high above those of other students that he had to be given the only A. At the same time, however, he continued to exhibit the qualities of his father. His mother recalled him saying: “Don’t let anyone think you’re important.”

Sally Scott, Eugene’s niece, remembers the following about him: “He was always Uncle Genie to me. He was quiet and very much the scholar. He was ever the teacher, ever patient, and even as a youth had a certain inner composure which set him apart. As a boy that difference may have caused him some grief until he found his true home....

“I remember one incident that involved books. At family dinners on holidays, Gene would join the group for dinner and retire to his room and studies immediately after. I have a love of books myself, and one day he found me in his room reading his books. (I was perhaps nine or ten years old and a bit frightened at being ‘caught.’) He asked me which books I liked best. There were two: *A Dog Named Chips* and *Charlie* by Albert Payson Terhune. He then presented a challenge. If I could memorize the titles and author’s full name by my next visit, the books would be mine to keep. I read them many times over the years and have read them to my daughters. I still have the books.”

Together with Walter, Eugene was a member of the high-school German Club, Chemistry Club, and Chess Club. In the German Club and German class he was called by the German version of his name, *Eugen* (pronounced “Oy-gen”). Walter began to refer to Eugene in this way outside of class, associating the sound of “Oy-gen” with the name of the famous Russian narrative poem by Pushkin and the opera by Tchaikovsky, *Eugene Onegin*. Eugene was to carry this nickname beyond his high school years. When writing to friends in college,

he would sign his name “Eugen” and occasionally use the transliterated form “Oign.”

In high school Eugene demonstrated a remarkable facility in languages, learning not only German but also French and Spanish. By the time he graduated, he was writing original poems in German. He also excelled in mathematics, which Walter attributes to the fact that this discipline, in addition to requiring an analytical mind, involves a great deal of introspection. Eugene’s math teacher hoped he would pursue a career in this field, and championed him as a student worthy of receiving college scholarships.

Eugene’s English teacher, Mr. Baskerville, also took an interest in him and his future. According to Walter, Baskerville encouraged a free, artistic lifestyle. He enjoyed music and had a great love for Spanish Romantic poetry. Among other things he introduced Eugene to the American nature poet Robinson Jeffers, a man who protested against society and its wars at a time when it was very unfashionable to do so.

During his high school years Eugene read Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, but, as he later said, he did not fully understand or appreciate the depth of Dostoyevsky at that time.

“Eugene had no time for trivia,” his mother has said. The senseless diversions of high school students, as well as the pomp of high school ceremonies, were a source of absolute boredom to him. Mike Scott remembers being amazed that Eugene had no desire to learn to drive, let alone own, a car, at a time when great peer pressure was attached to having a driver’s license. Eugene felt that even his friend Walter was not serious enough, and objected to his carousing and running around at night “like a butterfly.” When it came time for the high school graduation exercises and celebrations, with all the proud parents and pageantry, Eugene did not want to be bothered with the standard renting of a tuxedo.

Eugene did, however, take part in the production of the school play that was performed during the commencement. Along with twelve other students under

the supervision of a teacher, he helped to write the play, acted in it, and was in charge of the tickets. The play, entitled “Grown a Little Taller,” was written with the aim of pleasing the students’ parents and relatives who comprised the audience. Expressing the American dream that was still prevalent in the early 1950s, it upheld the ideals of family, religion (within reason), economic and career advancement, responsibility, and hard work, together with humanitarian service in the spirit of Albert Schweitzer.

**E**UGENE graduated from San Diego High School in June of 1952. He was ranked at the top of his class. In his high school yearbook, his fellow students wrote notes such as: “Eugene the Genius... Lots of luck & don’t give Einstein too much competition.” He received a number of scholarships, the largest being the four-thousand-dollar George F. Baker Scholarship, which he was given thanks to the enthusiastic endorsement of his math teacher. When he received this award, he did not make a big show of it. His mother, having found out about the award, elatedly asked him, “Where’s the letter?!” “In the drawer,” he replied calmly. Remembering this and similar incidents, his mother once said of him, “I never saw such a modest boy!” He even returned the smaller scholarships he received, explaining this by saying, “I’ve had enough.”

At this time Eugene had no definite ideas about a future career, no plans beyond a decision to enter Pomona College in southern California. (His math teacher was later disappointed when Eugene did not major in mathematics). “Eugene could have succeeded in anything,” Walter says, “but he did not have anything to pour himself into. He needed something to be passionate about.”

San Diego was filled with canyons, parts of which were overgrown with trees, brush, and grasses. Near the Roses’ modest suburban home was one such ravine, locally called Juniper Canyon. Through this canyon Eugene often took long walks alone, studying nature or — when he went at night — gazing up into the starry realm above the trees. What he thought about during these hours of solitude is unknown. Judging from the turns his life was soon to take, however,

it could be that these long walks were bound up not only with thinking, but also with traces of suffering. Fr. Paul Florensky, the great Russian scientist and martyr, once said: “The fate of greatness is suffering from the external world, and inward suffering that comes from oneself. So it was, so it is, and so it shall be.” Eugene was soon to enter into that unnamed inward suffering, which was the consequence of his being set apart from the world around him. Since his mind enabled him to understand things far ahead of others, he was plagued with boredom with the common things he had already experienced and understood. He had a longing for more, he wanted to go on, but to where? There was on him that stamp of nobility which made him incapable of finding fulfillment in lower, material things — the things of this earth.

“Eugene had deep eyes,” Walter recalls. “You didn’t want to look into them, because they would burn into you. It was as if he was attempting to see into the heart of the matter always. He always seemed to me like a tea kettle that was about to blow out steam. You knew something was boiling in there; you waited for him to blow his stack — but he never did. He was always calm, observing things, waiting to do something with what he was soaking up.”

Eugene had become a thinker, a lover of wisdom who required an answer to the question “why?” And whatever that answer was, he had to experience and live it. This much he knew — or rather felt — even then; and it was this which would determine the course of his life, up until his very death.





College Avenue, Pomona College, 1954.

## 2

# *Seeds of Rebellion*

*The errors of great men are more fruitful  
than the truths of little men.*

—Friedrich Nietzsche [1](#)

**I**N the autumn of 1952, Eugene entered Pomona College in southern California, and moved into a dormitory room there.

By this time Eugene, at 6'2", had grown into a tall, slim, well-formed man. He was of fair complexion, with a strong jawline, a perfect set of white teeth, a long and rather unusually sculptured nose, a high forehead, and thick, brown hair, which he combed straight back. The most prominent and intriguing aspect of his appearance was his large, thoughtful, penetrating blue eyes. He usually wore a white dress shirt, with the sleeves rolled up.

Together with Stanford, Pomona was considered the best of California's private colleges. It was also regarded as one of the top small liberal-arts colleges in the country. Like Harvard, it had been founded by the Congregationalist Protestants of New England. Known as the "Oxford of the Orange Grove," it was modeled on the Oxford system of independent, associated colleges. [\[a\]](#) Many of Pomona's professors were from Ivy League colleges; some were Rhodes Scholars. Since there was one professor to every ten students, much individual attention could be given. But the competition was high: for every applicant the college admitted, it had to turn down three others.

With its Congregationalist background, Pomona was still a center of conservative values when Eugene went there. In these prosperous postwar years,

the atmosphere was quiet and complacent. Ivy-covered buildings, rows of pepper and eucalyptus trees, and grassy commons were set beneath clear skies, amidst a warm, languid Mediterranean climate. The nearby town had only a few thousand people.

As at any small American college at this time, the students attached tremendous importance to popularity. Everyone knew who was popular and who was not. Those students who were picked by the college authorities as most likely to succeed were called “Ghosts”: symbols of dedication and rectitude who served as backseat advisors to bumbling freshmen. As one student of the time has observed, “It was every man’s dream to be a Ghost and every girl’s dream to marry a Ghost.” <sup>2</sup> Most of the “Ghosts” were also “Nap-pies” — members of Nu Alpha Phi, the most prestigious of the social fraternities.

As in high school, it was also very fashionable to have “wheels” and cruise around. Among the social activities of the popular crowd were dances, beach parties, ski parties, and especially football games. Before each game there were pep rallies around a bonfire on the football field, at which time the favorite college song was chanted:

(Drumbeat, drumbeat, drumbeat, drumbeat)  
Drumbeats rolled o’er the silence profound  
Far above Pomo-ho-na, above Pomo-ho-na  
Chanting braves making echoes resound  
Far above Pomo-ho-na, above Pomo-ho-na....

Other big events surrounded the initiation of freshmen, including a “sizing up” ceremony for women and a wild mudhole fight between freshmen and sophomores.

To the eighteen-year-old Eugene, all these activities, all these hankerings after popularity and success, were matters of total indifference. If this was indeed “real life,” he was growing more and more disgusted with it. Although he

continued to exhibit the same reserved dignity and thoughtful personality of his younger days, a passion was beginning to rise inside of him. Everything fell away before his first objective: to find out for himself why he existed in the first place, to *know*, to understand reality in the highest sense.

**F**OR answers to his “ultimate questions,” Eugene naturally used his greatest asset: his intellect. He began to make a serious study of Western philosophy, taking several courses in the philosophy department. One of his instructors was Frederick Sontag, a tough, demanding professor who had become something of a legend around Pomona.

At the end of his freshman year, Eugene wrote a paper outlining the philosophical conclusions which he — relying only on his logical mind, his knowledge of science and mathematics, and a little help from the super-brain of Spinoza — had come to. In this paper, “God and Man: Their Relationship,” Eugene stated: “‘Universe’ is my term for ‘God.’ It is an improvement over the latter term, I believe, for it far more readily conveys the *impersonal, unified* concept I wish to present.... All science points to the existence of the Universe, the totality of all things. Nothing in science points to the existence of a God removed from the Universe. For the present time, since I have not yet developed my own theory of knowledge, I assume for convenience’s sake that I can gain knowledge (as certain as *can* be obtained) through science. Therefore, I believe in the findings of science that point to the existence of the Universe; I reject the concept of an independent God for insufficient evidence.”

This was all that Eugene’s empirical reason could attain to; even Spinoza’s brain could not do much better. As for the purpose of life, Eugene wrote: “Man’s only purpose in life is existing — and existing happily.... Man should live for his happiness, accepting times when he is not happy merely as passages to higher times; his love of the Universe will tide him over to better times.” <sup>3</sup>

By this time, as such statements reveal, Eugene had completely rejected the Protestant Christianity of his formative years. He had begun to hate the

complacent, prosaic, consumer-oriented, middle-class culture in which he had been raised. Its idea of God, he felt, was shallow and provincial, not worthy of one who aspires to the highest reaches of the intellect; its religion was just an unquestioning acceptance of facile answers by people who are afraid or actually unable to look deeper into the nature of things. To Eugene, Protestantism represented the status quo: people living for this world and enjoying earthly happiness while embellishing, justifying, and making more tolerable their everyday existence by resorting to the “religious” side of their life. Since he inwardly felt different from the status quo, he knew he could never squeeze himself into the parameters of the Protestant American worldview, with its ideal of family bliss. He could not accept the accepted answers. He wanted to escape, but, for lack of a place to escape to, he was left only to rebel. At the same time, his soul, whether he knew it or not, was seeking something more *spiritual* than Spinoza’s dry intellectualism.

Young idealists who are rebelling against the Christianity of their childhood, who can accept nothing above the rational and yet are seeking something else to satisfy their spiritual needs, are apt to hear the call of a number of different siren voices. In his search through Western philosophy, Eugene was drawn to one of the most compelling of these: the wild, prophetic voice of Friedrich Nietzsche. At some point while in college he read Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in the original German and was overwhelmed by it.

Eugene had several things in common with Nietzsche. Both he and Nietzsche were seekers of noble ideals, involved in an intense and passionate inquiry into ultimate questions; both of them had been born into the religious atmosphere of Protestantism, which promised to give them everything their souls needed, yet could not; both were introverted, felt isolated from their fellow man, and underwent inward suffering which others could not comprehend; and both detested standardization, domestication, and the “herd mentality” of which they regarded Protestant Christianity to be an example. Many years after leaving college, Eugene was to describe Nietzsche’s rebellion against Christianity as

follows: “He was of a very romantic temperament and was very open to all kinds of higher ideas.... In his youth he was a Protestant seminary student and came to hate Christianity because he saw in it the principle of weakness. This, of course, was true because Luther had taken out of Christianity the idea of [ascetic] struggle and left it something very weak which does not satisfy either the mind or the heart.... Nietzsche could see no one who was struggling, no great ascetics, no heroes of Christianity, and from this he concluded that the whole of Christianity was a monstrous farce, a deception practiced upon humanity which does not satisfy the reason that wants truth, and which is full of superstition. Nietzsche was full of the idea that one can know only what is rational, and therefore he rejected everything above the rational. On the other hand, he saw that Christianity says nothing to the heart because it becomes so watered down that it is feeble. He saw it as simply a way of keeping people quiet and satisfied with their lot, and he said that was for the herds....

“Nietzsche himself was filled with the highest natural instincts for nobility and struggle. He was a great student of Greek literature. One of his first books talks about the Dionysian element in Greece. Until his time people regarded Greece as the home of the classical tradition of Apollo, but he said no, that Greece was also filled with striving, with the romantic feeling which he symbolized by Dionysius. And this was what he wanted, to be like Dionysius, constantly striving, struggling for something higher.” <sup>4</sup>

Eugene had a desire to share in such struggle and striving, which, although he did not know it then, was actually a desire for the *ascesis* denied him by Protestantism. Nietzsche’s striving, together with his rejection of Christianity, led him to develop the idea of the “Superman.” Man, Nietzsche said, is small and weak; he is only temporary; he must be overcome, and the Superman must supersede him. In later years, Eugene was to make the comment that “the answer to Nietzsche is St. Anthony the Great, who *did* overcome mankind (his own human nature) and was like an angel on earth.” <sup>5</sup> At this time, however, Eugene had no real exposure to the lofty aspect of Christian asceticism.

“Nietzsche,” Eugene once said, “wrote some lovely poems about the dark side of life, deep midnight, loneliness, etc.” Here he was speaking of such poems as “Night Song,” in which Zarathustra gives voice to his feelings: “Night has come; now all fountains speak more loudly. And my soul too is a fountain.... Something unappeased, unappeasable is within me; it longs to find expression. A craving for love is within me.... Alas, ice is all around me, my hand is burned by the icy.... Night has come: alas, that I must be light! And thirst for the nocturnal! And loneliness!” <sup>6</sup> During the unhappy period of his early manhood, Eugene must have identified with precisely such dark, terrible, and excruciating longings of the soul.

Insanity marked the last twelve years of Nietzsche’s life, during which time he was unable to write anything. Although it is widely believed that this madness came upon him rather suddenly, some astute writers have recognized its gradual development throughout his literary career.

Nietzsche’s mad ideas were the logical outcome of the proud philosophy of the German idealists and even of Spinoza, which, in denying or attenuating the reality of God, led eventually to self-worship, absurdity, and nihilism. Nietzsche the mad prophet bellowed out, like the pagan dragon of Wagner, poetical fire of the new religion of the Superman, the Antichrist. And however mad this religion might have been, it made more sense to the young Eugene than what he regarded as the spineless Christianity of his age.





Sumner Hall, Pomona College's first building. Photograph taken in 1983.



Bridges Auditorium, Pomona College, 1983.



# 3

## *The Nonconformists*

*God often isolates those whom He chooses, so that we have nowhere to turn except to Him, and then He reveals Himself to us.*

—Alison

**E**UGENE had begun his philosophic search by repudiating the very thing he was seeking. At the deepest level, he was being driven to find God, but he would have to go full circle before unexpectedly returning upon that from which he was running.

Young people like Eugene, being at an age of acute self-consciousness and spiritual hunger, are apt to fall into despair at not finding fulfillment in the material world, and to be, in the words of the young poet John Keats, “half in love with easeful death.” Although Eugene had hardly started out in life, he already had a longing to leave this world behind. In the midst of his doubt and confusion, there was only one person to whom he began to open his inner world. This was a young woman, a freshman like himself, named Alison Harris.

In November of 1952, Eugene went to a concert at the Bridges Auditorium on the college campus. The gray winter sky was darkening as he climbed the steps and walked under the lofty archway. The building was at that time the largest auditorium in California, with tall Grecian pillars in front, over which the names of great composers were chiseled.

The music, Schumann’s piano concerto, was particularly stirring. After the

concert, as Eugene was walking down the aisle, he was greeted by an acquaintance named Dirk Van Nouhuys. Beside Dirk was his date Alison. Eugene had seen Alison before in a class they had together, “The History of Western Civilization,” but he hadn’t met her until now. Alison was at once intrigued with Eugene. She liked the dignified way he carried himself; she thought he was handsome; but what especially struck her was the strange, melancholy depth of his eyes.

After Dirk made the introductions, he asked Eugene to have coffee with him and Alison. Eugene accepted Dirk’s offer, and the three of them stepped out into the cold night air. They went nearby to the “Sugar Bowl,” a small, inexpensive café run by two quiet ladies. As they warmed themselves with the coffee, they spoke of how the music that night had moved them.

**A**FTER that fateful night in November, Dirk, Eugene, Alison and others began to go to the “Sugar Bowl” to study. They formed a group of friends, made up of the nonconformists of the campus who were interested in things other than popularity and “success.” As with Eugene’s group of friends in high school, this new group was united by a common love for art, music, and literature.

Like Eugene, Alison was a quiet person, and deeply lonely. She had come from an artistic family, her mother having been an opera singer and her uncle a screenwriter. At the tender age of eighteen, she had already experienced much pain in her life. There were periods in her past too horrible to remember; she could recall nothing before the age of eight. Having been driven into a shell by the overpowering and sometimes ruthless personality of her egotistical mother, she was terribly shy around others. She tried to take after her saintly grandmother. By the time Eugene met her, she had become a devout Christian, having been converted largely through the poetry of T. S. Eliot. With her thin body and face, her sharply outlined features, and her shoulder-length dark blond hair, people said she looked just like the actress Lauren Bacall. She herself, however, disliked this actress and wanted to be more like Jennifer Jones, who

had made her screen debut at Alison's age, playing St. Bernadette of Lourdes.

Dirk Van Nouhuys (who insisted that his name be pronounced "Dairk") was an unusual young man. Gifted with a brilliant mind, he had started college when he was but sixteen years old. He had a great knowledge of music, and went on to become a professional writer. For a while he was receiving D and F grades for his English Composition papers simply because his spelling was atrocious. When Alison began editing his papers, changing nothing at all except the spelling, he instantly received A's. He came from a wealthy family which never pushed him to "be" anything. One Thanksgiving vacation, the group of friends went to stay at his parents' large home in Berkeley.

The most gregarious of the group, Dirk had a good sense of humor and a special talent for giving people nicknames (his own girlfriend he called "straw-headed thing"). Eugene, however, retained the nickname he had received in high school; all of his college friends called him "Oign," and he even signed his letters to Alison this way.



Alison posing for a “mood shot” by a friend who was taking a photography class, 1952.

Another member of the group was Albert Carter, a history major. Very mature for his age, Albert was even-tempered, always sympathetic and understanding of others, and ready to listen. He went on to get his Ph.D. at Princeton and teach English in a university.

Among the young women in the group was Lee Van Deventer, who later

married Albert and, like him, was a very compassionate person. Remembered as a lively conversationalist, she was majoring in comparative literature and later became a school teacher.

There was also Claire Isaacs, an earthy, outspoken drama major who took on the role of the “mother” of the group. Though not religious, Claire was very proud of her Jewish heritage.

The group also had a music major, Laurence McGilvery. A modern, sophisticated young man pursuing a wide interest in the arts, he later became an independent publisher and purveyor of art books.

Also in the group was John Zeigel, a postulant for the priesthood in the Anglican Church. Highly educated for his age, John had studied Latin for four years at a boy’s school run by the Episcopal Order of the Holy Cross. He had a beautiful singing voice, and at night would chant his prayers in Latin out of a Roman Catholic service book. He loved the high art of the Western Church, its Gregorian Chant and its ancient ceremony. According to his fellow Anglican Alison, however, he had not yet found true joy or peace in his faith, and was still trying to come to grips with it. He majored in classics at Pomona, and, like Albert, went on to become an English professor.

Of all the students in the group, the one that Eugene most admired was a Japanese American named Kaizo Kubo. Kaizo was twenty-four years old, considerably older than the others, being a transfer student to Pomona. Although he was not of the “popular” crowd, he was one of the most widely respected students on campus due to his integrity and honor in dealing with people.

After Pearl Harbor, when Kaizo was only fourteen, he and his family had been “evacuated” with many other Japanese Americans to a restriction camp and relocation center. “I don’t bear any grudge against America,” he used to say. “If the Japanese had been in the Americans’ shoes, they would have been much crueler.” <sup>1</sup> His family was poor: both his parents worked as day laborers, packing fruit and picking tomatoes under the hot sun. In 1950, soon after his father died, he entered Reedley Junior College in the San Joaquin Valley. In his junior year

he transferred to Pomona as a history major, having been given a full-tuition grant. In his senior year, to pay for his room and board, he got a job as a resident assistant in one of the dormitories.



Kaizo Kubo. Photograph taken when he was at Reedley Junior College, before he came to Pomona. *Courtesy of Jane Hildebrand and Karen Atkisson.*

Like Eugene, Kaizo was a loner, emotionally reserved and inscrutable, but when he spoke he did so with simplicity and intensity. He never fully became part of the group of friends and seemed to feel himself an outsider wherever he was — which Albert attributed to his early experience of being sent to the relocation center. He did, however, spend a lot of time with Eugene.

Eugene's college friends remember Eugene as having been very genial, and their relationships with him marked by a certain dignity. They remember his understated wit, his ability to see things differently and make observations on life which were the reverse of the usual ones — observations which at times

made his friends roll with laughter. All the male friends mention his remarkable athletic ability (“He was enormously strong,” Dirk says). Whenever the group would get together to play games in the quadrangle — volleyball, baseball, etc. — Eugene would throw himself into the match with enthusiasm and outstrip them all, so that they would consider it a misfortune to be placed on the opposing team.



Entrance to Frary Dining Hall, Pomona College, 1954.

Notwithstanding such camaraderie, Eugene was remembered by his friends as being “enigmatic.” The others noticed that he often took long walks alone at night, brooding for hours on end. “His hair,” John says, “would often hang disheveled over his eyes, giving him an almost manic appearance.” Not until many years later, however, did the people in the group — save for Alison — understand what depths of loneliness, bitterness, and desperation lay within their retiring friend. As some of them would later say, “We never knew him.”

As said above, there was no one in the world but Alison to whom Eugene was able to disclose his soul and reveal his pain. Alison remembers well one evening in 1954, when he told her things about himself that he said he had never

told anyone else in his life. His friendship with her was and remained a Platonic one, yet Alison was later to regard it as deeper than any other relationship she ever had, even while married.

Their kinship had nothing to do with common interests. In many ways Eugene and Alison were very unlike each other. While Eugene was a Nietzschean unbeliever, Alison was a churchgoing Christian. While he was moved by ideas and usually required time to make a decision, she was moved by feelings and was much more impulsive. And while he was poring over philosophy, she was poring over Romantic classics, her favorite novelist being Emily Brontë. “Nevertheless,” says Alison, “we understood each other. Both of us were people who found it very difficult to be understood by others. We were both solitary and uncomfortable around others. We didn’t feel much need to explain ourselves to each other — we always seemed to understand without any explanation. We did not have to put on a mask or justify ourselves to each other.”



Alison in 1953.



**D**URING the summer between his freshman and sophomore years, Eugene worked at a bookstore in San Francisco. His high school teacher Mr. Baskerville was a friend of the store's owners, and recommended Eugene for the job. While working in San Francisco, Eugene stayed for three months at the Hotel de France, a boarding house where everyone spoke French and ate European cuisine.

When he returned to Pomona for his second year, Eugene was assigned a roommate who was a math major. According to John, "This young man was constantly studying math problems, hardly ever cracked a smile, and had virtually no sense of humor. Eugene did not get along with him at all; they were totally mismatched roommates." It is interesting to observe that this roommate was precisely the kind of college student that Eugene's high school math teacher might have expected Eugene to become. As John has said, however, "Once Eugene found philosophy, everything changed for him."

After the first semester of his sophomore year, Eugene was anxious to escape the dormitories, and so rented an inexpensive room, with a private entrance, built onto someone's house. Like Kaizo, he had to earn money during his student years to pay his rent.

Besides the Sugar Bowl, Eugene's room became the main meeting place for his group of friends. One of the group's acts of nonconformity was to stay at the meetings long past the ten o'clock curfew at the dormitories. Although such acts were hardly what one would call revolutionary, the group did evoke some antagonism on the campus. "In the fall of 1953," Laurence McGilvery recalls, "a politically minded classmate campaigned for election and won as Men's Senior Class President on the platform of 'getting the nonconformists.' We innocents surely were his chief targets, with our undefined aspirations and our passionate conversations in the Sugar Bowl and our midnight revels — at least once or twice — in the Greek Theater out in the Wash."

At Eugene's place the group would stay up all night, listening to classical

music and talking (in Alison's words) about "great things." "Mostly we talked about the meaning of life," Alison recalls — though some of the others who were there merely recall talking about "books, music, painting, and sculpture." When the subject would turn to the question of God, John would sometimes start complaining about how he would have to give up women to be a priest. According to Alison, "He believed that the best priests were celibate, and he wanted to let everyone know what a sacrifice he would be making."

At most of these meetings, Eugene would remain characteristically silent, taking it all in carefully. He genuinely appreciated the company and the intellectual forum, but there were times when he felt that all this talk about the meaning of life was becoming just that: talk. He wanted to *do* something, even if he didn't know what it was. When he did take part in the discussion, it was often by way of challenging John's ideas about God. "Eugene was an iconoclast," John recalls. "He would deliberately say things to shock us and then would watch our reaction." Sometimes he would break his silence and, right in the middle of a discussion, come out with a statement that would reduce everyone to speechlessness.

## 4

# *The Search for Reality*

*Is all that we see or seem*

*But a dream within a dream?*

—Edgar Allan Poe <sup>1</sup>

**I**N his study of philosophy, it did not take Eugene long to recognize the limits of discursive reasoning. The flimsy answers he had given to the questions of existence in his essay, “God and Man: Their Relationship,” probably did not fully convince him even at the time he wrote them. He was not at all impressed with the Rationalists whose works he read in his philosophy classes. Nor was he convinced by the arguments of Hume, the skeptic who overthrew the Rationalists’ belief in reason, only to rely on a lower faculty: “common sense.” In an essay on Hume’s philosophy, Eugene had one word to say about it: “It is common. It fairly reeks with commonness.... In affirming the common, he denies the *un* common. What, then, of the subtler human experiences — in art, in religion, in any field where there must be some degree of imagination, of a vision *above* the common?” <sup>2</sup>

Eugene also found little to be gained from the philosophy of Schopenhauer. In an essay entitled “Schopenhauer: System; Comment,” he wrote: “We do not accept Schopenhauer’s pessimism, not because we have had a more commanding vision, but because Schopenhauer does not speak to us as one who knows, as one who has truly had a vision of the nature of things.” <sup>3</sup>

In later years Eugene recalled: “I was an undergraduate, looking for some kind of truth in philosophy, and not finding it. I was very bored with Western

philosophy.”<sup>4</sup> Even Nietzsche (though one could never accuse him of being boring) could do scarcely more than fuel Eugene’s inward rebellion against society. It was inevitable that Eugene’s search again enter the sphere of religion.

“Why does a person study religion?” Eugene asked toward the end of his life. “There are many incidental reasons, but there is only one reason if a person is really in earnest: in a word, it is to come into contact with reality, to find a reality deeper than the everyday reality that so quickly changes, rots away, leaves nothing behind and offers no lasting happiness to the human soul. Every religion that is sincere tries to open up contact with this reality.”<sup>5</sup>

IN November of 1953, during Eugene’s sophomore year, Pomona was visited by a fascinating and extremely intelligent Englishman who was later to become one of the most popular spiritual leaders of the young generation, Dr. Alan W. Watts. Watts had been an Anglican priest in the 1940s, during which time he had become known as an exciting and progressive theologian. In his book *Behold the Spirit*, for which he was awarded a master’s degree, he had declared that “Church religion is spiritually dead” and needs to be replaced by “an interior, spiritual and mystical understanding of the old, traditional body of wisdom... some conscious experience of being at one with Reality itself.”<sup>6</sup> Reviews of this book were rapturous. One Roman Catholic writer, F. S. C. Northrop, noted: “I regard [the] book as one of the best — in fact the only first-rate — book in recent years in the field of religion. It gets to the fundamental problem, it honestly sees the weaknesses of contemporary Protestantism, and it attempts to diagnose and cure the evil in the only way a cure can be effected, namely by a doctrine with content at the basic metaphysical level.

“It goes further than this, recognizing contributions from Oriental religion which simply are not present in contemporary Western religion. More than this it shows how the traditional Western doctrine of the Incarnation and the Atonement can be reconciled with the intuitive religion of the Orient, such as that of Zen Buddhism. These are exceedingly important and outstanding

achievements.” [7](#)

An Episcopal reviewer, Canon Bernard Iddings Bell, wrote that Watts’ book would “prove to be one of the half-dozen most significant books on religion published in the twentieth century.”

In 1950, however, in the wake of a public controversy Watts was forced to leave the priesthood, and then left the Anglican Church altogether. A year later he found a teaching position in the newly formed American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco, and in 1953 he became its dean. He was now wearing the hat of “Orientalist,” with a specialty in the study of Zen Buddhism. [8](#)

As we have seen, the early 1950s was in general a time of intellectual and spiritual complacency. Despite the fact that the United States had just ended its seven-year occupation of postwar Japan, Zen Buddhism was all but unknown in the West, studied by only a handful of writers and poets of the pre-beatnik era. But the pendulum was beginning to swing the other way, and Alan Watts was one of the first to sense the change in the air and run with it.

John, who knew about Watts through the Anglican Church, told the other Pomona nonconformists that they should definitely come and hear this man speak. Five of them — John, Dirk, Albert, Laurence, and Eugene — attended the talk that Watts gave in one of Pomona’s lecture halls.

Watts surprised his young listeners by telling them that the whole structure of the Western thought they had been studying was completely wrongheaded. Western man, he said, has long been used to looking at reality in a conceptual, indirect way, always knowing *about* it, but never really *knowing* it. Once you *think* about something — make it into a symbol or a moral lesson — then you’ve lost it. The world of thought uses symbols and words to represent real things, and thus is not the same as the reality itself. [9](#) The secret of life is to stop thinking about it, and just *experience* it. This is what Zen is all about. It is not a philosophy, but simply the way things are. As he said this, Watts lifted a glass of water that had been placed on the table before him. “It’s not looking at this glass of water and defining it,” he said, “but...” — and with this he poured the water

out onto the stage. As Eugene recalled later, this moment was “very dramatic.”  
[10](#)

“Watts was an enormously persuasive speaker,” Albert says. “We were all much impressed.” Besides being witty, provocative, and entertaining, Watts was also very well-read, and called the students’ attention to many little-known holy men, sages, and writers.

As Eugene and his friends left the lecture hall, they spoke animatedly of how Watts’ ideas had sparked their interest. Only Eugene, however, was not content to leave it at that. He now embarked on an in-depth study of Zen, and at some point began to practice *zazen* (seated meditation).

A new, unexpected avenue had now been opened to Eugene in his search, one that seemed to cut through everything that he had found so boring. If the purpose of religion was to open up reality to the seeker, then Zen, it appeared to him, went straight to the heart of the matter. In an essay for an English course in May of 1954, Eugene wrote: “Being direct, Zen has no sacred books, dogmas, rituals, or concepts of God, the soul, Heaven — all of these are superfluous accoutrements, tending too often to come between the individual and his enlightenment rather than helping him to it... [Zen] may be said to be the very crystallization of Far Eastern civilization.” [11](#)

It was perhaps inevitable that a young unbeliever like Eugene would be drawn to Zen Buddhism, which required no belief in or devotion to a personal God, and which in fact required belief in nothing outside one’s empirical experience. Zen, he perceived, had more intellectual depth than the Protestantism he had rejected; it had a definite and challenging *practice* that would require some degree of renunciation as well as considerable physical and mental effort (the *ascesis* he was looking for); and it had a line of tradition dating back a full millennium before the Protestant Reformation. Moreover, it was *different* from middle-class American semi-Christian suburbia; to grasp a world outlook that was exotic and completely foreign to his own was a challenge for his mind. Finally, Zen practice had the possibility of enlightenment, a sudden

*awakening* to reality. According to Buddhist teaching, the material world, the world of sense, is only an illusion, as is any idea of self. To Eugene, who felt himself a stranger to the world around him, an awakening out of this “illusion” would be nothing less than El Dorado.

Although its nondevotional practice was clearly centered in the mind rather than the heart, Zen aimed at an elemental experience beyond logic and rationality. “One arrives,” Eugene wrote in another essay, “at this (universal) knowledge through no ‘method’; it does not proceed, like discursive knowledge, step by step, a piece at a time — but is present directly and entirely in one timeless instant. It is an *awakening*, a realization of an always existing state of affairs; hence it cannot be ‘sought,’ nor ‘attained,’ but only prepared for.”

Death was attractive to Eugene as a means of escaping his tormenting feelings of separateness. But was not Buddhist enlightenment a much more hopeful “death”? “Nirvana,” he wrote, “is the cessation of clinging, the ‘blowing out’ of the flame of craving. It is a death, a being ‘finished’—finished in the sense both of ‘ended’ and of ‘perfected.’ With the cessation of craving, misery ends.” [12](#)

## 5

### *Behind the Mask*

*O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of  
fall*

*Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed....*

—Gerard Manley Hopkins [1](#)

THE aspect of Eugene that his friends Dirk and Albert found most phenomenal was his aptitude for languages. In his freshman and sophomore years of college, Eugene continued to perfect his knowledge of German and French, and then in his junior year he went on to take Mandarin Chinese. “There was a young woman in his Chinese class,” Albert relates, “who had come from the Chinese community in San Francisco and spoke the Cantonese dialect. After a year of the class, she said that if you closed your eyes when Eugene spoke, you couldn’t tell he wasn’t Chinese. She was very embarrassed because he was better at it than she was, and it was *her* language. He could intuit and visualize the Chinese character-graphs, and maintained that they looked like what they were supposed to represent — though none of the rest of us could see it.”

Eugene now resolved to earn his bachelor’s degree in Oriental Languages. This decision stemmed, of course, from his new interest in Zen and Eastern thought, but Albert also attributed it to the fact that Eugene, having so easily mastered European languages, was looking for a challenge. At that time, Pomona had the second largest collection of Chinese texts in the country (the largest being at the University of California, Berkeley), but since the Chinese



department was very small, most of it remained on the shelves unused.

Because of the low student/teacher ratio at Pomona, almost every student had a professor who personally looked after his or her educational formation. Eugene's main patron was his Chinese language and history instructor, Shou-yi Ch'en, with whom he conducted a friendly correspondence for a few years after graduating.

Also due to his interest in Zen, Eugene took up the art of archery. According to Albert, his athletic ability combined with his power of concentration made him a wonderful bowman.

**A**LTHOUGH he avoided the popular social functions on campus, Eugene did take part in college productions of classical plays. He played the character of Ajax in a school performance of the Greek play by Sophocles. So profoundly did this play move him that, as he later confessed, he wept during the final scene when Ajax dies. He also acted in a French-language production of a play by Molière.

At Pomona at that time, there were some students who went on to become famous. Together with Alison, Eugene was acquainted with Frank Capra, Jr., the son of the great Christian film director. <sup>2</sup> Alison remembers Frank Jr., who went on to make movies of his own, as a very pious Roman Catholic boy. Actor Richard Chamberlain was also a student at Pomona in the same class year as Eugene, and Kris Kristofferson was a year behind.

Eugene worked as a reader for Ved Mehta, a talented blind student from India who later became one of the new generation of writers for *The New Yorker* magazine. Ved's acclaimed books were to include a biography of Gandhi and several volumes of his own memoirs. For a short time, Ved had been a roommate of John's, but Eugene had been introduced to him by Kaizo, Ved's best friend at Pomona.

"I felt very lucky to have found Gene as a reader," Ved writes in his memoirs. "His own work was so well organized that he seemed to have plenty of

time to give to me, and he read with such clarity that I almost had the illusion that he was explaining things.” <sup>3</sup>

Although both Eugene and Ved were serious students, both being elected members of the honorary scholarly society Phi Beta Kappa, they were in other respects exact opposites. Ved, who had come to the New World four years earlier, longed to fit into American life. As he later admitted in his memoirs, he was ashamed of Indian culture and religion at this time, and revered things Western. He yearned to be in the popular crowd, to have the most sought-after girl, to be in the most socially desirable fraternity, to be a “Ghost,” to be part of the car culture of southern California. These were precisely the things which, as we have seen, Eugene detested. Having become sick of American life, he had already turned to the East.

Along with Eugene, however, Ved shared a great admiration for the noble Kaizo Kubo. Kaizo, Ved acknowledged, “pursued knowledge for its own sake,” while he himself succeeded academically because he “concentrated on results.” “Any thoughtful person would have been drawn to K[aizo],” Ved recalls. “He had poise and dignity; he was sincere and cheerful, and had a persevering nature.” <sup>4</sup>

**A**T the end of Eugene’s junior year, tragedy struck his group of friends. The year before, at the advice of professors and friends, Kaizo had become a graduate student in history. He felt guilty about this, thinking that, after getting his bachelor’s degree, he should have immediately gone for a teaching credential so as to support his family. He worried that his widowed mother had to go on working to support his education. “Fruit packing is seasonal employment,” he said, “so most of her income comes from working in the onion fields. I hate to see her pulling onions day after day. She’s such a frail old woman.” <sup>5</sup>

When the time approached for Kaizo to turn in his master’s degree thesis, his worries increased. The topic he had chosen had proved too big for him, and the professor who had always supported and helped him was then on sabbatical.

He knew he would never meet the deadline. His strong Japanese sense of honor tormented him. He thought of his mother working in the fields, and he felt he had failed in his filial duty. Being such a loner, however, he kept the extremity of his depression to himself.

In the evening of May 2, 1955, the due date for his unfinished thesis, Kaizo put on several layers of clothing and got into bed. He put two pillows against his chest and stomach, and fired twice at his heart with a pistol. Though muffled by the clothes and pillows, the shots were clearly heard by the student in the next dormitory room. The student ran to Kaizo's room and found him lying in the doorway, murmuring, "I shot myself.... This is the way it should be." <sup>6</sup>

News of Kaizo's suicide hit Eugene hard. It came as a tremendous shock to everyone, but, as Eugene's group of friends recalled, no one was as profoundly saddened by it as Eugene. Kaizo was a person very similar to Eugene, a noble soul whom, in his own unspoken way, Eugene loved. Life had continued as usual under a fragile veneer of normality, and suddenly Kaizo was gone — to a state which Eugene thought might in fact be preferable to his present one.

Having also heard about Kaizo's death, Alison was sitting with friends at a booth in the "Sugar Bowl." Eugene walked in and sat down alone at the counter. Alison went up to him and looked at him expectantly, but he said nothing. Finally, after brooding a long time, he concluded, staring off into space: "Each of us wears a mask... and no one knows what's behind it." He rose up, and Alison followed. For miles he walked with her, not saying a word.

## 6

### *Pursued by God*

*I walked in darkness, and in slippery places, and sought Thee abroad out of myself, and found not the God of my heart; and had come into the depths of the sea, and distrusted and despaired of ever finding truth. [\[a\]](#)*

—*The Confessions of Blessed Augustine* [1](#)

*You must picture me... night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him Whom I desired not to meet.*

—C. S. Lewis [2](#)

**L**ONG silences were not uncommon for Eugene. His relationship with Alison was such that they did not feel they needed to be always talking when together. “We spent hours studying the stars,” Alison recalls. “He pointed out to me the constellations, knowing them all from memory. He was fascinated by ants, birds.” She remembers how he once lay down on the sidewalk to watch the ants, while she looked on. “He had a deep love for the sea,” she says. “We watched the sea and sat in silence for many hours. He loved the night, and walking....

“He told me many of his feelings. He was pretty desperate, actually: he told me he was suicidal. He felt there was no place for him anywhere — no one who understood him. He felt that life was futile.... He was (in our college years) contemptuous of people, but he was also afraid of them. He felt rejected by people, especially his family. And in fact, they *did* reject him through lack of

understanding.”

“I never saw anybody who could concentrate as much as Eugene could; he just shut everything else out.... He wasn’t an outward, emotional type like I was. But inside he was very, very passionate. I mean that not in a worldly sense, but in a spiritual sense. He was an all-or-nothing kind of person; he never did anything halfway. And I think that’s why his family didn’t understand him.

“I also felt there was no place for me in the world. I suppose I was the only one who knew how he felt, and vice versa.”

Being estranged even from his own parents whom he loved, Eugene felt like one born out of place, out of time. Alison remembers his dislike for modern civilization, and especially for the products of technological progress. “He didn’t like automobiles, electricity, clocks,” she says. “He didn’t even like doctors and hospitals.”

Following in the steps of T. S. Eliot, Alison had become a member of the Anglican Church, and considered herself an “Anglo-Catholic.” “In my youth I was very opinionated,” she says. “I told him he shouldn’t judge Christianity by what he saw in people who practiced it in various and sundry strange ways. I felt that his interest in Zen was a college fad and not to be taken seriously.”

Repeating Nietzsche’s well-known phrase, Eugene told Alison that he believed God was dead. [\[b\]](#) “He also believed that there *was* a God,” says Alison, “but that God had been ‘put into a box’ by people. People believed their idea of God that they had invented, and not the reality of God. Eugene was very bitter at times. I think he felt there was something wrong with him and that he could never find God — so he substituted studying for direct apprehension of truth and tried to withdraw from life and hide.”

For an understanding of Eugene’s idea of God at this time, we must look at one of the earlier, scholarly books of Alan Watts: *The Supreme Identity: An Essay on Oriental Metaphysics and the Christian Religion*. This was Eugene’s favorite of all Watts’ works. In it, Watts posits that modern Christianity is ineffective in leading man to an awareness of his true nature and the reality of

God. What in the West is called God is actually, according to Watts, the transpersonal ground of man's consciousness, man's true "Self." At the end of *The Supreme Identity*, Watts discusses the ways of realizing this Self, stating that the way of Zen is more suited to modern culture than the devotional practices of Christianity.

It so happened that Watts had apostatized from the same Anglo-Catholic (or high Anglican) branch of the Anglican Church to which Alison belonged. Watts' Christian writings had even been in the tract rack at Alison's church until Watts had left the Faith, at which time Alison's priest had thrown them out. Needless to say, Alison had scant respect for Watts. She told Eugene that "Zen was a lot of nonsense, and that Christianity (more specifically Catholic Christianity) was the only truth worth having."

Eugene would become irritated when Alison would criticize Zen, and he would sometimes laugh out loud at her attempts to convert him to Christianity. Nevertheless, he asked her many questions about the differences between Protestantism and Catholicism. As an Anglo-Catholic, Alison did not have a high opinion of Protestantism and at the same time considered the Church of Rome to be in great error because of the papacy.

As part of her attempt to convert Eugene, Alison told him to read Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. She was, she has said, "trying to show him there was another side to God that he did not realize." He could not have helped but notice that Dostoyevsky was dealing with exactly the same philosophical issues as was Nietzsche — and just as powerfully — only from a Christian point of view. Nietzsche's statement, "There is no God, therefore everything is permitted," was only an echo of Ivan Karamazov's almost identical words, written by Dostoyevsky in Russia three years earlier. Nietzsche in fact called Dostoyevsky the most profound psychologist in world literature.

Although Eugene argued with Alison, there can be no doubt that he had some admiration for her youthful convictions and her degree of faith to which he himself could not attain. Despite their opposing views, there was a spiritual

longing that the two of them had in common. With his other friends he shared intellectual pursuits but not that deeper longing, and thus they could never understand the deeper part of him. With the exception of John, who was still struggling with his faith, all of Eugene's other friends in the group of non-conformists thought that Christianity was only for children and for people without full intellectual capacity. Eugene shared their rejection of the Christian Faith, and yet it was not to his fellow skeptics in the group that Eugene opened his soul, but to Alison, the one believing Christian. Many years later, when Eugene said that Alison had "understood" him, she took this as the highest compliment possible.

Eugene felt pity for Alison as for one who was unhappy like himself. Those long silent walks they took together were a kind of sharing of each other's pain, and a balm that helped soothe it. The love that he felt for her did influence his spiritual development, though the changes wrought through her became apparent only years later.

Alison remembers the happy moments that shone against the somber background of their relationship. "Once we were walking by a park at night," she recalls, "and we saw that the sprinklers were on. I loved to run through sprinklers, so I went over the fence and ran. Eugene laughed. He was always very amused when I did silly things. He, however, never did things like that — he was dignified."

There may have been some justification for Alison's accusation that Eugene was only "playing" with Zen. She recalls that he "threw out his alarm clock and his aspirin (two of his 'needs' which were scorned by Zen)." As a result of this "renunciation," Alison had to give him aspirin, knock on his door to wake him up, and tell him when to go to class.

"Zen helped Eugene in a *negative* way," says Alison. "He went into it with the idea of finding knowledge of himself, and what he found was that he was a sinner. In other words, it awakened him to the fact that he needed *something*, but provided no real answers."

Eugene himself, toward the end of his life, had this to say about Zen when someone asked him about the origin of the concept of an impersonal deity (i.e., the “Self” that Watts wrote about): “That concept comes from people who don’t want to meet the personal God, because He definitely requires things of one. I think that, in many cases, when people say they have this experience, it’s some kind of illusion — some kind of wishful thinking. This is very much helped by the feeling of Zen meditation, in which you ‘quiet yourself down.’ —And if you haven’t got anything really deep inside of you that wants to come out, you can get yourself into some quiet state, and think you’ve met God, or whatever you’re looking for. It’s a kind of spiritual immaturity; but I think that, if there’s anything passionate inside of you, finally you’ll go crazy and break the bonds.” [3](#)

This may be seen as a description of Eugene himself during his years at Pomona. He was one of those who *did* have something passionate inside. It may even be said that he never truly ceased believing in the reality of Jesus Christ, but that, in rebelling against the forms of Christianity with which he had personally come into contact, his mind was trying to convince his heart that he did not believe. Or, as Dostoyevsky would ironically put it: “If he was to find out that he believed in God, then he would believe in Him; but since he did not know that he believed in Him, then he did not believe in Him.” [4](#)

Alison was witness to incidents which indicated how Eugene was “going crazy” and trying to “break the bonds” without really knowing how to do so. She recalls the night when Eugene and John’s argument about God came to a head. John, Eugene, Alison, and a few others had gone to the top of Mount Baldy, another local meeting place of the group of friends. Everyone became drunk with wine, except Alison. “John was crying and ranting about how he had to give up women for God,” Alison recalls, “and Eugene became totally disgusted with the whole scene.”

Then something unexpected happened. Eugene stood up and began shouting at John. “There is no God!” he bellowed. “Your God is a fable! *If* there was a God, He wouldn’t torment his followers. You believe that God is having



fun sticking pins in people. Such a God does not exist!”

In his drunken rage, Eugene proceeded to pour wine over John’s head, saying, “I’m John the Baptist!” Then, raising a fist to heaven from the top of the mountain, he cursed God and dared Him to damn him to hell. “See! Nothing happened,” he cried, looking at the distraught Alison with wild eyes. The others took this as some kind of joke, but Alison could see in it Eugene’s horrible struggle with God. In his despair, it seemed worth being damned forever by God’s wrath, if only he could empirically know that God existed — rather than remain in a stagnant state of indifference. If God did damn him to hell, at least then he would, for that blissful instant, feel God’s touch and know for sure that He was reachable.

Alison was to see other such manifestations of the torment and spiritual void within Eugene. “He would drink out of despair,” she says. “I never knew anyone who could drink so much. He would drink until he would throw up, and would weep inconsolably.” Again, only Alison saw this. As far as his other friends knew, Eugene was drinking only for “recreation.”

Sometimes Eugene would read the words of Nietzsche while intoxicated, and he would feel stronger. Strangely enough, these words would also have an effect opposite to what their author had intended. In sharing Nietzsche’s rebellion, Eugene sensed that Nietzsche — as well as he himself — was not just rebelling against an idea or an obsolete belief system designed for the “herd.” The rebellion was much too passionate, too elemental, too *personal* for that. Nietzsche was fighting against something real, something neither he nor Eugene could escape.

Although Eugene was the most openly atheistic of all her peers at Pomona, Alison recognized him as being also the most spiritual. “Even when he was an atheist,” she says, “he gave it his all.”

“Atheism,” Eugene wrote in later years, “true ‘existential’ atheism burning with hatred of a seemingly unjust or unmerciful God, is a spiritual state; it is a real attempt to grapple with the true God Whose ways are so inexplicable even

to the most believing of men, and it has more than once been known to end in a blinding vision of Him Whom the real atheist truly seeks. It is Christ Who works in these souls.... Nietzsche, in calling himself Antichrist, proved thereby his intense hunger for Christ....” [5](#)

## 7

### ***“World, Good Night!”***

*Whithersoever the soul of man turns itself, unless toward Thee, it is riveted upon sorrows, yea though it is riveted upon things beautiful.*

—*The Confessions of Blessed Augustine* [1](#)

*If it is true that Dostoyevsky gave Eugene Orthodoxy, then it was Bach who gave him Christ.*

—Alison

**J**UST as Zen, in spite of itself, had indirectly reminded Eugene of what his soul truly needed, so had Nietzsche. But there was another influence that reminded him directly: music. Music, as the Fathers of the Church teach, is the language closest to the soul.

“Eugene did not read as much as he listened to music,” writes Alison. In 1954 he took her to a performance of the Russian opera *Boris Godunov* by Mussorgsky, which intrigued him by showing another, foreign aspect of Christianity, and which made him comment, “I thought the Germans were deep, but it seems the Russians are much deeper.”

Nevertheless, it was the German composer Johann Sebastian Bach who was to be the pivotal composer in Eugene’s life. “The music we listened to was almost all Bach,” Alison continues. “Our friend Albert Carter loved Bach: he introduced both Eugene and me to him. There were about ten of us who used to sit up all night and listen to Bach. Eugene especially liked the Mass in B Minor, the *St. John Passion*, the *St. Matthew Passion*, the *Magnificat*, the cantatas, and

the *Christmas Oratorio*.... At first he loved the music, then the words took over in his mind.... The words which Bach used were directly from the Gospels and other Scriptures. So it was hearing the words of the Bible set to music that had the most profound influence on him.”

One Bach cantata in particular, no. 82, helped to change Eugene’s life. It was called *Ich Habe Genug* (“I Have Enough”), and it dealt with the subject of death. Composed for one voice and orchestra, it was written for the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord, [\[a\]](#) when the Christ-child is presented in the Temple and St. Symeon greets Him and His Mother, telling the Lord that he is now ready to die. What Bach created was a stirring expression of man’s longing for the heavenly realm, to go beyond this “vale of tears.” The baritone sings three arias, addressing his own soul to the accompaniment of simple, compunctious melodies of sublime beauty. The first is a sigh of relief that the end of life approaches: “I have enough. I have received the Saviour, the hope of the faithful, in my yearning arms. I have enough! I have seen Him; my faith has embraced Jesus, and today I would gladly leave this world. My only hope is that Jesus shall be mine and I His. I cling to Him in faith and, like Symeon, I already see the joy of that other life. Let us join Him! If the Lord would only deliver me from the chains of my human form; if only the time for my departure were here, with joy I would say to the world, ‘I have enough.’”

In the second part, the music becomes calm and gentle, like a lullaby, and the soul is moved to shut its eyes on life forever: “Slumber now, weary eyes — close softly and peacefully. World, I stay here no longer. I renounce thee that my spirit may thrive. Here all is misery, but there I shall behold sweet peace, perfect repose.”

A fervent plea is then voiced: “My God! When wilt Thou call me in peace to join Thee, to lie in the cool earth and rest there in Thee?” The soul dies to the world and bids it farewell: “World, good night!”

The melody ceases, and only the low drone of an organ is heard, representing the passage of death. In the third part the soul, freed of earthly

attachments, leaps out of the body and into eternity. The music reflects the lightness, freedom, and rapture of a soaring bird: “I rejoice in my death!” [2](#)

**I**CH HABE GENUG was loved by Alison as well as by Eugene. When she would go to see him, she would ask him to play it. Eventually this became a sort of tradition with them, and he would always play it before she would go home. He would not, however, play it if anyone else was in the room. When it would be time for her to leave he would get up and every time would say the same phrase: “Wouldn’t you like to hear some music before you go?” Oblivious to what she would say, he would pick up that very record and ask which side she would like to hear. And again, regardless of what she would say, he would put on the side with *Ich Habe Genug*. Then he would sink deep into his armchair, not looking around or speaking. He would play it over and over. When Alison would rise to go, he would say nothing and remain silently listening. For hours he would sit without moving, contemplating what had been revealed to him through the cantata, which said something so deep that nothing else in his life seemed to matter.

As we have seen, the reality of death strongly affected Eugene. He, too, had “had enough” of life in this world, and he longed for something else. In some sense he had, in his suffering, already “died to the world.” And the music of Bach hinted at another world beyond death which was as yet *terra incognita* to him. This was not just beautiful music, composed by an extremely refined genius; rather, it had obviously been written by a man who had experienced God and the immortality of his own soul, and who used the language of music to describe this experience.

Alison believes that Bach played the greatest part in eventually bringing Eugene back to faith in God. “I’m sure of it,” she says, “because it actually tormented him.” The God of contemporary Christianity, which he found boring and unconvincing, was of course dead to him irrevocably; he could never go back to that. But what of Bach, that eighteenth-century Lutheran? Eugene could

not so easily dismiss what that music was saying directly to his soul.

Thus it was that it “tormented” him. “He would get drunk,” Alison recalls, “and would lie on the floor, pounding it with his fists, screaming at God to leave him alone.”

In Dostoyevsky’s *The Possessed*, there is a Nietzsche-like character named Kirilov, who wages a one-man war against the idea of God; and another character, Pyotr Verkhovensky, makes the insightful comment that Kirilov, in his consuming desire to prove God does not exist, shows that he “believes perhaps more thoroughly than any priest.” <sup>3</sup> When one thinks of the young Eugene pounding on the floor in despair, one is reminded of this same comment. Here was a man for whom the question of God was ultimately the only thing that mattered, *whether He existed or not*. For, however much his mind may have taken refuge in a rationally concocted impersonal “Self,” his heart told him that, without a personal God, life was futile indeed.

## 8

### *The Taste of Hell*

*For it was my sin, that not in Him, but in His creatures — myself and others — I sought for pleasures, sublimities, truths, and so fell headlong into sorrows, confusions, errors.... I wandered, O my God, too much astray from Thee my stay, in these days of my youth, and I became to myself a barren land.*

—*The Confessions of Blessed Augustine* [1](#)

*If I go down into hades, Thou art present there.*

—Psalm 138:7 [\[a\]](#)

**I**N 1955, while still a student at Pomona, Eugene attended the summer school of the aforementioned American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco. He took a course taught by Alan Watts, “Comparative Religions, East and West,” and also a course in Oriental calligraphy taught by a Japanese Zen priest. For lodging he once more rented a room for the summer at the Hotel de France.

Founded in 1951, the Academy of Asian Studies was located in a large mansion in the luxurious Pacific Heights area of San Francisco, overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge and the hills of Marin County. A graduate school affiliated with the College of the Pacific (California’s oldest institution of higher learning), it offered master’s and doctor’s degrees in Far Eastern, South Eastern, Near Eastern, and North African Studies. The courses concentrated on the religion, philosophy, psychology, arts, and social institutions of Asia, and provided

instruction in its classical languages: Sanskrit, Hindi, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Arabic, and Japanese. At the time Eugene went there, it had a dozen distinguished instructors from all over the world and fewer than a hundred students.

According to the ideas of its original financial backers, the Academy was set up as a cultural information service at the graduate level. Its purpose, as noted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, was “to provide practical training for leaders in government, education, politics, industry, foreign trade, and social service.” But the Academy’s founder, Professor Frederic Spiegelberg of Stanford University, together with its dean Alan Watts and much of its faculty, had no real interest in this idea of a training center for future businessmen and ambassadors. In Watts’ words, “We were concerned with the practical transformation of human consciousness, with the actual living out of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist ways on the level of high mysticism.... In retrospect one can see that the Academy of Asian Studies was a transitional institution emerging from the failure of universities and churches to satisfy important spiritual needs.... By and large our students wanted no more than to get by in the world of supposedly practical affairs. They had no ambitions for working with the Department of State, and still less for making fortunes in commerce with the Far East. They might, in a one-eyed way, be thinking that a Ph.D. would be useful in getting a teaching position, as a reasonably interesting way of supplying bread and butter. But the other eye was on something else — the thing variously called *moksha*, *bodhi*, *kaivalya*, or *satori* in the Asian religions.” [2](#)

The Academy offered a program of public information, separate from the graduate studies, conducted by means of public lectures, conferences, performances of Asian music, and art exhibitions. Averaging about three per week, the public lectures were given both by the resident faculty and by visiting speakers, including the renowned authority on Zen, Dr. Daisetz T. Suzuki. Through this program the Academy began to attract the progressive intelligentsia of San Francisco: poets, artists, writers, and students.



In the center of all the activity was the Academy's dean, Alan Watts, who, although he was less grounded in any Eastern tradition than the other instructors, could speak more eloquently, captivatingly, and convincingly than any of them. Already he was a local celebrity in the San Francisco Bay area. As one of his biographers stated: "No one could expound the mysteries of the East and make them more mysterious, yet let the people believe they had almost reached the brink of understanding — no one in the world could do it as well as Watts." <sup>3</sup>

It had been the presence of Alan Watts, of course, that had drawn Eugene to the Academy in the first place. As he recorded, for the summer course in 1955 he used Watts' *The Supreme Identity* as one of his "textbooks" when writing his term paper. At that time, in addition to taking a class from Watts, he participated in a small, informal Zen study group which gathered atop meditation cushions under Watts' tutelage. As he wrote to his friend Dirk Van Nouhuys:



The American Academy of Asian Studies, San Francisco, 1955.



Dean Alan Watts discussing a translation of a Zen Buddhist text with Drs. Paul and George Fung at the Academy.

I am sitting once weekly before the barefoot feet of Alan Watts, to learn of Zen, with three others. Twice a week, as you know, I sit before his shodden feet to learn of “comparative” something or other.... His subject matter, and his stage presence I suppose, seem very attracting. He also has something to say; how much, I can’t possibly find out until I’ve got somewhere in the maze myself. Thus far he knows and communicates enough to keep me coming. Some of his insights are particularly revealing. <sup>4</sup>

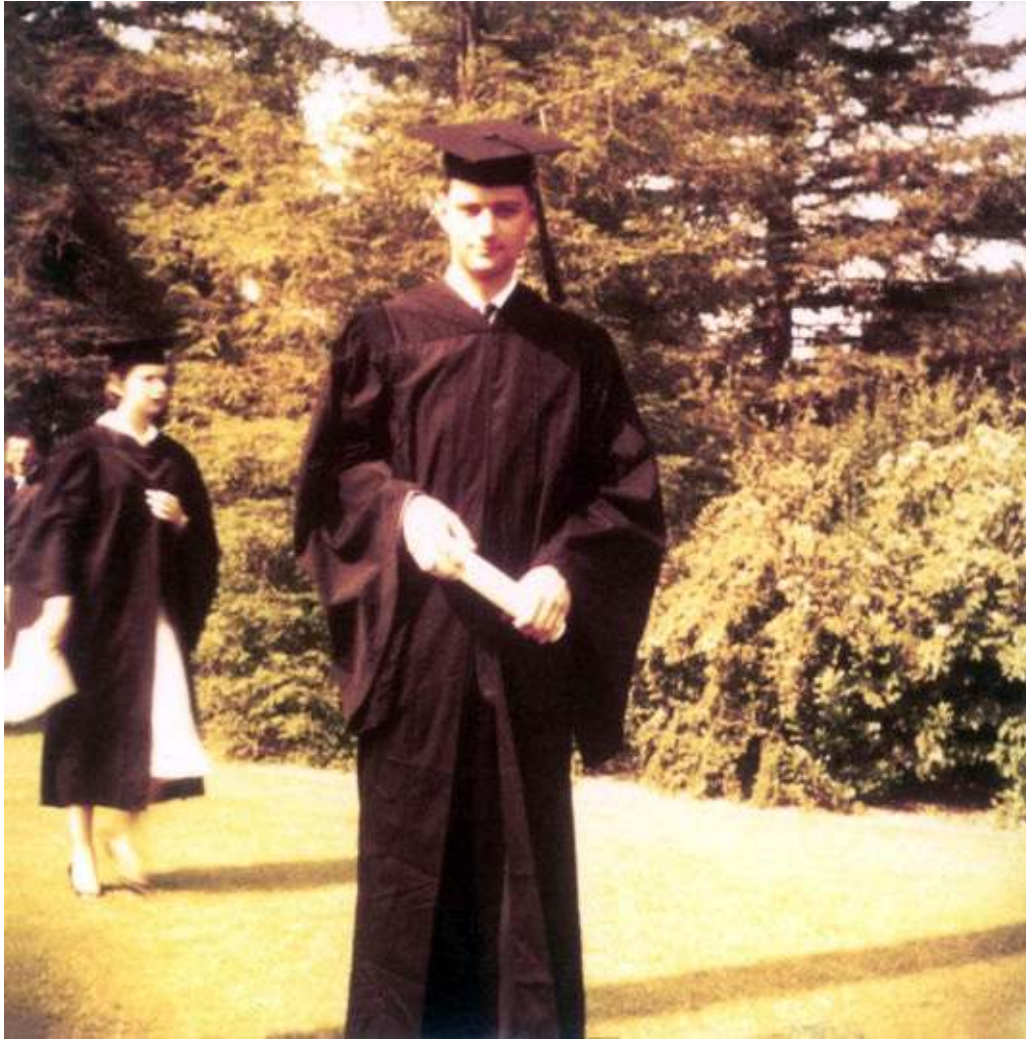
Back at Pomona to complete his bachelor’s degree, Eugene wrote to Watts requesting his recommendation for a scholarship program for his future graduate studies. Watts wrote back, advising him to make his program “much more specific,” and recommending his own Academy as one of the five places where Eugene “could make a really profitable study of either Chinese philosophy or Far-Eastern Buddhism.” Watts apologized for not having sent Eugene’s course transcript earlier, and said that “to do all that is necessary for my work here would require the ten arms of Shiva, and I have but two.”

Eugene graduated *magna cum laude* from Pomona in 1956, and

subsequently enrolled in the Academy of Asian Studies as a full-time student. He rented an apartment in San Francisco together with another student of the Academy, Jon Gregerson.

**I**N San Francisco, Eugene sought to find a place for himself on the outskirts of the society he had rejected. He began to estrange himself from the status quo, from what he saw as the dullness of the contemporary “mob.” Through his association with the Academy, he naturally fell in with the intellectual elite of the city and began to take on its affectations. He saved his limited funds to go with friends to gourmet and exotic restaurants, and became a connoisseur of fine wines. Occasionally he smoked expensive Balkan Sobranie cigarettes, which according to Alan Watts were “the best cigarettes imaginable.” <sup>5</sup> As much as possible, he would attend operas, concerts of classical music, art exhibits, and theater productions of both the classical and avant-garde genres, and would compare and discuss these with others of the literati. In some of his letters he took on the “spontaneous” writing style of the new, progressive writers, with rambling sentences and no regard for grammar and capitalization. As he later confessed, all this did not come from himself, from what he truly was inside. “I was only mimicking,” he said.

The progressive intelligentsia which Eugene had entered saw itself as a highly cultured set. As one of his friends from those days has written: “From this distance and in these cruel times, we may look like so many butterflies — snobs, dilettantes. There is some truth in that, but we also cared truly and deeply and passionately for the music, the writing, the making of subtle and important distinctions, the experience. Under the mask of elitism, I think we did exactly what a liberal education intended us to do: explore.”



Eugene at his graduation from Pomona College, 1956.

San Francisco had become a center for the avant-garde of the nation, a countercultural movement of exploration that would help move society out of the relatively innocent and complacent era of the early 1950s. Out of the San Francisco “bohemian” intelligentsia sprang the “beat” movement, which was also largely restricted to intellectuals. The new ideas and ways of thinking of the elite would later trickle down to the masses of the young generation, producing the huge, unrestricted, and international phenomenon of the “hippie” movement, which also had San Francisco as one of its first main centers.

Thanks to the talents of Alan Watts, the Academy of Asian Studies helped effect these cultural changes. The Academy, wrote Watts in his autobiography,

“was one of the principal roots of what later came to be known, in the early sixties, as the San Francisco Renaissance, of which one must say, like Saint Augustine when asked about the nature of time, ‘I know what it is, but when you ask me, I don’t.’ I am too close to what has happened to see it in proper perspective. I know only that between, say, 1958 and 1970 a huge tide of spiritual energy in the form of poetry, music, philosophy, painting, religion, communications techniques in radio, television, and cinema, dancing, theater, and general lifestyle swept out of this city and its environs to affect America and the whole world, and that I have been intensely involved in it. It would be false modesty to say that I had little to do with it.” [6](#)

Long before the word “hippie” entered our lexicon, the progressive intellectuals of San Francisco had turned away from the American dream, with its ideals of family and Judeo-Christian religion. They were delving into anything that was different, drawing above all from Eastern religions. In rejecting Western morality and taking only what they wanted from the East, they were free to explore forms of debauchery, degradation, and perversion unacceptable in any civilized society, combining cultural pretensions with what Eugene would later refer to as “the spirit of lawlessness.” Among the most influential preachers of this new moral relativism was Alan Watts. Now a constant critic of Western religion, he advocated a new “freedom” from the God of the “uptight Christians and Jews,” [7](#) and by this he meant above all freedom from Christian sexual morality. An admitted hedonist, he claimed that the “guilt” imposed on people by Judeo-Christian religion was a debilitating, cramping force on the human personality, and should be eradicated from Western society.

From his first summer at the Academy in San Francisco, Eugene embraced the countercultural moral codes (or lack of them) of the intellectual elite, which in thirty years would become the standard morality of much of the nation. Under the influence of Watts, he rationalized this with teachings selected from Eastern religion. In a letter of 1955 he wrote:



Western man is a man of anxiety and sin *par excellence*; he approaches God only with fear and trembling — or he makes himself a machine to produce more and more and thus “progress” to damnation. He is a man with an enormous sense of guilt.

Eastern wisdom tempers my own feeling of sin; I am therefore perhaps really not to seek ‘God’: I begin to state the problem in other terms. But the fact remains: no finite goal suffices. [8](#)

According to Alan Watts’ interpretation of Buddhist doctrines, one should not “seek” anything, for in seeking one loses sight of what already IS. Through seeking anything — including God and salvation — one becomes conscious of oneself as the seeker, and the self is but an illusion. Furthermore, the object of the search is but an abstraction, and therefore not real, either. While studying under Watts, Eugene set forth this fatalistic philosophy in a letter to his friend Laurence McGilvery:

I deny that anything I have ever perceived or thought through any organ whatsoever is “non-existent”; I affirm that practically everything I have ever perceived or thought is abstract, relatively unreal thereby (for the concrete is the only real), because perceived by my own abstraction-clouded senses. Anything that can be called a thing is something; but no things are really things, they are only called things. As Buddhism, the Chinese language, Ezra Pound, [Ernest] Fenellosa, and some modern philosophy, psychology, and semantics affirm: THERE IS NO THING IN NATURE, reality as “things” is a figment of our imaginations, and seeing reality as “things” is what is symbolized (I think) by the Buddhist and Christian Hells. Abstraction is Hell, and I hate it; and I shall not stop talking about it just because I know words are futile, and will save nobody. And I will try as far as I am able, or think I am able, to stop worshipping these “things,” no matter how exalted a form they may take — be the abstraction

God himself.... Salvation is seeing things as they are, not looking at things through pink spectacles and proclaiming to all the world, Behold! the One God is Pink! Being true to oneself is abstract, is Hell itself, as long as one worships it as an end, hides it in his mind's eye and says, This is reality. One can start with oneself as little as with "God," if both are abstractions. It is waking up alone that counts — the Buddh in Buddhism....

If one cannot save oneself through "God," through "self," through any of these abstractions, HOW does one save oneself?... One DOESN'T save oneself. It's absolutely impossible and futile. If God, "God," feels like saving us damn sinners, he will, and there's nothing we can do about it; there is likewise nothing we can NOT do about it — activity is futile, but so is inactivity. [9](#)

If hell is nothing but a symbol for the delusion of abstraction, and if it is futile to try to "do" anything on the path to truth, illumination or salvation, then there is nothing to prevent one from living however one pleases. This was precisely what the ex-Christian priest Alan Watts was getting at, and to some extent practicing. Eugene, too, would follow this philosophy to its logical conclusion. Together with many of his young contemporaries, he entered upon a life of hedonism and sexual immorality. As Alison has observed, there was something of Eugene's rebellion against God in this. As he had atop Mount Baldy, Eugene was raising a challenge to God, this time by flying in the face of His laws.

Compared with what went on in the San Francisco bohemian subculture, the acts of nonconformity among Eugene's friends at Pomona were quite tame. In some letters to his Pomona friends, Eugene took on the flippant, devil-may-care attitude of a twenty-two-year-old youth experimenting in what before had been barred to him; but this seems to have been just bravado. As he stated in later years, this was the darkest, most miserable period of his life. Forbidden deeds, he said, had disgusted him even at the time he was committing them.

They would precipitate long periods of depression afterward.

In order to temporarily escape the feeling of “guilt” — which was actually the voice of his conscience and of God in his heart — Eugene turned more and more to the sensual diversions of fine wine, gourmet food, and sophisticated cultural entertainment. His letters to fellow members of the cultured set became filled with discussion of these three diversions, and dotted with such phrases as “The fish is the finest I’ve ever had.... We had a *Cruse Chablis* at Julius’ Castle, [b] ‘twas excellent and dry.” <sup>10</sup>

But these diversions only increased his guilt, which in turn piqued his desire for more escapes — especially into drink. He purchased wine by the gallon. At one drunken revel, attended by Alan Watts, he became so intoxicated that he remembered nothing of what happened that night. Even in his most intoxicated states, however, the God he had rejected as an “abstraction” would not leave him alone. In one letter to a friend at Pomona, which he composed while drunk, he wrote lines of devilish bravado and mischief, only to lay this game aside and ask: “Do you know why I am in San Francisco? Because I wish to find out who I am and who God is. Do you wish to know these things? They are the only things I care to know.” <sup>11</sup> In another letter, also written while drunk, he admitted: “I am certainly ‘sick,’ as all men are sick who are absent from the love of God.” <sup>12</sup>

On occasion Eugene would seek refuge in nature, finding that walks in the woods helped him to get out of his head, away from his morbid thoughts — which included thoughts of suicide. In a letter he wrote: “I find that... when I... (as I did yesterday) go out on a Greyhound bus to Mill Valley and spend the day hiking in Muir Woods, or (as I shall next Sunday) climb Mount Tamalpais, [c] I do not cling to objects of my desire as I do when I walk the streets of San Francisco or go to a movie or eat a candy bar, and neither am I obsessed with the morbid thoughts of self-emptiness [d] and will to suicide which inevitably catch up with me when I think about things for very long.” <sup>13</sup>

As Eugene related in later years, he was so miserable during this period that



he began to experiment with insanity. In this he was influenced by the existentialist writers of nihilism and the absurd — Nietzsche, Kafka, Camus, Ionesco — but also by his Eastern ideas. If, as he was taught by Watts and Buddhism, abstract thinking is delusion, and knowledge is ignorance, then perhaps the breakdown of logical thought processes could end in the liberation from delusion, in a glimpse of truth. In a letter Eugene wrote:

A sense of humor, I believe, requires a high degree (or an ordinary degree, however you look at it) of sanity, which I have been losing by leaps and caterwauls in recent months. Of course, there are the kinds of insanity: the kind that's just out of contact with reality, such as the state of those who are well-adjusted to our civilization; the kind that's out of contact with both reality and our civilization (Nietzsche); divine madness ("possession" of various sorts); etc. [14](#)

And in another letter:

I am being obscure almost intentionally, that I may surprise myself with an unintentional turn; and in fact this is written largely to myself, and others look on at risk of incomprehension — not that I do any more, mostly, than guess.

Speed, agitation, novelty, are a last form of knowledge, past the time when knowledge has become ignorance, denying it or perhaps summing up for all to see that this knowledge IS precisely ignorance, dissolving thus not only it but everything.

Are we then in those days? Are these the signs of the times? Our time is not "directionless": it is DOWN, and so fast we cannot move, but agitate in mente.

Who seeks "meaning"?—INSANITY is meaning; we are progenitors — of CHAOS. Not in the mind alone, in everything.

We of course, do nothing, but follow. [15](#)

At one point Eugene explored this state so far that he began to wonder if he were the sole existent reality, imagining the external world as one creates dreams while asleep.

One friend who knew Eugene well during these days has said: “He was a very secretive person, and much about him remained an enigma to me. He could be almost totally non-communicative for weeks or even months at a time, and would seem to brood over some nameless terror within.”

Having challenged God by living in defiance of His commandments, Eugene began to experience infernal torments. He felt damnation was upon him, and was filled with self-loathing. “Among the damned,” he wrote in a letter, “I feel there is no hierarchy.... I am not to be emulated or admired, and condemnation is just.” <sup>16</sup> Many years later, describing the end of his exploration and experimentation outside the will of God, he could only say, “I was in hell. I know what hell is.”

Before this, the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche had only been intellectual theories to him, ideas which fueled his rebellion against civilization. Now, however, he was tasting the hellish consequences of these theories, seeing how they manifested themselves in practice. He began to understand that Nietzsche was not just a philosopher thinking out various ideas. He was more of a poet, but his poetry possessed a power that was more than human. The very writing of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* had something of the supernatural in it. Walking among the mountains of Switzerland, Nietzsche had been filled with an inspiration that he said had not been known since the time of the ancients. He would write huge portions hastily and in one sitting, as if they came not from himself and he was only affixing them on paper. Calling himself a “mouthpiece or medium of an almighty power,” he wrote: “One hears — one does not seek; one takes — one does not ask who gives: a thought suddenly flashes up like lightning, it comes with necessity, unhesitatingly — I never had any choice in the matter.” <sup>17</sup>

Eugene himself had a similar experience through just reading *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in his state of sin and despair. One day, after having spent hours reading it in the original German, he took a walk through the city. It was already evening, and the sky became blood-red. As he came to a certain spot on the street, he heard Nietzsche's poetry resonating inside of him. He felt that "Zarathustra" had actually become alive and was speaking to him, breathing words into him. He felt the power of those words as one feels the charge of electricity, and he became terrified.

It was only later that Eugene fully understood where the "spirituality," the mysterious power and enthusiasm of Nietzsche's poetry came from. As noble as his original ideals may have been, Nietzsche's passionate rejection of God had opened him up to a state of partial possession, and he had indeed become — as Eugene later came to believe — a "mouthpiece" of infernal powers.

**E**VEN while suffering in a state of living hell, Eugene, like Nietzsche, refused to turn for deliverance to the religion of his formative years, for the Christ it preached was not manly enough for him. For Eugene, the heavenly Father of mainline Protestantism was rather like his own father: kind, well-meaning, but weak, ready to mold himself to suit people's whims, afraid of making people uncomfortable. In time the mainline churches would so emasculate the God they worshipped that some would refuse to call him "Father" at all, but would refer to him as an abstract "Father-Mother." Eugene had to break down the facade of this sentimental, watered-down Christianity, in order that he might later acquire the fullness of the mystery of Christ, the true God Who is known in pain and crucifixion.

Modern American Christianity seemed phony to Eugene because there was no pain or sacrifice involved; it was all too easy. His forays into Nietzschean insanity were precisely a way of experiencing that pain. Even in the tasting of the pleasure that simultaneously repulsed him and made him hate himself, there was an element of seeking the pain out of which he could know God. "I vote for

the extremes,” he wrote at the time. “... If surrounded by pleasure, one must inflict pain upon oneself, and suffer consciously if necessary.” [18](#)

In the same letter, he wrote lines that were to prove prophetic in his own life:

The punishment of sin is sin. Pain is the greatest blessing, for it awakens man from his self-hypnosis, the self-delusion that can take any earthly goal — be it crude, such as sex, food, comfort, or subtler, such as art, music, literature — as final. The desire for these things fails, and man becomes weary. Then: he fades away or kills himself; or he undertakes the path to deliverance, salvation....

Disease, suffering, death — these are reminders, convenient reminders, that man most profoundly is not of this world. In an age of pleasure, God is seldom seen. [19](#)

It has been said that, at the Last Judgment, the fire that will burn those who are worthy of torment will also illumine those who are to inherit the Kingdom of God. [20](#) This, perhaps, was one of the reasons why Eugene deliberately did those things by which he could experience the flames of hell. It was a twisted way of seeking the God Whom he believed could not be “sought”: to be reminded of His presence by feeling the intense need for Him, the torment, and the despair which come from being separated from Him. As Blessed Augustine put it in describing the dissipation of his own youth: “Safety I hated, and a way without snares, for within me was a famine for that inward food, Thyself, my God.” [21](#)

This was a hell that Eugene wished on no one. In later life he said that certain sinful realities, which he had known while being in that hell, are best left unmentioned so that they will not be put into the air. Such was his desire to bury the sinful aspect of his past that, in his later years, he did not even want anyone to see a photograph of himself from his “bohemian” days, showing him sitting at a desk and wearing a goatee.

When by the grace of God Eugene was finally transformed into a new man, the old man of sin, who had always been foreign to his soul, was dead to him forever, and he buried him gladly. The new man that he became was profoundly ashamed of what the old man had been. But his experience of hell — the moral degradation, absurdity, and despair that was rising like a wave to inundate America and the world — gave him an edge that he would use later on. Having entered more deeply than most of his contemporaries into the growing nihilism of his age, he would one day oppose it more strongly than they, for he knew its true evil. Having once stood on the vanguard of the destruction of traditional Christian society and morality, he would one day be on the vanguard of the path of return.

## 9

### *Truth Above All Else*

*Every kind of partial and transitory disequilibrium must perforce contribute towards the great equilibrium of the whole, and nothing can ultimately prevail against the power of truth.*

—René Guénon

**C**ITING the words of Confucius, Eugene once asked: “Shall I teach you what knowledge is? When you know a thing, hold that you know it; when you do not know a thing, allow that you do not know it. This is knowledge.” <sup>1</sup>

As Alison has observed: “Eugene knew himself; he recognized his limitations completely, much more than most people.” Despite the intellectual elitism of his youth, Eugene was the first to admit that everything he had ever learned with his mind meant nothing beside true wisdom — what he called the “vision of the nature of things.” In an essay for a philosophy class at Pomona, he had written: “The author of this paper confesses himself unenlightened by such metaphysical knowledge.... The nature of things is non-intellectible in essence, can never be known by the intellect.... Some other relationship, then, is wanting between the individual and this ‘reality’; what must it be?—feeling, intuition, what? We cannot say.” <sup>2</sup>

At the Academy, which had a large collection of books on religious philosophy, Eugene took the opportunity to make a careful study of the works of various metaphysicians, endeavoring to learn what they had to say of the way to true wisdom — though fully realizing that such study was a poor substitute for that wisdom itself. Evelyn Underhill, Ernest Fenellosa, and other writers

interested him and gave him food for thought; but one in particular stood high above the rest. This was the French metaphysician René Guénon, who had died in Cairo when Eugene had been a junior in high school. “I read and studied with eagerness all his books that I could get hold of,” Eugene recalled later. <sup>3</sup> Some books he was able to find in English translation; others he read in the original French.



René Guénon (1886–1951).

Alan Watts was also familiar with Guénon’s works and had mentioned him briefly in *The Supreme Identity*. But for Watts, Guénon was just one thinker among many whose ideas might be taken into consideration. For Eugene, he became much more: a single vantage point from which he could view the myriad fruits of man’s immemorial search for meaning. The influence of Guénon on Eugene’s spiritual development can hardly be underestimated. All the other writers whose works he pondered in his early days — including Nietzsche and Watts — represented only passing phases for him, but Guénon actually formed

him for life. Without Guénon to help him take a crucial step at this juncture, his spiritual growth might have been stunted irrevocably.

In a letter he wrote many years later to another seeker interested in Guénon, Eugene was to tell what precisely Guénon did for him: “It so happens that René Guénon was the chief influence in the formation of my own intellectual outlook (quite apart from the question of Orthodox Christianity).... It was René Guénon who taught me to seek and love the Truth above all else, and to be unsatisfied with anything else.” [4](#)

Guénon, who believed that an intellectual elite was needed to restore true metaphysical knowledge to the West, could hardly help Eugene overcome his elitism. Since his approach was exclusively intellectual, his teachings were incapable of morally regenerating Eugene, of releasing him from his hell and of opening to him the fullness of the truth he sought. Guénon was, however, the first one to set him on the path toward this truth, showing him the way of true philosophy. It could be said that Guénon’s works were to Eugene what the written exhortations of Cicero had been to the young Augustine, who said that by these exhortations he had been “strongly roused, and kindled, and inflamed to love, and seek, and obtain, and hold, and embrace not this or that sect, but wisdom itself whatever it were.” [5](#)

After encountering Guénon, Eugene was never to be the same, never to see things in the same way. From now on — whether reading, listening to music, looking at art and architecture, or just observing life around him — he was to do this with the aim of seeing how each thing related to transcendent and timeless truth.

Guénon was like Watts in pointing out the problems of Western civilization, but he looked at these problems far more deeply than Watts. Whereas Watts was always trying to show how everything Western was inferior to what was in the East, Guénon demonstrated that the problem lay not in the West itself, but in the modernist spirit that had taken over the West. Whereas Watts was first of all a critic of the West, Guénon was first of all a critic of



modernity.

In Guénon's writings Eugene found things he had always *felt* without being able to quite understand, having never had a clear perspective on them. He had always *felt* there was something wrong with the modern world; but since that was the only world he had known directly, he had had nothing by which to judge this matter, and had thus been inclined to think there was something wrong with himself. Guénon taught him that it was in fact not him, but the modern world, that was abnormal.

Through Guénon, Eugene was introduced to an outlook completely at odds with the spirit of his times and with the modern philosophies he had previously studied. Reading Guénon's works for the first time, he noted in a letter: "My 'schooling' for sixteen years has taught me to think hazily; in the presence of such clear thinking I scarcely know what to do." <sup>6</sup> In essence, Guénon convinced him that the upholding of ancient tradition was valid, and not just a sign of being unenlightened, as the modernists would claim. Whereas the modern mentality viewed all things in terms of historical *progress*, Guénon viewed them in terms of historical *disintegration*. According to the spirit of the times, the newer a thing is, the better it is; according to Guénon, it is apt to be better if it is older.

Guénon indicated that modern Western society is based on a rejection of the traditional spirit of ancient cultures. He said that it is only through a return to the traditional, *orthodox* forms of the major world religions, either Eastern or Western, that man can even begin to come once more into contact with truth. As it is, without a traditional worldview to bring all into a coherent whole, modern life becomes fragmented, disordered, confused, and the modern world heads toward catastrophe.

In his book *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, Guénon explained how the elimination of traditional spiritual principles has led to a drastic degeneration of humanity. He showed how modern science, with its tendency to reduce everything to an exclusively quantitative level, has corrupted man's conception of true knowledge and confined his vision to what is temporal

and material. As we have seen, in his freshman year at Pomona Eugene had trusted the modern scientific outlook (for lack of anything better, he had said); with his study of Guénon, this was to change completely. He was still to regard modern science as a way to knowledge, but now he saw this as “knowledge of the lowest, commonest sort.” <sup>7</sup> Guénon wrote elsewhere that, “in attempting to reduce everything to the stature of man taken as an end in himself, modern civilization has sunk stage by stage to a level of his lowest elements and aims at little more than satisfying the needs inherent in the material side of his nature.” <sup>8</sup> Trying to fill in the gap that science and materialism have left in the modern age, “pseudo-religions” have sprung up; but in their confusion of psychic with spiritual reality, they have only further obscured the truth.

Viewing this downward trend according to the eschatologies of traditional religions, Guénon wrote: “Whereas the modern world considered in itself is an anomaly and even a sort of monstrosity, it is no less true that, when viewed in relation to the whole historical cycle of which it is a part, it corresponds exactly to the conditions pertaining to a certain phase of that cycle, the phase which the Hindu tradition specifies as the final period of the *Kali-Yuga*.” <sup>9</sup>

According to Guénon’s reading of the Hindu tradition, then, the modern world is now at the end of the fourth and last age of the *Manvantara* time cycle: the *Kali-Yuga* or “dark age.” Guénon wrote that, since the beginning of the *Kali-Yuga*, the “truths which formerly lay within reach of all mankind have become more and more hidden and difficult to approach; those who have access to them grow gradually fewer and fewer.”

Such words must have had a tremendous effect on Eugene when he first read them. They were enough to provide a precise explanation of his own experience: why the truth had always seemed hidden from him, why he had always been looking for something more, why he had felt out of place amidst modern civilization and technology.

Guénon, having been raised as a French Catholic, saw the doctrine of the *Kali-Yuga* in the light of Christian teaching. The degeneration and departure

from the truths of the ancients, as foretold in Hindu eschatology, was equated to the Christian concept of the *apostasy*; the cataclysm and destruction of the present world which will mark the end of the *Kali-Yuga* was equated with the *apocalypse*. All this, Guénon remarked, “should be viewed such as it is, not only without optimism but also without pessimism, since... the end of the old world will be the beginning of a new one.” In Guénon’s view, this new world described in ancient Sanskrit texts will be the fulfillment of the Biblical promise of *a new heaven and a new earth*—a reality entirely different from the existing one. [\[a\]](#) Finally, Guénon saw the deceptions and delusions characteristic of the last phase of the *Kali-Yuga* as being those of the Antichrist. The modern partisans of progress, Guénon asserted, are deluded in expecting a “golden age” to dawn within the present time cycle. “Their error,” he wrote, “in its most extreme form, will be that of the Antichrist himself when he claims to bring the ‘golden age’ into being through the reign of the ‘counter-tradition,’ and when he even gives it an appearance of authenticity, purely deceitful and ephemeral though it be, by means of a counterfeit of the traditional idea of the *Sanctum Regnum*.” [10](#)

Unlike Watts, Guénon had no axe to grind with Christianity, seeing it as the authentic spiritual tradition of the West. It was only Protestantism and other modernistic deviations from traditional Christianity that Guénon did not accept.

“Actually,” Guénon wrote, “religion being essentially a form of tradition, the anti-traditional spirit cannot help being anti-religious; it begins by denaturing religion and ends by suppressing it altogether, wherever it is able to do so. Protestantism is illogical from the fact that, while doing its utmost to ‘humanize’ religion, it nevertheless permits the survival, at least theoretically, of a supra-human element, namely revelation; it hesitates to drive negation to its logical conclusion, but, by exposing revelation to all the discussions which follow in the wake of purely human interpretations, it does in fact reduce it practically to nothing.... It is natural that Protestantism, animated as it is by a spirit of negation, should have given birth to that dissolving ‘criticism’ which, in the hands of so-called ‘historians of religion,’ has become a weapon of offense

against all religion; in this way, while affecting not to recognize any authority except that of the Scriptures, it has itself contributed in large measure to the destruction of that very same authority, of the minimum of tradition, that is to say, which it still affected to retain; once launched, the revolt against the traditional outlook could not be arrested in mid-course.” [11](#)

This sober view of Protestantism, of course, brought Eugene much closer to the truth than did the blanket repudiation of Christianity that he had encountered in Nietzsche and, to a lesser degree, in Watts.

**A**CCORDING to Eugene’s own testimony, Guénon helped determine his course of study. “Through Guénon’s influence,” Eugene wrote, “I studied the ancient Chinese language and resolved to do for the Chinese spiritual tradition what he had done for the Hindu.” Guénon, who had made a broad study of the Hindu tradition with the aim of making it for the first time known in the West in an authentic form, had not done the same with the Chinese tradition. [\[b\]](#) “I only went deeper into the Chinese tradition,” Eugene wrote, “because no one had yet presented it in the West from the fully traditional point of view.” [12](#) In connection with his interest in Zen, Eugene had been involved somewhat in Chinese studies before he had ever encountered Guénon’s writings, but it was Guénon who set for him a definite objective in his studies, a goal that spurred him on.

Toward the end of his life, Eugene explained why he was drawn more to the Chinese tradition than to the (East) Indian tradition: “My Chinese professor once told me that the Indian mind is quite different [from the Chinese]. The Indians are up in the heavens, seeking Brahma, spiritual experiences, and so on, while the Chinese are always right down to earth. That’s why I liked them from the beginning. Although it is also very spiritual in a way, the basic Chinese culture never loses track of the present reality.” [13](#) We can see something of the character of Eugene’s practical mother — and, through her, of his grandfather the struggling stumpland farmer — in this inclination of his toward the down-to-

earth. It was this inclination that later helped him to get a grip on realistic Christian spirituality, to avoid spiritual “self-persuasion.”

But there was another, special reason why Eugene was attracted to Chinese culture: the *Tao Teh Ching* of Lao Tzu. This classic work of Chinese philosophy from the sixth century B.C. impressed him so much that he desired to read it in its original language and tap its meaning. “It is so profound that one can get lost in it,” he said. <sup>14</sup> As he explained in later years, according to Lao Tzu’s philosophy “the center of the universe is Tao: the Path of life.” This “Path,” “Way,” or “ordering principle” of nature — like Him Who fashioned nature — is characterized by simplicity and humility. In this — as well as in its precepts which closely approximate those of Christ, <sup>[c]</sup> and in its reticence in speaking of that which is not yet known — the *Tao Teh Ching* is a foreshadowing of what would later be revealed through Christ. Since the *Tao Teh Ching* contains in itself no supernatural revelation, it cannot really be called “mystical.” “Some people think it’s very mystical,” Eugene later said. “I think it’s more on a natural level.” <sup>15</sup> It may, however, be said to represent the epitome of what a human being can know *without* direct revelation, that is, through the apprehension of universal principles as manifested in nature, in the divinely created order. For Eugene, who like Kirilov did not yet “know that he believed” in Christian revelation, the *Tao Teh Ching* was thus the best possibility open to him, and he endeavored to take full advantage of it.

# 10

## *Two Teachers*

*Truth is the object of philosophy, but not always of philosophers.*

—John Churton Collins

**W**HILE attending summer courses at the Academy in 1955, Eugene had been taken by a Zen priest to see the various temples, both Buddhist and Shinto, in the Japanese quarter of the city. After this, he had begun to turn his attention to other forms of Buddhism besides Zen: 1) the Jode-Shinshu branch with its devotion to the Amida Buddha as the personification of divine compassion; 2) the esoteric Shingon and Tendai branches with their highly complicated metaphysic; 3) the exclusive Nichiren branch, founded in the twelfth century by a persecuted Japanese monk who called Zen the “spawn of demons” and emphasized the doctrine of *Mappo* or “last times”; and 4) Tibetan Buddhism.

About Eugene’s interest in the latter, one of his classmates at the Academy has said: “Eugene found Tibetan iconography (the paintings, not the statues — Eugene never liked any kind of sculptured images) aesthetically very pleasing, especially the designs and color combinations. He was also fascinated by the various phenomena of Tibetan spirituality and asceticism — such as levitation, teleportation, the creation and manifestation of ‘thought forms,’ and the ability of Tibetan ascetics to spend hours in prayer and meditation outside in freezing temperatures. His interest in the Tibetan ‘Book of the Dead’ was considerable. This describes the journey of the soul after death on the so-called Bardo Plane. For the Tibetan Buddhist, this of course involves ‘reincarnation.’ And one may

observe that Eugene was very much concerned with ‘reincarnation’ at one time. This remained a subject to which he gave much thought, but regarding which he was never very communicative.”

According to the same classmate, Hindu metaphysics, the focus of Guénon’s inquiries, “had a profound attraction for Eugene, although he did not find the gods of the Hindu pantheon at all appealing — but only interesting as allegories indicative of certain happenings within the human psyche. Nor did he much care for Hindu religious art. Two aspects of Hinduism which particularly interested him were: 1) the Hindu ideal and reality of the ‘holy man’ or holy ascetic — who was often a lone wanderer, although sometimes a dweller in an ashram, and 2) the Hindu concept of the *Kali-Yuga*.

“Over and above Buddhism and Hinduism, Eugene had a profound interest in Taoism, its holy book the *Tao Teh Ching*, and its author Lao Tzu. The latter was for Eugene a kind of prototype of the holy sage or ascetic, the hermit who retires to a mountain retreat to become one with the Tao and cultivate ‘perfect harmony’ with nature.”

**I**N his study of comparative traditions, Eugene took several philosophy courses given by Alan Watts and invariably received high marks from him; but after a while his estimation of this talented lecturer and writer began to change. Having been taught by Guénon to “seek the truth above all else,” Eugene came to see that Watts, despite Watts’ own pronouncements, did not share this aim. At base, this ex-Anglican priest wanted a religion that he could be comfortable with, that promised him spiritual benefits while allowing him to do basically whatever he wanted; and he used his very able mind to both formulate and justify this amorphous religion. Zen, with its aversion to dogma, proved malleable in his hands.

In January of 1957 Eugene wrote in a letter: “I am taking A. W. Watts’ course in Zen, after reading his new book on the subject, from manuscript copy. All right, but I wonder why he must continue to attack (Catholic) Christianity,

even on the side.” [1](#)

While Guénon had attempted to study Eastern religions within their own context, Watts seemed to be trying to make them digestible to Westerners. The “Buddhism” he espoused as a remedy for the spiritual malaise of the West was thus an inauthentic, synthesized expression of that tradition, streamlined to cater to the modern mentality of self-worship.

A friend of Eugene has written: “As for Alan Watts, his [lasting] influence on Eugene was, as far as I can tell, all but non-existent, although Eugene was at one time impressed with two of his books, namely *The Supreme Identity* and *Myth and Ritual in Christianity*. To be sure, Watts could be intellectually stimulating, but in the end I think that Eugene saw in Watts nothing more than what Watts was — a charming, witty, and curiously fascinating Englishman... an ‘armchair Buddhist,’ as Eugene once termed him.”



Alan Watts lecturing on Zen, 1958.

Watts himself admitted to being a charlatan and claimed to be nothing other than a “philosophical entertainer” — though he said this with a twinkle in his eye that made one imagine that there was something more to him. He did not



accept the disciplines of the Eastern religions he was espousing, and argued with Zen masters and swamis who told him what their religions demanded.

In 1960, three years after Eugene had left the Academy and Watts had embarked on his solo career, Eugene observed in his journal: “Watts’ philosophy is a justification of a naturalistic hedonism, however refined. It exploits the doctrines of numerous religions to do this, denying them when he sees fit, judging everything by his own hedonistic standards. This is dishonest. If he wishes to cite religious doctrines, he should take them in context and should take all of them. By picking and choosing he makes it obvious that he does not take them seriously; they are toys to him, for he is God. He joins the ranks of the pseudo-religious preachers.” <sup>2</sup>

During the years of Eugene’s association with him, Watts still carried the air of a respectable English gentleman and scholar. In the 1960s, however, with the mushrooming interest in Eastern religions among Westerners, he took on a new “hip” persona and rose to national fame as a pop hero of the young generation. He was, writes his biographer, “one of the first in America to affect the Christ-beard, to wear sandals and an old kimono, to be an advocate of free love and free wine and free spirit and NOW — which he called Zen Buddhism.... Thousands upon thousands of these youths began to buy Watts’ books to try to understand what this erudite man was communicating about the Eastern world and how it could be adapted to the West.” <sup>3</sup> Watts was dubbed “the chief guru of the counterculture.”

By the early 1970s Watts was reaping the fruits of what Eugene had seen a decade earlier. Although thousands still regarded him as an Eastern spiritual master, he ended his days frustrated and cynical, an alcoholic who admitted, “I don’t like myself when I am sober.” <sup>4</sup>

After Watts’ death in 1974, Eugene mentioned him in a lecture, remembering the striking impression Watts had first made on him: “Looking back, it is obvious that he had simply caught the right wavelength, followed it all the way and made his career out of it, made lots of money, and attracted many

followers. Some of what he taught was true, especially about what is wrong with contemporary civilization. But he gave only some pitifully small shred of truth combined with a lot of his own opinions, and in the end a great system of lies; and he destroyed souls, including his own undoubtedly.” [5](#)

**H**AVING decided on Chinese philosophy as the focus of his study, Eugene knew he needed an authentic teacher. Referring to the interpretation of ancient texts, he once said: “You have to have it personally given to you by your teacher. The Chinese don’t accept the idea of just reading in books: you have books, but only the teacher can give you the teaching in the books.” [6](#)

While Watts was obviously not the teacher he was looking for, Eugene did find a genuine representative of the Chinese spiritual tradition in the person of a Chinese Taoist scholar named Gi-ming Shien. In 1953 Gi-ming had come to teach at the same Academy of Asian Studies. In Eugene’s words, Gi-ming knew “more about Chinese philosophy than probably anyone in the country, and studied with real philosophers and sages in China.” (Among these sages were Ju-yang Ching-wu and Ma Yei-fu.) He had spent some years in a Taoist monastery in China and had been healed of tuberculosis through Taoist prayer and meditation combined with breathing exercises, as directed by Taoist monks. When Mao Tse-tung’s revolt occurred, Gi-ming’s family, being of the aristocracy, was dispossessed. Together with China’s greatest scholars and thinkers, Gi-ming fled to central China, where the Communists had not yet reached. Although these scholars were able to take few books with them, they had precisely memorized the Chinese classics. In the city of Chungking, they formed a makeshift university, where Gi-ming Shien served as Professor of Philosophy and authored three books in Chinese. In 1945 the Communists took over Chungking, the university was closed, and Gi-ming left the country, going first to Japan and then to the United States. In 1948 he received a master’s degree from Haverford College in Pennsylvania, and for a few years he taught philosophy in Pennsylvania and New York.

One of Eugene's friends recalls: "Gi-ming Shien had a speech impediment (a cleft palate, I believe) which made him very difficult to understand in Chinese, not to mention English, which he spoke very poorly. Eugene loved him for his genuineness as a person and his Taoist wisdom, and regarded him as something of a saint." Eugene himself said that, in meeting and studying with this representative of the Chinese tradition, he "understood full well what Guénon means by the difference between such authentic teachers and the mere 'professors' who teach in universities." <sup>7</sup> In later life, remembering the people he had known during his early years, Eugene spoke of no one more highly than he did Gi-ming Shien.

It was under Gi-ming that Eugene began to learn the language of ancient China, [\[a\]](#) as René Guénon's influence had prompted him to do. He found that this language, although it did not possess what we call grammar, was perhaps the most perfectly constructed language in the world. He worked closely with Gi-ming to translate the *Tao Teh Ching* into English from the ancient original text. He took copious notes on the meaning of each word, drawing on the ancient commentaries that Gi-ming knew so well. Their collaboration was a happy one, for while Gi-ming was transmitting the true meaning of the text to Eugene, Eugene was helping Gi-ming to find the most precise English words to capture the meaning.

Eugene's notes for Gi-ming's Chinese philosophy classes at the Academy stand in marked contrast to those he took during Watts' courses. While Watts stood outside the traditions and commented on them, inserting his own opinions at every turn, Gi-ming stood within his tradition and passed on the straight teaching of the ancient schools. Thus, even when discussing the greatest philosophical questions mankind has ever asked, he did so with refreshing simplicity. Especially when discussing the Confucianists and Neo-Confucianists, he brought one down to earth with a sense of one's duty and goal as a human being, teaching a philosophy of basic goodness, faithfulness, honesty, and love.

In telling the Academy students of the ancient Chinese approach to learning

as elucidated in the writings of Confucius and Hsün Tsu, Gi-ming said: “What a man *is* is his learning, not what he has. It is his wisdom, not his knowledge. What a man *is* is revealed in his personal manner. The manner is not important in itself, but *as it reveals the man*....



Gi-ming Shien conducting a class in Chinese philosophy at the Academy of Asian Studies.

“The end of learning is to be *a good man*.... Of primary importance in this is a teacher and friend, since the goal of education is not concepts, but personal change of character. In the teacher and friend is a living personal example. Only a spirit can influence a spirit.”

Passing on the ancient Chinese teaching on love, Gi-ming said: “To ‘complete one’s person,’ one must first love others. Love of others brings peace, lack of love brings disharmony. A peaceful mind may perfect the person.”

What Gi-ming said of marital relationships is especially timely today. The love between husband and wife, he taught, “excludes the love of others if *respect* does not underlie affection. Desire makes one approach, respect keeps them apart; the union of the two is affection or love which abides. *Respect* is the regulating force of love.” [8](#)

Reading what Gi-ming wrote and taught, one is struck at how little his approach resembles that of today's gurus who are supposed to represent the wisdom of the East. In transmitting the living tradition of ancient Chinese philosophy, Gi-ming was much more like the philosophers of ancient Greece, whose teachings helped to prepare mankind for the fullness of God's revelation that was to come with Jesus Christ.

Gi-ming himself frequently pointed out how the ancient Greek and Chinese philosophers were basically alike in their view of the universe. He likened the Tao of Lao Tzu's philosophy to the One of Parmenides, the "absolute Goodness" of Plato, and the "Unmoved Mover" of Aristotle. "According to Chinese Taoist philosophy," Gi-ming wrote, "the Tao or the One is prior to all things, and from the Tao or One all things derive their order. We may say, therefore, that the Tao or the One, like Substance or God postulated by Greek philosophers, produces all things." <sup>9</sup> In his classes, Gi-ming also indicated how, in the ancient cultures of both Greece and China, political theory was closely connected with metaphysics, how in both cultures the state was to be modeled after "the image of heaven."

In later years Eugene noted: "In the history of ancient China there are moments when it is absolutely incredible how the same things happened in Chinese life as happened in the West, even though there was no outward connection [between the two civilizations]. The first of the Greek philosophers — Thales and so forth — lived about the sixth century B.C., just about the time Confucius was in China and Buddha was in India.... It is as though there was really a *spirit of the times*." <sup>10</sup>

Like Guénon, Gi-ming emphasized the contrast, not between East and West, but between ancient and modern. He wrote: "The main difference between the ancient Chinese and Greek thinkers, on the one hand, and modern scientists, on the other, is that the former operated from the point of view of the whole, treating nature as integral — reaching a view of the whole, or simplicity — whereas the latter start with particulars and derive definitions and laws by way

of induction or generalization.” [11](#)

This was the subject of a paper Eugene wrote at the end of 1956, “Conceptions of Relativity, Contemporary and Traditional.” In the first part Eugene made a thoroughgoing critique of modern science, partly drawing from Guénon but mostly setting forth the results of his own research and thought. In the second part he compared the modern scientific conception of “relativity” with the traditional Chinese conception of it as found in Lao Tzu. In essence Eugene stated that, while modern science is correct in claiming that the things of the sensible world are relative and transient, it is gravely wrong in assuming that the realm of the senses encompasses *all* reality, and thus that all things are relative. Ancient Chinese philosophy, while acknowledging the fleetingness of the objects of human perception, still recognizes the existence of a higher reality beyond what we see.

In another paper, entitled “Some Observations on Jung and Eastern Thought,” Eugene pointed out the error of trying to assimilate traditional philosophies into modern modes of thinking which are not applicable to them. The results of Swiss psychologist Carl Jung’s attempt to fit Eastern thought into his own psychological system, Eugene stated, has been “a total misunderstanding on his part of the true nature of Chinese and Indian doctrines.” Eugene showed that Jung “refuses to meet a metaphysical text on its own grounds,” as Guénon had done, and that he “reads no Oriental language and has never undergone any thorough training in Oriental philosophy,” as Eugene himself was undertaking to do. [12](#) By quoting him extensively Eugene revealed Jung’s pride and lack of philosophical integrity, so foreign to the humility and honesty of a true representative of Oriental wisdom such as Gi-ming Shien. At the end of the paper Eugene exposed Jung’s psychological system as another of the pseudo-religions which, according to Guénon, were a sign of the times.

It is interesting that Eugene wrote this paper for the last course he was to take from Alan Watts, who happened to be a great admirer of Jung. Within a year after leaving the Academy, Watts was to meet the aging psychologist in

Zurich, where Jung asked him if he knew any words from the Oriental religions that might correspond with his own psychological terminology. [13](#)

**I**N Alan Watts' Comparative Religion class, Eugene had heard Taoism exalted and Confucianism treated with condescension. From Gi-ming, however, he learned of the fundamental unity in the Chinese schools. "There is a oneness of tradition," Eugene was to explain later, "even though it is expressed in different forms. Scholars like to take things apart, and therefore they say that in China there are all kinds of different philosophies: Confucianism, Taoism, ancestor worship, worship of gods and spirits, as well as various other philosophies. My teacher [Gi-ming Shien], however, was very insistent that it is all one. In fact, there is a very strong idea in the Chinese mind of orthodoxy: that there is a right teaching, and that the whole society depends on that right teaching. This orthodoxy is expressed in different forms. My teacher made it quite clear that Taoism is the esoteric side, and Confucianism is the more social side. Taoism has to do with spiritual life, and Confucianism with social, public life." [14](#)

A student from the Academy recalls that Gi-ming Shien was definitely a Taoist and a Confucianist, and not a Buddhist. This might have been because Confucianism and Taoism were indigenous to China and thus entirely of the Chinese tradition, whereas Buddhism was a foreign element, having been introduced at least seven centuries later from India.

While studying under Gi-ming, Eugene's early infatuation with Zen Buddhism began to wane. In May of 1957 Eugene wrote: "I have found Zen incredibly dull compared with the richness of the early classics, Taoism, and Confucius. Zen is so awfully wordy and so un-primordial." [15](#)

Gi-ming also taught Eugene an important lesson in the reconstruction of history. As Eugene related, "My Chinese professor told me that whenever there is a conflict between archeology and written texts, human beings must believe the written texts, because archeology is only ground and your opinions and



interpretations, while the written texts are other human beings — whom you have to trust. This is the basic Chinese attitude.” [16](#)

In an essay that Eugene edited and typed for him, Gi-ming wrote: “Some contemporary Chinese scholars... derive their evidence not from the classical books themselves but from archeological excavations — from the inscriptions of the ancient bronze vessels. Accepting this evidence, these scholars at one time doubted the existence of the Yin dynasty and believed the documents relating to it in the... classical books to be spurious. When, however, in 1928 they did discover some inscribed vessels of the Yin dynasty from the excavation of Yin Hsü, they were forced to recognize once again the existence of the Yin dynasty.” [17](#)

Gi-ming had no part in the textual criticisms and unnecessary arguments of modern scholars, either within China or outside of it. Such scholars, he wrote, “devoted their entire lives to criticism of the classical Chinese texts, trying to prove which were genuine classical texts and which were spurious, and even which passages within a given text were genuine and which not, and attempting to identify the authors of these. As a result, they simply disregarded the meaning and value of the classical books....

“I am a student of Chinese philosophy, and it is my belief that I must rely upon the Chinese traditional viewpoint, rather than follow the newly invented and untraditional arguments of modern scholars. To do the latter would result in depriving Chinese philosophy of all criteria of meaning and value; it would end in a state of confusion leading nowhere.” [18](#)

As can be guessed from his background, Gi-ming Shien was vehemently anti-Communist. In an article entitled “Traditional Wisdom and Revolutionary Philosophy in Contemporary China,” he wrote: “According to the Communists, the principle that promotes society is the fighting of the classes; the evolution or progress of a society or human beings in general depends on the level of this fight, and therefore the Chinese Communists teach to hate instead of love. But this opposes itself fundamentally to the nature of the Chinese populace.



According to Chinese philosophy, the progress of a society is based on love for fellow man, because it is only possible to attain peace in the world by means of love, whereas the fight of the classes and hatred among men is the fount of evil and war.” [19](#)

Gi-ming told Eugene that Communism would be the death of the Chinese spiritual teaching — by which he probably meant those teachings native to China, of which he was a carrier. Eugene shared Gi-ming’s view of Communism, seeing it as a kind of ruthlessly enforced materialism aimed at eradicating man’s longing for higher, spiritual reality. He had not yet, however, found anything that could withstand such an unprecedented onslaught of the anti-religious spirit.

A humble man, Gi-ming Shien never became well-known as a teacher, writer, or philosopher. As a genuine teacher who failed from a worldly point of view, he stood in direct contrast to Watts, a pretender who became enormously successful. Eugene chose the former, and the world ran after the latter.

# 11

## *In Sight of Home*

*To the superficial and the guilty it is more comfortable to bathe in the shallow pool of human thought than in the dangerous depths of Christ.*

—St. Nikolai Velimirovich <sup>1</sup>

**A**LTHOUGH Buddhism remained the major religion of interest to the progressive intelligentsia of San Francisco, the Academy of Asian Studies attracted young intellectuals on a variety of other spiritual paths. Through these people and his own studies, Eugene was exposed to almost all the traditions possible, and to their most esoteric aspects.

Eugene became friends with a student of the Academy who was of Orthodox Jewish background, and through him deepened his understanding of the Hassidic tradition. He began to read the works of the traditional Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. About Buber's book *Eclipse of God*, he wrote: "From the point of view assumed, [it] seems an accurate description of Modernism, or at least of this phase of it." <sup>2</sup> He liked Buber's *I and Thou*, but above all he was impressed with his *Baal Shem*—the story of the founder of the mystical Hassidic sect of Judaism in Poland — as well as with Buber's translations of Hassidic spiritual anecdotes and writings.

One East Indian writer on Hinduism whom Eugene respected was Ananda Coomaraswamy, a friend of Guénon, curator of Indian art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and interpreter of common metaphysical principles behind world art. It seems the only Hindu center Eugene visited was the Vedanta temple, which was under the aegis of the Vedanta Societies founded by Swami

Vivekananda around 1900. Through his reading of Guénon and other sources, however, Eugene was soon to recognize that Vivekananda's "Westernized Vedanta" was another modern pseudo-religion.

Some students whom Eugene met leaned toward Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam. Eugene, who otherwise had little or no interest in Islam, was fascinated by the Sufi practice of reciting the ninety-nine Divine Names of Allah.

Through Guénon's influence, Eugene had come to appreciate Christianity as one of the authentic ancient traditions, though he still viewed Protestantism as outside of this, being an anti-tradition. One of Eugene's favorite authors was Max Picard, a Swiss Jewish convert to Roman Catholicism who viewed the modern world in ways similar to Guénon. Eugene's library included Picard's books *The Flight from God*, *Hitler in Our Selves*, and *The Human Face*.

From among the divergent spiritual currents examined by the Academy students, Christian mysticism was not omitted. Eugene knew at least two students who were involved in Eastern Orthodox Christian spirituality. One of them, Crist Lovdjieff, was of Bulgarian and Croatian descent and had been baptized into the Orthodox Church as an infant. A middle-aged man with Slavic features, a soft, generous heart, and an intense, charismatic personality, Lovdjieff had acquired a devoted following among the inmates of San Quentin Prison, where he taught school and organized courses on Comparative Religion. On at least one occasion he took Eugene and other friends at the Academy to visit the prison with him. Some years later Lovdjieff was dubbed "The Christ of San Quentin" <sup>3</sup> in Eldridge Cleaver's popular book of social protest, *Soul on Ice*. [\[a\]](#) Although he considered himself something of a disciple of Alan Watts, his spiritual path was of his own devising, drawing from many different traditions but mostly from Christianity. His interest in Eastern Christianity centered largely on the philosophy of Nicholas Berdyaev, a modern Russian religious thinker who took pride in his liberal and nonconformist approach to his native Faith.

The other Academy student who was involved in Eastern Orthodoxy was

Eugene's roommate, Jon. A convert to the Orthodox Faith, Jon attended various Russian Orthodox churches in San Francisco. Unlike Crist Lovdjieff, he was concentrating on the traditional texts of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. He introduced Eugene to the *Philokalia*, a compilation of writings by the early Fathers and ascetics on the spiritual life, as well as to *The Way of a Pilgrim*, an account of a nineteenth-century Russian pilgrim's experience of prayer. Eugene's first reaction was to note the outward similarity between the Jesus Prayer described in the *Philokalia* and the Shinshu Buddhist prayer to the Amida Buddha called the "recitation of the Divine Name." His understanding of Eastern Christian spirituality may not have gone much deeper than this at first, but at least he now knew that the religion of his native culture —Christianity — had something comparable to what he once thought he had to look to other religions to find.

Eugene's appreciation for the mystical depth of Christianity was further increased by a book published in English only a few years before he had come to San Francisco: *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* by the French-Swiss thinker Frithjof Schuon. At one time Schuon had been a follower of Gu  non. It seems that Gu  non had known little about Eastern Orthodox Christianity, which has been aptly called "the world's best kept secret." [\[b\]](#) Coming a generation later, Schuon had acquired considerable knowledge of its most exalted spirituality, and led Eugene to view it as the purest form of the Christian tradition. Like Eugene at this time, Schuon knew of Christianity as an outsider, as one still too "wise and prudent" to see the secret things revealed to babes. Eugene had the acuteness to benefit from Schuon's knowledge, even though he had not yet the *experience* to see through his shortcomings.

**I**T was Jon who first prompted Eugene to attend an Eastern Orthodox Church service. "You're interested in Eastern religions," Jon said. "You should look into the Eastern side of Christianity."

At Jon's recommendation, Eugene went first to the Cathedral of the Russian

Orthodox Church Abroad in the heart of San Francisco, dedicated to the icon of the Mother of God “Joy of All Who Sorrow.” [\[c\]](#) Having formerly been an Episcopal church, the Cathedral had tall stained glass windows in front and along the walls. Its vaulted ceiling had been made from boards taken from old sailing vessels; and indeed, standing beneath its arches one felt as if one were inside some great ark.

Eugene arrived at the Cathedral in time for the Vespers service. Red oil lamps flickered before a gold iconostasis, illumining holy images of Christ and His Mother. From the left side of the Cathedral and from the choir loft came beautiful antiphonal singing in a language foreign to Eugene’s ear. On a small platform in the middle of the nave stood a crippled, bent-over old man with a white beard and in purple vestments. This was Archbishop Tikhon Troitsky. Totally immersed in the service, he kept his eyes closed in a state of utmost attention. Whenever he would open them, they would be stern and command complete alertness from those who served with him.



The Russian Orthodox Cathedral of the Mother of God “Joy of All Who Sorrow,” on Fulton Street in San Francisco.

Photograph taken in 1999.

The small figure of Archbishop Tikhon made a tremendous impression on Eugene. Perhaps Eugene saw even then that he was not just performing according to a carefully choreographed ritual, but was in a state of deep prayer. What Eugene did not know then was that Archbishop Tikhon had been a man of prayer all his life, having received his spiritual training from the God-illuminated Elder Gabriel of Kazan and Pskov in Russia. In his small quarters attached to the Cathedral, Archbishop Tikhon spent more time in prayer than anything else, and would keep vigil whole nights through.

In the Cathedral, the intensity of all that was happening around him touched the soul of Eugene — this seemingly incidental visitor. He witnessed the beauty of the traditional art and music, but, even more, he sensed the fulfillment of his longing to leave this world — since what he beheld was otherworldly. The transition from the bustling metropolis of San Francisco to the heavenly radiance and peace of the service was not unlike the joyful transition into eternal rest that Bach described in *Ich Habe Genug*.

Two decades later, Eugene described his first direct experience of Orthodoxy:



The interior of the “Joy of All Who Sorrow” Cathedral on Fulton Street in San Francisco.  
Photograph taken in 1969.

“For years in my studies I was satisfied with being ‘above all traditions’ but somehow faithful to them.... When I visited an Orthodox church, it was only in order to view another ‘tradition’—knowing that Guénon (or one of his disciples) [\[d\]](#) had described Orthodoxy as being the most authentic of the Christian traditions.

“However, when I entered an Orthodox church for the first time (a Russian church in San Francisco) something happened to me that I had not experienced in any Buddhist or other Eastern temple; something in my heart said that this



was ‘home,’ that all my search was over. I didn’t really know what this meant, because the service was quite strange to me, and in a foreign language. I began to attend Orthodox services more frequently, gradually learning its language and customs, but still keeping all my basic Guénonian ideas about all the authentic spiritual traditions.” [4](#)

After his first experience of an Orthodox service, Eugene attended services in a number of Orthodox churches. Above all he was attracted to the Russian tradition. In San Francisco, three overlapping “jurisdictions” of the Russian Orthodox Church were represented: the Russian Church Abroad, the American Metropolia, and the Moscow Patriarchate. Eugene went to services in the churches of all three.

In 1957 Eugene was profoundly moved while attending the Holy Week and Pascha (Easter) services in the various Russian churches in San Francisco, especially in the Holy Trinity Cathedral of the American Metropolia. At that time the Metropolia’s ruling hierarch in San Francisco was Bishop John Shahovskoy. A highly regarded and influential church figure, Bishop John had grown up as a prince in pre-Revolutionary Russia. He was tonsured a monk on Mount Athos, Greece, in 1926, and served as the dean of St. Vladimir’s Seminary in New York before being appointed Bishop of San Francisco and Western America in 1950. [\[e\]](#)

Describing the Good Friday services in Bishop John’s Cathedral, Eugene wrote: “Good Friday was solemn. In the evening there was a solemn procession of the Shroud of Christ, taken from the coffin inside, over which the service for the dead was chanted, and the bell tolled sadly as the procession proceeded around the church.”

The solemnity of this service only served to highlight the joy that was felt in the same Cathedral on the Feast of Christ’s Resurrection. As Eugene wrote: “I have never seen a happier man than Bishop John on Easter eve as he walked through the congregation radiantly chanting *Christos Voskrese!* (Christ is risen!), nor a more ‘together’ people than those who answered *Voistinu Voskrese!*



(Truly, He is risen!)....

“Every day of the week is a feast day. In Russia the bells ring all day every day.” [5](#)

Eugene’s experience in the Russian Cathedrals — both of Archbishop Tikhon and of Bishop John — did not bring about an immediate change in him. A seed had been planted, one that would grow inside of him and later transform him into a new being. Almost three years would pass between his first entrance into an Orthodox Cathedral and the time when he would come to know Him Who was depicted in the Cathedral’s icon.



Archbishop Tikhon Troitsky (†1963) of San Francisco and Western America, of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. Photograph taken in 1953.



Bishop John Shahovskoy (1902–89) of San Francisco and Western America, of the American Metropolia (later the Orthodox Church in America).



A rare photograph taken at the Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mount Athos, Greece, in 1926, showing the future Archbishop Tikhon and Bishop John Shahovskoy together. Left to right: newly tonsured Monk Basil Krivocheine, the future Archbishop of Brussels (Moscow Patriarchate); Archimandrite Kiryk, who gave the future Bishop John Shahovskoy the monastic tonsure shortly after this picture was taken; Prince Dimitry Alexeyevich Shahovskoy, the future Bishop John; Archimandrite Tikhon, the future Archbishop, who was on pilgrimage from Serbia at the time this picture was taken; and Monk Sophrony Sakharov, the future Archimandrite and renowned spiritual father of England (see [chapter 35](#) below).



Holy Trinity Cathedral at the corner of Green and Van Ness Streets in San Francisco. Photograph taken in 1999.

**I**N an essay he wrote in 1957, we find Eugene trying to reconcile in his mind what he had already been told by his heart. Entitled “Pseudo-Religion and the Modern Age,” the essay began by reviewing the teachings of Theosophism, Westernized Vedanta, and “New Thought,” and concluded that these examples of pseudo-religion, with their hostility to orthodoxy, their implicit worship of the ego, and their twisted interpretations of Eastern thought, were laying a foundation for the counter-tradition of Antichrist. Especially relevant to Eugene’s spiritual development is a section called “The Subversion of Traditional Christianity.” Here Eugene stated that in the Roman Catholic Church religious forms had been partially emptied of their “inner dimension,” and thus “the Church had to fall back on its purely external formal dimension.” “The Church,” he wrote, “has continued to exist until the present in a state of decay,” yet has still retained the traditional forms. “Now however a new and more formidable attack is being made on it.... The object of this subversion is to make Christianity into another ‘pseudo-tradition’ capable of being added to the growing modern ‘synthesis’ of ideas.... The ‘syncretist’ spirit of the age will not allow the ‘particularist’ claims of the Church; but insists that it be ‘broadened’ to

satisfy the new ‘conscience of mankind.’”

As against this, Eugene upheld the “narrowness” of Christianity as being expedient for the Western mentality, since it limits any elements which are not immediately conducive to salvation. “Christianity,” he wrote, “was established precisely to conform to this narrowness [of the Western mind] and mould upon its limitations a means of salvation suitable to Western man; the latter in rejecting Christianity has denied salvation for himself and thus played his own nature false.”<sup>6</sup>

Eugene himself was neither rejecting Christianity nor adhering to its “particularist claims,” that is, its insistence on one Divine Incarnation, one way to salvation, etc. Although he stated that these claims were expedient for the salvation of Western man, he, a Western man, felt above them.

Eugene had come across this way of thinking in the same book that had deepened his respect for Orthodox Christianity: Frithjof Schuon’s *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*. Schuon, although he had broken with René Guénon over irreconcilable differences, adhered to Guénon’s belief that no one authentic tradition is necessarily superior to another. He took up where Guénon left off, but, despite his broader knowledge of Orthodox Christianity, it may be said that he went in the wrong direction. Whereas Guénon had striven primarily to return the West to traditional metaphysical principles and to a correct understanding of Eastern doctrines, Schuon went much further in developing a new religious outlook and teaching, one in which the aspects of various traditions were systematically explained and interpreted according to the *a priori* notion that they are all one on an esoteric level.<sup>[f]</sup> In Schuon, Guénon’s intellectual elitism reached a phenomenal degree by being given a more thoroughly articulated *religious* application. “For the mass of mankind,” Schuon stated, “there is nothing better than the ordinary path of salvation.”<sup>7</sup> For highly intelligent beings like himself, however, Schuon said there is another way: “transcending” all traditions, dissolving a traditional viewpoint in order to re-absorb it according to one’s esoteric interpretations. Schuon claimed this right

for “those men who have been endowed by God with the quality of intelligence in a transcendent degree.”<sup>8</sup> He attempted to show how “naive,” “illogical,” and erroneous were the “particularist views” of traditional religious adherents, especially Christians, and at the same time said it was “providential” and “necessary” for them to have these views.<sup>9</sup>

The religious outlook formulated by Schuon is inviting to those who both are highly intelligent and have never known what it means to be fully within a living tradition. Eugene fit both categories. In his “Pseudo-Religion” paper he looked with hope to “the appearance of a ‘universal orthodoxy,’ the demonstration of the true and ‘transcendent unity of religions.’” He stated that this movement “transcends all traditions though it denies none,” and he contrasted it with the syncretism of the pseudo-religions.

**A**T the end of his essay, Eugene discussed the destination of modern intellectual and religious currents: the reign of Antichrist. He wrote: “If the ‘psychic’ is equated with the ‘spiritual,’ as in his total ignorance of both modern man has done, then science and pseudo-spirituality unite and spiritual truths become scientific ‘facts.’... Science with its new and ‘higher’ knowledge of the ‘spiritual’ realm will possess a tyranny over men hitherto undreamt of; it will be absolute lord in a world completely closed off from the reality transcending it, and attack will be futile, for science itself will possess the supreme weapon: ‘God.’... The ‘master mind’ superintending this activity is none other than that of Satan, the ‘adversary,’ the ‘ape of God,’ who shall rule over his perfected kingdom in the person of Antichrist.... The Antichrist will be irresistible because he is ‘good’ and ‘beneficent’.... The Antichrist himself, the personification of the ‘opposing’ forces of Satan, will be the supreme ‘problem-solver’ of the age, with a ready ‘answer’ to all its weighty and seemingly insoluble problems; and mankind, completely ensnared by ‘reasonableness’ and egocentricity, and seeking ever for the ‘light,’ will readily flock to him who offers the only ‘solution.’”<sup>10</sup>

Alison has said that “Eugene recognized the existence of evil and error before he recognized the existence of good and truth.” Through Nietzsche he had felt the infernal spirit of Antichrist and had known its power. Through Guénon he had seen this power at work in the modern world, preventing man from attaining to a higher reality by subverting the traditions by which he can attain to it, keeping him ensnared in materialism and “psychism” which masquerade as spirituality. He saw modern man — in the midst of political tension and spiritual famine — expecting the coming of the “problem-solver.” For Eugene the Antichrist was a reality. And from this he came to an inevitable conclusion. “When I knew the Antichrist must exist,” he once said, “I knew that He Whom the Antichrist opposes also must exist. I knew that Christ must exist.”<sup>11</sup>

But again, although he had knowledge and understanding, he did not yet have the *experience* of Christ. Once he had traveled this far, however, this experience was not long in coming.

# 12

## *Dead End*

*The great city is the center of the Flight. The streets resemble pipes into which men are sucked; a few trees have been dragged along with the men into the city. These stand fearfully on the edge of the street. They no longer know their way back into the countryside and they try slowly to grow downward through the asphalt and to disappear....*

—Max Picard, *The Flight from God*<sup>1</sup>

*I was becoming more miserable, and Thou nearer. Thy right hand was continually ready to pluck me out of the mire, and to wash me thoroughly, and I knew it not.*

—*The Confessions of Blessed Augustine*<sup>2</sup>

**A**T the end of 1956, the Academy of Asian Studies was in crisis. Despite the higher aspirations of both its students and faculty, its Board of Directors was trying to transform it, in Eugene's words, "into a dull, respectable graduate school for manufacturing degrees."<sup>3</sup> Alan Watts, after a public duel with the Chairman of the Board, resigned from his position as dean, though he continued to teach at the Academy for another semester. The Chairman threatened to remove other members of the faculty, among whom was Gi-ming Shien.

The new dean, Ernest Egerton Wood, was an elderly Theosophist. At one time a candidate for President of the Theosophical Society, he had lived for thirty-eight years in India and had authored about twenty books on Asian affairs, some of which had been published by the Society. Amidst the students at the Academy, however, he was something of a dinosaur, part of a dying breed of

Western Orientalists that was totally out of touch with the spiritual seekers of the new generation. As Eugene noted, “He gives lectures on ‘Emerson as Unifier of East and West’ in the Theosophical vein... and [his] students (in the Indian-Theosophical Department) are little old ladies who come to the Academy when there is no séance or spiritualistic meeting elsewhere.”<sup>4</sup> It was perhaps no coincidence that Eugene’s main term paper from this time, “Pseudo-Religion and the Modern Age,” began with an exposure of Theosophism as a spiritual fraud.

“If the Academy survives,” Eugene wrote in his letters, “it will be as a pseudo Indian establishment.... Now it is officially an institution of ‘specialists’—which it cannot be, since Berkeley is so much better at it.... I will stay as long as Gi-ming is there, but he is very discouraged about it himself.”<sup>5</sup>

In the spring of 1957 Gi-ming left the Academy, and Eugene followed him. A year or so later the College of the Pacific severed its connection with it, and, in the words of Alan Watts, “the project faded into dismal obscurity.”<sup>6</sup>

Eugene was now a college student without a college. He could not see studying Chinese philosophy at an American university if a traditional teacher like Gi-ming were not there to teach it. “I will stay with my Chinese professor,” he wrote, “the only Chinese scholar known to me, present or past, qualified to teach Chinese philosophy.”<sup>7</sup> Eugene wrote to his former Chinese language instructor at Pomona, Shou-yi Ch’en, asking if there were any teaching positions available for Gi-ming in Pomona’s Philosophy/Religion Department, but was regretfully told there were none.

Gi-ming now became a private tutor in San Francisco, and Eugene became his main pupil. Eugene assisted him in translating, editing, and typing his works in English. Among these was a unique exegesis on China’s oldest written document, *The Book of Changes*, in which Gi-ming showed how the stages in the historical development of this book perfectly express the essence of Chinese culture in each age, revealing how a civilization moves from a state of innocence through increasing levels of corruption.



**I**N the fall of 1957, while still studying with Gi-ming in San Francisco, Eugene enrolled in the University of California at Berkeley in order to complete his master's degree in Oriental Languages.

The city of Berkeley was located on the other side of the San Francisco Bay. Its university, the hub of the University of California system, was commonly called "Cal." With over twenty thousand students, Cal was many times larger than Pomona. Whereas Pomona had more of a community atmosphere, Cal was much more cosmopolitan and institutionalized, its students much more anonymous. And whereas Pomona, having been founded by Congregationalists, had as its motto to "uphold Christian civilization," Cal, being state-run, had a prevalent sense of humanistic skepticism toward religion.

Cal had a good program for the study of Oriental languages; but perhaps its greatest asset for a graduate student like Eugene was its library, which, as we have said, had the greatest collection of Asian texts in the country.

Eugene did not go to Cal to study Chinese philosophy, which he believed could not be adequately taught there. His aim was only to master the language of ancient China, in order to use this as a tool by which to present, in the spirit of Guénon, the essence of Chinese philosophy to the West. During the course of his work at Berkeley, Eugene also studied Japanese, Latin, classical Greek, and Sanskrit. Since the Oriental Languages Department offered no instruction in Sanskrit, Eugene proceeded to learn it on his own — an undertaking which some people in the Department thought was remarkable.

In 1958 Eugene took a good class on Chinese poetry, for which he produced some beautiful translations of early Chinese verse. He liked the instructor of this class, Professor Shih-Hsiang Chen, whom he said had a genuine feeling for Chinese literature and "does not try to make of it something more than it is." Compared with Gi-ming Shien's approach to China, however, Eugene found the approach of the other Berkeley Sinology professors to be what he called "sheer boredom." "If China is all they make it out to be," he wrote, "I

cannot see how they can survive the prospect themselves. But they do, and they even become ‘passionate’ and ‘original’ over it; though, of course, the passion is contrived and the originality very dim-witted.... Fortunately, my earnest study lies outside of hours.”<sup>8</sup>

In the middle of 1958, Gi-ming left for New York, where he had lived before, leaving Eugene without an instructor for his earnest philosophical studies. “I am still in the very elementary stages of Chinese philosophy, too,” Eugene noted regretfully.<sup>9</sup>

In New York, Gi-ming joined the faculty of the proposed East-West Institute. At first he wrote optimistic letters to Eugene about his new position, but after some months it became apparent that the new institute was not suited for him. Eugene continued to edit and type Gi-ming’s manuscripts from afar, and kept him informed on the progress he was making in ancient Chinese at the University of California. In November of 1958 he received from Gi-ming the following letter:<sup>[a]</sup>

Dear Eugene:

I am more than happy to hear from you and learn that you took five courses at the U.C. this fall, and that they were rather more interesting than the courses you took last academic year. All the courses you are taking at the U.C. this year, in my opinion, are useful insofar as the Chinese (language) is concerned. They will make you a master of the Chinese language. Of course, language is just the means, not the end. However, without the means, the end cannot be achieved.... If one wishes to know the underlying meaning of the philosophy of the classics, the commentaries as given by the Neo-Confucianists in the Sung and Ming dynasties are very important, as these commentaries were directed to the underlying meaning of the words....

It is nice to hear that Mr. Chen has personal feeling for Chinese poetry and culture, rather than merely knowledge stored up in the head. I have not

yet met him. I hope I shall see him some day....

Regarding the East-West Institute... if it is opened, I do not think it is a good place for me, as the courses are so mixed up. (There are courses in cooking and dancing, etc.) I do not think it is a good sign for the future. So, up to now, besides my reading, I am still looking for a position for next year.... With best wishes,

Your friend in Tao,  
Gi-ming

**M**EANWHILE, having been shown through Guénon that the modern world was nothing less than a “monstrosity,” Eugene was finding it increasingly intolerable to live in what he called “the insanity, the hell, of modern life.”<sup>10</sup> In defiance of the artificial, concrete world of modern civilization, he deliberately did not obtain a driver’s license. He avoided riding buses, but consented to ride on trains; mostly he walked from place to place in the city. He loathed television as a conformer of innumerable human minds to the one abnormal mind of the age. Any opinion that was considered popular was regarded with suspicion if not outright disdain by him. He was especially intolerant of what he called “Lucies” — people of the shallow “herd” mentality who have nothing to say and yet are always talking. To him, a “Lucy” was epitomized by a person who interrupts a classroom discussion to expound on his or her own boring opinions, forcing everyone else, out of politeness, to listen to and take into consideration all kinds of inanities. “Democracy,” he said, “is government according to the opinions of Lucies.”

To escape from modern society, Eugene had identified himself with society’s discontents; but now that was proving to be a dead end also. The counterculture of his generation, he perceived, was just another modern fashion, more a product and symptom of modern civilization than a viable alternative to it. Thus, he was feeling estranged not only from society, but from those who had themselves rebelled against it. “It is rather interesting,” he wrote, “to observe the

different levels of social life in San Francisco, from the disreputable to the very fashionable (and the different ways in which one can be disreputable or fashionable), all of which exist side by side virtually unaware of each other's existence. I am rather puzzled as to which level I am supposed to belong to.”<sup>11</sup>

By 1958 the “beat movement” had reached its peak, restlessly trying to extend art, music, and literature to more free-form expression, and espousing, in the words of its founder Jack Kerouac, “mystical detachment and relaxation of social and sexual tensions.”<sup>12</sup> Poets and jazz musicians began to congregate in the North Beach area of San Francisco. Eugene went there, but was unimpressed. “We attended a Beat Generation party recently,” he wrote in a letter. “Rather dull, with bongo drums (or whatever they’re called) and Herb Caen.”<sup>13</sup> [b] With his background in classical music, Eugene had no tolerance for jazz.

On one occasion Eugene met Jack Kerouac himself, who ten years earlier had given the Beat Generation its name. “Like we were a generation of furtives,” Kerouac had said in those days, “... with a kind of beatness, a weariness with all the forms, all the conventions of the world.... So I guess you might say we’re a *beat* generation.”<sup>14</sup> Like Eugene, Kerouac had a strong Christian conscience and felt miserable trying to live outside the will of God; like him also, he had a brief liaison with Buddhism, but found it powerless to cauterize the wounds of his soul.

Eugene also met Gary Snyder, the Zen hero of Kerouac’s book *Dharma Bums*, who was a personal friend of Alan Watts and visited the Academy several times. As one beat historian has written, “Kerouac’s portrayal of Snyder’s values and lifestyle became a blueprint for the hippie culture a decade later.”<sup>15</sup>

As soon as the beat movement became popularized, tourists and onlookers began to flock to North Beach, trying to catch sight of a “real” beatnik. The place became inhabited, in Eugene’s words, by “bearded, belligerent boys who have suddenly discovered they are ‘beat’ and all the rage.” Meanwhile, the real beatniks like Kerouac — those aging veterans of its endless, meandering search

— found their untamed energy being replaced by stagnation and despair. Life could not be imbued with meaning simply by the attempt to live it to its fullest. Eugene, of course, could identify with Kerouac's weariness with the world, his searching, and the high value he placed on suffering ("I was born to suffer," Kerouac had said), but he also came to see that *that* kind of searching and suffering, having no aim except to perpetuate itself, was self-absorbed and self-destructive. In a letter from that time Eugene wrote: "The Beat Generation... seems pretty well beaten."<sup>16</sup>

But the values of the Beat Generation did not die. In the words of Kerouac: "The bop visions became common property of the commercial, popular cultural world.... The ingestion of drugs became official (tranquilizers and the rest); and even the clothes style of the beat hipsters carried over to the new rock 'n' roll youth... and the Beat Generation, though dead, was resurrected and justified."<sup>17</sup>

As part of the spiritual quest inaugurated by the beat movement, hallucinogenic drugs began to be utilized for their supposedly spiritual value. Their first exponent had been Aldous Huxley, author of *Brave New World*, who in 1953 had published *The Doors of Perception* about his psychedelic experiences with mescaline. Their second main popularizer was an old friend of Huxley's, none other than Alan Watts. In 1958, a year after leaving his position at the Academy of Asian Studies, Watts took the synthetic drug LSD as part of a controlled experiment at the University of California, Los Angeles. He went on to take the drug several more times, and in 1962 wrote a book on his supposedly "mystical experiences" through LSD, *The Joyous Cosmology*. (In light of what Eugene observed about the difference between the Chinese and Indian traditions, it is noteworthy that Watts wrote of these experiences: "Oddly, considering my absorption in Zen at the time, the flavor of these experiences was Hindu rather than Chinese. Somehow the atmosphere of Hindu mythology and imagery slid into them.")<sup>18</sup> During the same year of 1962, Watts received a two-year travel and study fellowship from Harvard University, where he became acquainted with Harvard Professor Timothy Leary. Leary took LSD for the first time in

1962, and went on to advocate psychedelic experience as a new world-religion. Although Watts was, in his own words, dismayed “to see Timothy converting himself into a popular store-front messiah with his name in lights,”<sup>19</sup> he himself had already done much to attract the young generation to hallucinogens with the promise of attaining mystical enlightenment.

Eugene read *The Doors of Perception*, and after examining Huxley’s psychedelic experiences he noted: “The drug increases sensitivity, not consciousness (or only very secondarily)... [It] causes a change in perception, in the subjective state—*not* a change in *being*, which is what religion wishes.”<sup>20</sup>

In the very first years of LSD experimentation (almost a decade before it was outlawed), one of Eugene’s friends, Eric, tried to persuade him to try it. “This young man,” Eugene recalls, “a typical religious searcher, told me: ‘No matter what you might say of the dangers of drugs, you must admit that *anything* is better than everyday American life, which is spiritually dead.’ I disagreed, since even then I was beginning to glimpse that spiritual life spreads in two directions: it can lead one *higher* than this everyday life of corruption, but it can also lead one *lower* and bring about a literal spiritual — as well as physical — death. He went his own way, and before he was thirty years old he was a wreck of an old man, his mind ruined, and any search for reality abandoned.”<sup>21</sup>

**E**RIC, through his chemically enhanced “search,” had within a few years reached a state toward which society as a whole, through a more gradual process, was headed. Eugene himself had taken part in the early stages of that countercultural movement which, far from arresting this “progress” of society, had done much to speed it up. At the end of the age he lived in, Eugene saw a dead end, madness and dissolution. One day he wrote:

“We know too much to see that winter is the only season, because it is now and always.

“The city, though unavoidable, is still a barbarizing machine; but despite the city, it is still *our* blindness. It was inevitable that the earth be paved and man

dehumanized, but woe to them through whom these evils come! It is truly ironic that no one believes in damnation any more, and even more so that everyone looks to the 'future.' It is interesting, too, that our imagination is so narrowed that we can imagine nothing more 'horrible' than a brave new world, or 1984, or an 'atomic war.' We must have much to learn, who have forgotten so much....

"Oh, brave new dead end!"<sup>22</sup>

Beyond the dead end of the modern world, Eugene saw hell and damnation. Yet, despite his rejection of this world, he was still part of it, still ensnared in its creeping despair.

The exit, however, had been with him all along. Not many years later, having recognized it at last, he was to write: "Christ is the only exit from this world; all other exits — sexual rapture, political utopia, economic independence — are but blind alleys in which rot the corpses of the many that have tried them."<sup>23</sup>





Icon of Christ the Pantocrator (Ruler of All), Moscow, ca. 1670.



# 13

## *The Truth as Person*

*No one has rightly sought the truth who has not encountered at the end of this search — whether to accept or reject Him — our Lord, Jesus Christ, “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” Truth that stands against the world and is a reproach to all worldliness.*

—Eugene Rose<sup>1</sup>

*Sometimes God sends me moments in which I am utterly at peace.... In those moments I have constructed for myself a creed in which everything is clear and holy for me.... Here it is: to believe that there is nothing more beautiful, more profound, more sympathetic, more reasonable, more manly and more perfect than the Saviour; and not only is there nothing, but I tell myself with jealous love that there never could be.*

—Fyodor Dostoyevsky<sup>2</sup>

*Many Eastern religions are fine as far as they go, but only Christianity can open heaven to you....*

—Fr. Seraphim Rose<sup>3</sup>

**T**HROUGHOUT his search, Eugene had continued to attend services in the Orthodox churches of the city. Describing what he experienced there, he wrote: “Still, in the deadness of the city there is a spark of *Sobornost*: ‘Togetherness,’ ‘Community.’” As we have seen, after attending the Holy Week and Pascha celebrations in a Russian Cathedral in 1957, he said that he had

never seen such joy and “togetherness” in people. “After this,” he concluded, “the outside world is dreary indeed. Everywhere people are only pieces, fragments of a broken whole; one realizes this too intensely after such a holy week.”<sup>4</sup>

Eugene himself was one of those fragments, part of the “outside world” that could only look in, not fully sharing in the joy and the oneness. His long years of desperation, alienation, and suffering, however, had been preparing him for the time when he could at last enter in. “When conversion does take place,” he said in later years, “the process of revelation occurs in a very simple way: a person is in need, he suffers, and then somehow the other world opens up. The more you are in suffering and difficulties and are desperate for God, the more He is going to come to your aid, reveal Who He is, and show you the way to get out.”<sup>5</sup>

“Eugene had been running from God for so long,” Alison has said, “and the more he had sinned against Him, the harder God had pursued him. Finally he could run no longer, and surrendered.” Now, even while languishing in the depths of hell, Eugene dared to turn and call out to Him against Whom he had rebelled. Striving to tame his rebellious spirit with acceptance and humility, he wrote in a pivotal passage dated February 28, 1959:

“What suffering has not God reserved for man in this age! As though man had not suffered enough already throughout all the ages — no, it is simply that man has not realized the presence of God in his suffering. God is allowing man to suffer now without revealing Himself as the cause of that suffering; He wishes man to be reduced to the very utmost of despair. What a cruel God this must be!?!—No, it is the infinite and incalculable love of God that makes Him allow us so much suffering. Man had thought himself sufficient, and even now he — we — think we can escape our destiny by our own efforts. Escape!—that is our only thought. To escape from the insanity, the hell, of modern life is all we wish. But we *cannot escape!!!* We must go through this hell, and *accept* it, knowing it is the love of God that causes our suffering. What terrible anguish!—to suffer so, not knowing why, indeed thinking there is no reason. The reason is God’s love

— do we see it blazing in the darkness?—we are blind. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy; Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners.”<sup>6</sup>

For the first time the works of Dostoyevsky, which Alison had once told him to read, began to strike Eugene with their full spiritual power. All of modern man’s great existential dilemmas had been dealt with by Dostoyevsky, who provided answers which confounded human thought, coming as they did from the Gospel of Christ. In the character of Ivan in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, Eugene saw the man whom he himself had been all these years: an overly intellectual Western man who tries to understand everything with his mind, and therefore ends in doubting, in atheism. In a short piece he wrote entitled “An Answer to Ivan,” Eugene attempted to answer Ivan’s doubts, at the same time answering the doubts of his own “old man”:

“Once one has risen to the level of doubting, two paths open up to him: the path of questioning, of doubting, of trying to *understand* until one ends in doubting everything, destroyed by doubt, or else giving oneself over to some false science that ‘explains’—i.e., explains away the irreconcilable paradoxes of our existence; or the path of acceptance and prayer, accepting even the doubt (without contriving more than one’s immediate experience gives one legitimately to doubt), praying to be given yet more to try and test us, crying for more life, more to accept and weep over, accepting and praying in the midst of doubt, knowing that the way of doubt has as many pitfalls as the way of easy acceptance.... For everyone who rationalizes away the suffering of living — the hedonists, the ‘philosophers,’ those who simply don’t care — there is at least one who [falls into these pitfalls of doubt], who drives himself to doubt more than he really (existentially) doubts, who explains away the other side of the paradox of human life (the real goodness, and penitence, and the very pity that drives him to doubt in the first place) as cheaply as the false comforters (whom he hates) explain away the suffering and sin and evil.

“For we have entered the time of the Last Doubt, the final and greatest of all: the doubt of everything, the denial of all coherence, the abandonment of the

attempt to make ‘sense’ of the world and human life.

“But the man of this Last Doubt, in the end, falls into the same pit as the false comforters, those who explain away suffering: for both have thought too much, have tried too hard to make ‘sense,’ to ‘explain’ life. The one explains it too easily, the other finds the lack of explanation, perhaps, too easy. But both trust the mind, both think that life *should* make sense, *should* be explained — and that if I, a normal questioning man, can (or cannot) make sense of it, that is all that is needful.

“O proud and vain man! You can make no sense, no real sense of life until you have lived it far more deeply than your mere doubt reveals. You have gone deeper, it is true, than the false comforters, you have refused to be satisfied with the obvious hypocrisy that shields us from the intolerable suffering of our fellow man; but you too, in your turn, have stopped, stopped at the very threshold of the mystery of life....

“You are at a standstill because you have approached the mystery of existence with the mind, with questions and demands for explanation; whereas it can only be approached through prostration, humility, prayer — and acceptance. Accept all, take all into yourself — all that is given you. If you do not do this, if you shield yourself from one smallest bit of suffering so as to take refuge in the rational attitude of doubt, then the fault lies in yourself, and the world fails to make sense precisely because you, who look at it, make no sense. You are foul, and constantly contradict yourself, yet you expect to see the world pure, and making sense!”<sup>2</sup>

**F**OR years Eugene had suffered because the Truth had eluded him. He had sought the Truth above all else, and had sought it with his mind: through Western philosophy, through Guénon’s metaphysics, through Eastern religions, even through trying to sidestep logical thought processes with his mind. Now, as his firsthand experience of Orthodoxy began to work in his soul, he began to realize that the Truth was not at all what he had thought it to be, and that he had

been using altogether the wrong tool to find it. “With my exposure to Orthodoxy and to Orthodox people,” he recalled later, “a new idea began to enter my awareness: that Truth was not just an abstract idea, sought and known by the mind, but was something personal — even a Person — sought and loved by the heart. And that is how I met Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

While under the influence of Alan Watts and Eastern religion, Eugene had thought that the principle of a Personal God was unworthy of the Absolute, a product of people’s minds, and that beyond this was the Impersonal “Self.” With his new awareness, however, he found that the exact reverse was true: that belief in an impersonal deity was “a kind of spiritual immaturity,” as he said, and that beyond this was the Creator of the universe Who has revealed Himself as a Personal Absolute, Whose Name is I AM.<sup>9</sup>

The Truth Eugene had always sought was indeed a Person — He Who said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”<sup>10</sup> — and, in the words of Dostoyevsky, how beautiful and profound, how manly was that Truth! Blessed Augustine, in seeking the Truth like Eugene, had once asked, “Is Truth therefore nothing because it is not diffused through space finite or infinite?” — and the Truth answered him from afar, “Yet verily, I AM that I AM.” Beholding the glory of Him Who is Truth, Augustine could only utter: “O Truth Who art Eternity! and Love Who art Truth! and Eternity Who art Love!”<sup>11</sup>

This Truth had descended to earth and taken flesh in order that man — that Eugene himself — could be one with Him. In the words of St. Ephraim the Syrian: “Truth came down into the womb, came forth from it, and cast man’s sin aside.” Now, in order to know the Truth, Eugene had to enter into a personal relationship with Him, to repent of his sins and purify himself of all uncleanness, and to love Him with all his being.<sup>12</sup>

In his journal Eugene wrote: “Our age has been taught to believe in nothing higher than the human mind, and in the ideas of that mind; that is why the conflicts of our day are ‘ideological,’ and why Truth is not in them. For Truth is only in living communion with living Truth, Christ; apart from Him there is no

life, no Truth.”<sup>13</sup>

In other notes Eugene expressed himself even more strongly: “The Truth is Jesus Christ, the God-man; error is to deny this Truth, which is simply to wish oneself to be as God. All who are not with Him, are against Him, for He is Truth, the Truth of all that is and of our deepest being, and whoever denies that denies all. Indifference is error; the indifferent one has chosen — not to accept Him....

“When we are in true submission to Him, the Truth, the Truth dwells in us.”<sup>14</sup>

Many influences had brought Eugene to the threshold of Truth: Bach with his elevating Christian music, Guénon with his emphasis on the necessity of ancient tradition and his critique of modernity. But it was Orthodoxy — being the fullness of Christianity — that alone brought him into contact with the fullness of Truth, the undistorted image of Jesus Christ. Nothing else had satisfied him; but when he had first encountered Orthodoxy personally, his heart had immediately said, “This is home,” even though it took his mind some time to respond.

Toward the end of his life Eugene asked: “Is there a special organ for receiving revelation from God? Yes, in a certain sense, there is such an organ, though usually we close it and do not let it open up: God’s revelation is given to something called a loving heart....

“It is not first of all miracles which reveal God to men, but something about God that is revealed to a heart that is ready for it. This is what is meant by a ‘burning heart.’”<sup>15</sup>

**W**ITH some people conversion is connected with a certain dramatic moment, but such was not the case with Eugene. His conversion was more of a gradual awakening to what God had already planted in his heart. Many years later, writing to a spiritual seeker interested in René Guénon, Eugene wrote: “I am now grateful that my approach to Orthodoxy took several years and had

nothing of emotional excitement about it — that was Guénon’s influence again, and it helped me to go deeper into Orthodoxy without the ups and downs that some converts encounter when they are not too ready for something as deep as Orthodoxy.”<sup>16</sup>

Even in the slow, undramatic process of his conversion, Eugene was to reach a dimension unfathomed by Guénon. According to one biographer, “Guénon could not bring himself to accept that the highest form of knowledge was to be obtained by the union of the mind and the feelings, the union of intellect with love. This being so... he insisted on following his lonely path of pure intellectual intuition.”<sup>17</sup> This tendency had eventually led Guénon to enter a contemplative Sufi *tarîqah*, but his “conversion” had hardly been what Eugene experienced. “Contrary to what is usually considered a ‘conversion,’” Guénon wrote, “there is nothing in it which implies superiority in itself of one tradition over another but simply what one might call reasons of spiritual convenience, which again is something quite other than an individual preference.”<sup>18</sup>

What was there in Eugene that enabled him to acquire that which other penetrating intellectuals like Guénon and Schuon could not? A friend who knew him for many years has provided this answer: “He was very intelligent — such a genius that few people saw him for what he was. But at the same time he was very simple, not complicated at all, rather like his father and mother. He could see things exactly the way they were. He was a down-to-earth, warm, honest person.”

In keeping with the gradual nature of his conversion, this side of Eugene was not fully seen until some years later, when it was cultivated by fellowship with other Orthodox Christians. On returning to Christianity, he remained silent, mulling it over. There still remained on him layers of bitterness and sophisticated defenses which he had acquired from his years in the world. The darkness of Ivan Karamazov’s great existential doubt still bothered him; he was still in what Blessed Augustine, speaking of the gradual process of his own conversion, had called “that doubtful state of faith.” Now, however, Eugene

could see a light of joy and hope at the end of a dark tunnel, and he could not but follow it to the end. It was as if he heard the Voice that Augustine had heard when he had first perceived himself far from God: “I am the food of grown men; grow, and thou shalt feed upon Me.”

Yet more would Eugene have to suffer, but now, as the “new idea” of the Truth as Person began to be experienced by him as a living reality, that suffering had meaning. The suffering of the world, Eugene wrote, “makes ‘sense,’ but in no way that can be experienced in words; its ‘sense’ must be *lived*, not spoken about.”<sup>19</sup>

Whereas Eugene’s former suffering had been enveloped in an atmosphere of uncertainty and despair, his new suffering had in it an air of hope. The new suffering was the agony of repentance, and as such it carried with it the hope of redemption. Now that Eugene was finally turning to God, he had to begin the painful process of breaking with his former self and drawing closer to the Truth as Person. In the words of the Russian spiritual writer St. Theophan the Recluse (which Eugene was to translate into English in his later years): “It is something painful, but it saves. It is inevitable that whoever has not experienced such a painful break has not yet begun to live through repentance. It is impossible for a person to begin cleansing himself in everything without having gone through this crucible.”<sup>20</sup>

As a Christian, Eugene continued to despise the modern world and hoped for nothing from it; he wanted only to escape it. In some ways he felt even more estranged from the Christianity he had been raised in, for while *that* Christianity was at home in the world, his was radically otherworldly. He had finally found the designation of man’s existence, and it was this: to live eternally in another world, united with Christ in His Kingdom.

Eugene’s was an ascetic faith. He wanted a Christianity that emphasized not earthly consolation and benefits, but rather heavenly redemption through intense suffering on earth. No other kind rang true to him who had suffered so much. Only a God Who allowed His children to be perfected for heaven through



suffering, and Who Himself set the example by coming to a life of suffering — only such a God was capable of drawing the afflicted world to Himself and was worthy to be worshipped by the highest spiritual faculties of man.

Before, Eugene had denied the existence of a God who enjoyed “sticking pins in people.” Now he confirmed his faith in Him Who, while allowing suffering in the world, had Himself taken on suffering far greater than that of His creation. Again addressing the doubter in the person of Ivan Karamazov, he wrote: “And the God-man, Who alone of all suffered as an absolute Innocent — do you look for an ‘explanation’ from Him? His explanation is His life — look at it.... We all deserve what we suffer, or at least should look on it with gladness as an opportunity to live more deeply and approach our fellow man and our God more closely. But Jesus Christ did not deserve to suffer. He had no cause to, for He was innocent, and He had nothing to learn, nothing to gain from suffering. His was a purely gratuitous act, such as we cannot even imagine, and He suffered as we cannot imagine anyone suffering, for He alone did not flee pity[\[a\]](#) or the suffering of men. He offered Himself no false consolation, no easy escape such as we use every day. He alone lived to the full all the pain and sorrow of which man is capable.

“And so He knows how it is with us.... We know existence is suffering, and we know that our God loves us and for this love suffered even more intensely than the greatest saint; we know this, and yet we presume to ‘doubt,’ to offer our petty questioning of the ‘meaning’ of it all. O vile man! Accept it and suffer more, and pray to God — pray for no object, for no cause, merely give your heartfelt prayers and tears to Him. He knows the ‘why’ of it. He knows all.”[21](#)

**O**NE evening, as Eugene was walking along a San Francisco street, he suddenly came upon the same spot where he had once felt the infernal power of Nietzsche’s poetry speaking within him, and had known in that instant the horrors of hell. Just as at that former time, there was now a sunset on the horizon. This time, however, Eugene thought on how he lived during the sunset

of Christianity, and he was reminded of how he too had crucified Christ with his sins. He marveled that God should have shown His mercy and revealed Himself to one so sinful. The more lowly and vile he felt, the more he was ennobled and uplifted by the grandeur and beauty of the God Who yet loved him.

When Eugene had stood on this spot before, he had heard the voice of the satanic prophet Nietzsche, who, in response to the suffering and loneliness in the world, had raised a fist to God. Now Eugene heard a different voice, that of the Russian prophet Dostoyevsky, who, in response to the same suffering, had taught that one should fall to the earth in repentance, thankfulness, and awe before the Creator, realizing it was one's own sins that increased the world's sufferings. Having striven to throw off the doubts of Ivan, Eugene followed the example of the other Karamazov brother, Alyosha. Prostrating himself before his Lord Jesus Christ on the darkening San Francisco street, Eugene wept with repentance and contrition.

# PART II





Point Lobos Reserve, next to Carmel, where Eugene took walks along the shore. Photograph taken in 1954.

# 14

## *Good-bye*

*I cannot raise my eyes to yours;  
I cannot lift my lowered head,  
Nor speak those words which might be said.  
But when the wind of autumn stirs  
The dying leaves, and we must part,  
We'll hold some meaning in the heart:  
Unspoken, since we both believed  
In Him Who in His love has brought  
From out of silence, out of naught,  
The universe that He conceived.<sup>1</sup>*

**S**INCE Russian Orthodoxy was so far outside the experience of Eugene's parents, it was not easy for them to relate to it when Eugene told them of his interest. His father Frank identified Orthodoxy with the Roman Catholic Church in which he himself had been raised, and, as could be expected of him, he was very agreeable to Eugene's involvement in it.

Eugene's mother Esther, on the other hand, influenced by fears arising from the Cold War, identified Russian Orthodoxy with Communism, and so initially opposed Eugene's interest in it. Frank, as the son of a socialist father, understood the difference between the two and tried to defend his son against his wife's criticisms. In February of 1959, he wrote in a letter to his son:

Mom has a complex fear of Russia and all things Russian. She is greatly confused between the actions of Russia's present and past governments and

the wishes of her people. Since you have shown your interest in Catholicism, especially of the Russian Orthodox, she has lumped that in with the other elements. Having been raised in an atmosphere of socialism and under the influence of Karl Marx, who is the father of the present communist movement (it seems to me), and knowing that the greatest point in the Marx creed is that there is no religion with any sound basis or reason for existence, I know that the Russian Catholic church and the communist movement must be deadly enemies. For that reason, I have never connected your liking for that church as having any connection with or inclination for the communist movement. I don't know just where mom got the idea of a connection other than the general idea is that the two are in Russia.

... So when you get any of these pessimistic splurges that come from mom, just keep in mind that I am firmly with YOU. Don't let these things depress you. They are but small digressions in the greater trend.

Always,  
Pop [2](#)

Frank's touching words proved true. Esther eventually overcame her suspicions of Russian Orthodoxy, and, although there were to be other such "digressions," the "greater trend" was to prevail in the end.

More important, however, was the effect that Frank's letter must have had on Eugene's soul. According to Frank's family members, Frank rarely if ever wrote letters to anyone. Clearly, he felt a pressing need to write to his son. It did not matter that he did not understand the differences between Roman Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy. In his own simple way, he said what was crucial for Eugene to hear: that he encouraged him in his involvement in Orthodoxy; that, contrary to custom, he was willing to express disagreement with his wife over this; and, most significant of all, that he had unconditional love for his son. Perhaps this expression of unconditional love from his father helped Eugene to open himself up to the unconditional love of God. It was

within four days of receiving his father's letter that he wrote his first prayer, asking Christ for mercy.<sup>[a]</sup>

**D**URING his Christmas break from university work in 1959, Eugene went to visit his parents at their new home in the scenic coastal town of Carmel, where they had retired two years earlier. While there, he invited Alison to come and stay for three days.

Eugene had kept in touch with Alison during his first years in San Francisco, but the letters he had written to her during those dark days had so depressed her that she had burned them. Now, having virtually given him up as a lost man, she was overjoyed to learn that he had ceased *kicking against the pricks* (Acts 9:5) and had turned to Christ. Since becoming a Christian, he told her, he had been praying for her every day; but lately she had been asking him to confide in her more. On August 17 she had written: "You asked me once if you seemed distant, and you do.... Why is it that you never talk about yourself?... Is it perhaps that the coldness you once said you felt for people includes me?... I pray for you also each day. I am grateful for your prayers. Do not say they are feeble. I feel that you suffer, but you do not tell me."

Alison arrived in Carmel on December 27. Her memorable visit was marred only by her tense relationship with Esther. For some reason Esther disliked Alison, and when Alison asked Eugene for an explanation, the latter only replied, "She's jealous." For her part, Alison resented what she saw as Esther's pressure on Eugene to become what she wanted him to be: a "successful" man of the world. "Why can't you be like your brother Franklin?—he already owns his own gas station," Alison heard Esther ask her son. To this Eugene replied simply, "He has more problems than I."

With its dramatic, rocky coasts and verdant forests swept by fresh sea breezes, Carmel was an ideal place for Eugene to take the long, meditative nature walks he loved so much. He and Alison spent much time walking along the beach. "He loved the Carmel coastline," Alison recalls, "but he hated the

Carmel lifestyle.” Carmel had been a center for the avant-garde movement, for bohemians and beatniks such as Henry Miller, Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder; but more recently it had been taken over by the retired *nouveaux riches* with their rows of trendy shops and restaurants.

When Eugene and Alison returned in the evening from a long winter walk, they went into the Roses’ warm living room. Eugene put *Ich Habe Genug* on the phonograph and sat down in meditation. His mother, suspecting that a romance might be developing, peeked in, but all she saw was the two of them sitting motionlessly, looking at the floor, and listening to a piece of music on the theme of death. When the cantata was over, Alison turned off the phonograph but said not a word, knowing Eugene did not like to speak at such times. Going to her room, she left him alone with the sound of the surf crashing against the Carmel coast and Bach’s vivid reminder of the other world still ringing in his ears.

Eugene said little to Alison about the past. She noted later that he did not once mention any of their friends from their Pomona days. Eugene was now embarking on a new life, and his former life was peeling off in layers. Certain things had become clear to him. He told Alison that the reason he had been drinking so heavily was that he had been without God. Now, having acquired faith in Him, he no longer had need of those intoxicated states.

He told her about the Orthodox Church that had brought about this change in him. At one point he exclaimed, “Orthodoxy is better than Bach!” He asked to take her to an Orthodox Liturgy on Sunday. She agreed, but said she would also like to go to an Anglican Mass so that she could receive Communion. Much of that Sunday was thus spent in church. They attended the Anglican service first, after which Eugene politely told Alison, “That wasn’t so bad.” The Orthodox Liturgy they attended next was at the St. Seraphim Russian Church in the town of Seaside, about five miles away from his parents’ home. Alison was impressed by the beauty of the service, but there was one problem: in this traditional Orthodox church there were no pews, and her feet were becoming tired from standing a long time beside Eugene. Without so much as moving her head, she



glanced at some benches pushed against the wall. Somehow fathoming her thoughts, Eugene told her in a low, serious voice, “Those are for the *aged* and the *infirm*.” She remained standing. Afterwards, she recalls, he took her out to lunch and made up for this. In general, she remembers him as having been “very considerate” of her feelings.

At the Orthodox church, Alison had noticed the people crossing themselves from right to left, the opposite of Roman Catholic and Anglican practice. “Why do you cross yourself backwards?” she asked Eugene. “Why do *you*?” he responded with a smile.

Seeing Eugene’s love for the Orthodox Church, Alison also noticed his hesitation to join it. “He was always very slow to make decisions,” Alison recalls. He knew that his joining the Church would — or *should*—change everything in his life, and he did not want to take it lightly.”

It was not difficult for Eugene to attend Russian churches only as an “observer.” He was a foreigner in a Church full of immigrants, many of whom knew very little English. At that time there was no Orthodox convert movement in America and Western Europe as there is today. There were very few Western converts to Orthodoxy, and most of these were either intellectuals or people who had converted as a prerequisite to marriage to an Orthodox spouse. In the minds of many Russians in the churches Eugene attended, the idea of an American converting to Orthodoxy on his own was all but incomprehensible.

Alison, on the other hand, did not hesitate to reprove Eugene for not making a commitment to the Orthodox Church. “You can’t just go to church and never do anything about it,” she told him. “You need to be baptized or confirmed as a member because you need the Sacraments.”

Half a year later, in the summer of 1960, Eugene saw Alison again in Long Beach, where she had rented an inexpensive place from a crippled Hungarian immigrant and his daughter. Already she noticed a change in him. He was much more committed, thought of himself as being Orthodox, and knew it was only a matter of time before he fully entered the Church. But he was still uncertain

about his future.

As Eugene later wrote to Alison, he had by this time renounced the sins and immorality of his dark years.<sup>[b]</sup> Now he was considering the possibility of eventually getting married and having children. At their meeting in Long Beach, he brought up the subject of marriage to her, and spoke about the possibility of their being married in the Orthodox Church. “He talked about perhaps becoming a priest someday,” Alison recalls. “He said he wanted a wife and family, but he said he couldn’t handle all the worldly things that go along with them: money, a job, a car, etc. He didn’t think he could stay at a nine-to-five job. He hated the academic world and felt that people there lived in a little world of their own, without seeing reality. He knew his limitations; he knew he wasn’t meant for the world. But he didn’t know what he was meant for.”

Alison told Eugene that, if they were to be married, she would get a job and support him. “He said he would never agree to that,” she recalls. “To him it was not honorable.”

As he had at Pomona, Eugene opened his soul to Alison, expressing his most private fears and concerns. Looking back years later on Eugene’s week-long visit to Long Beach, Alison concluded: “Although he talked at length about marriage and all that it would involve, he knew deep down that he was not going to get married. But he cared for me, and wanted me to know that.” She believes he sensed even then that he would be seeing her for the last time. He was very sad, especially when parting; and indeed, even though he was to continue writing her, he was never to see her again on this earth.

## *Truth or Fashion*

*In the modern academic world, you cannot deeply love anything, for this is not considered objective. The principle is this: first you KILL the subject, then you dissect it. You must take out its soul before you can “objectively” study it, decide what it is. Once this is done you can’t bring it back to life. You have acquired knowledge of it, yes, but it lies dead and dissected before you.*[la](#)

—Eugene Rose<sup>1</sup>

**H**AVING, on becoming a Christian, thrown off the “transvaluation of values” of the counterculture, Eugene became extremely conservative. In appearance he was very much the distinguished young gentleman. He was most often seen wearing a corduroy jacket, a white shirt, and black slacks, and was never without a tie in public. In San Francisco’s cool, windy, and damp climate, he liked to walk with a black umbrella.

While working toward his master’s degree at Cal, Eugene supported himself by teaching undergraduate courses in the Oriental Languages Department. One of the undergraduates, Russell Maeth, recalls: “‘Mr. Rose,’ as he was generally known, was a very reserved person — or, perhaps, he simply didn’t suffer fools gladly, or, possibly, was simply very shy. At any rate, he was considerably senior to me, and, except in the East Asiatic Library, our paths rarely crossed.... One thing always impressed me about him: in his quiet way he always seemed to have had something of great importance to say, and I have always regretted that I was never fortunate enough to hear him say it.”

There is no indication that Eugene saw a conflict between his personal involvement in Russian Orthodoxy and his continued study of Chinese language, philosophy, and culture. He never lost his respect for the Chinese tradition, and at one point even speculated on what would have happened if this refined culture, already imbued with many “Christian” values, had embraced Orthodox Christianity rather than Buddhism in the early centuries of the Christian era. Lao Tzu, he believed, would have followed Jesus Christ if he had known Him, for he would have seen in Him the Tao or Way of Heaven. “I was thinking that if I ever got my doctor’s degree in Chinese literature,” Eugene recalled in later years, “I was going to write a paper comparing the Byzantine emperor with the Chinese emperor. There are many similarities. In both Byzantine and Chinese society, the emperor is to be the guardian of orthodoxy.”<sup>2</sup>

While Eugene was still studying and teaching at Berkeley, Gi-ming Shien returned to San Francisco, where he remained for a few years, again supporting himself as a private tutor. Eugene kept in contact with him during these years, and continued to assist him in translating his works into English.

Although Gi-ming Shien remained, as Eugene put it, his “only real contact with the Chinese tradition,”<sup>3</sup> at Berkeley Eugene came under the influence of a brilliant Chinese philologist who happened to be a Russian: Professor Peter Alexeyevich Boodberg.

Born in Vladivostok in 1903, Boodberg was a cadet in a military school in St. Petersburg during World War I. Military disasters closed the school in 1915, and Peter was sent with his brother to Harbin, Manchuria, for safety, while his father went on to fight in the Tsar’s army against the Bolsheviks. In Manchuria, Peter began to instruct himself in the Chinese language, a study he continued at the University of Vladivostok and later, after he had emigrated to the United States in 1920, at the University of California, Berkeley.

Eugene, upon embracing Russian Orthodoxy, came to appreciate Professor Boodberg much more than he had before, not only because Boodberg was Russian, but also because he was a true gentleman who represented traditional,

Old World values. Descended from an ancient line of Estonian nobility, Boodberg bore the title of Baron. In the words of his student and colleague Edward Schafer, “What did survive of [Boodberg’s] knightly heritage was a deeply ingrained sense of honor, courtliness and loyalty which came to distinguish his whole career as scholar and as human being.”<sup>4</sup>

Together with Eugene, Boodberg was not at home with the “achievements” of modernity. Writes Schafer: “Boodberg deplored the computerization of academic life, and would sometimes ironically sign letters to administrative officers with his ‘employee number.’ He detested IBM cards and disdained to fill out questionnaires. He regarded all such devices as dehumanizing. He even rejected all dependence on indexes and concordances: one should have memorized the Classics and be sufficiently familiar with other major contributions to literature and history to be able to dispense with such crutches. A good scholar needed only a good mind, good books, and good conversation.”



Peter Alexeyevich Boodberg (1903–74).

*Photograph courtesy of the Department of Oriental Languages, University of California, Berkeley.*

Although Boodberg taught courses on “Chinese Civilization” and “The

Great Books of Eastern Asia,” Eugene looked to him not for a living transmission of Chinese philosophy, but rather for an understanding of language. In the field of philology Boodberg was truly extraordinary. Besides being an expert in the historical development of several Far Eastern languages — including Mongol and Manchu — he was also trained in the ancient languages of central Asia and the Near East. With his encyclopedic knowledge, he advocated what he styled “global Sinology”: the study of “the linguistic, historical, and cultural relations of ancient and medieval China with its steppe neighbors and through them with the Eurasiatic ‘Far West.’”

According to Edward Schafer, in the study of the early history of the Chinese language and script, Boodberg “became an unrivaled and — except locally — unrecognized master.... His students were on the average much more sophisticated than those trained by other Sinologists.”<sup>5</sup>

While studying under Boodberg, Eugene made a more thorough study of the language of the *Tao Teh Ching*. For his master’s degree thesis he wrote an essay entitled “‘Emptiness’ and ‘Fullness’ in the *Lao-Tzu*.” One of the Berkeley professors who reviewed this paper, Cyril Birch, noted how closely Eugene had followed Boodberg’s approach to linguistic analysis. For the philosophical aspect of the essay, Eugene received help from the wisdom of Gi-ming Shien, as is clear from a comparison of the thesis with notes he had taken during Gi-ming’s lectures at the Academy.

In the introduction to his thesis, Eugene indicated that his approach had been “‘philologico-philosophical,’ an alternative examination of words and ideas.” Lao-Tzu, he stated, “is not concerned with abstract concepts, but rather with what one might call poetic ideas: ideas highly charged with dynamic associations.” Although Eugene’s paper was necessarily limited in scope, it did help to bring these poetic ideas out of what Eugene regarded as the needless obscurity characteristic of many translations and interpretations of the *Tao Teh Ching*. He wrote: “Our examination of the language of the book — always in conjunction with the ideas bound up in it — will serve, it is hoped, as a partial

antidote to the too-often careless, even cavalier, approach to Lao-Tzu the ‘mystic’ and fount of ‘esoteric wisdom’ that has marked many of the popular works on him. Lao-Tzu’s thought is often elusive and paradoxical, but it is rarely if ever as fantastic and contradictory as it has sometimes been made to seem.”<sup>6</sup> The interpretations of the *Tao Teh Ching* that Eugene offered not only made the book’s meaning more clear and understandable, but they also brought out deeper and subtler aspects of it.<sup>[b]</sup>

**A**s Boodberg and Eugene became better acquainted, they began to share thoughts unrelated to their academic work. Like Eugene, Boodberg had once experienced a burning love for truth, and had spent many nights walking beside the ocean and under the stars, pondering the questions of existence. As he told Eugene, however, the daily cares of marriage and family life had in effect put an end to these intense probings.

Although Boodberg had been raised Russian Orthodox, he had, by the time Eugene knew him, ceased attending church. Boodberg’s colleague Professor Cyril Birch considered him an agnostic; but this may have been because Boodberg, like most professors at the liberal Berkeley campus, considered it dangerous to his position or at least unprofessional to show religious feeling or conviction in the context of his work. Eugene was convinced that Boodberg actually did, in his own way, have a love of God. And, as Professor Birch pointed out, Boodberg was “profoundly Russian, and may have further interested Eugene in Russian spiritual values.” He had even been known to make the Orthodox sign of the Cross over university students as they left for war, to fight Communism as his father had done.

It is likely that Eugene — with his interest in “things Russian,” and with the philosophical bent he had in common with Russians — reminded Boodberg of his younger self. One incident, however, points to an incompatibility in their outlook regarding “Russian spiritual values.” Once they became involved in a heated discussion about the two great Russian novelists, Tolstoy and

Dostoyevsky. Boodberg insisted that Tolstoy was by far the greater of the two, but Eugene argued that Dostoyevsky was more profound. Boodberg was so adamant that Eugene began to wonder if he had somehow failed to notice a deeper level in Tolstoy's writings. "What book," he asked Boodberg, "best shows the depth of Tolstoy?" Boodberg chose *War and Peace*. Going home, the passionate truth-seeker Eugene reread *War and Peace* straight through. Within a few days, Boodberg heard a knock on his door. There stood Eugene, *War and Peace* in his hands. "You're wrong," he said. "Dostoyevsky is much deeper."

Many years later, Eugene was to recount this incident while giving a lecture on Dostoyevsky. He was speaking of how Rodion Raskolnikov — the main character in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*—exemplified the opposition between Orthodox Christianity and Western ideas in Russia, and how the former prevailed in Raskolnikov when he publicly confessed his crime. For Eugene, Professor Boodberg was a firsthand example of the same Russian crosscurrents. "I had a professor once," he said, "who was a Baltic baron. He was a Russian, and he was Orthodox in his heart, but he was a very Western man. He overlaid his Orthodox heart with Western sophistication and scholarship, and he married a woman who encouraged that, who wanted to make him famous in the academic world and important in the eyes of the people."

"I was eating dinner with him one day, and we were discussing Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. He told me that Dostoyevsky was all right, but that Tolstoy was a universal human artist and was deeper. I had to go back and read *War and Peace* again to see what he meant, and I found out what he meant. Tolstoy describes all the different layers of society very calmly and objectively, but he does not have the heart that Dostoyevsky has. When it comes to religion, he mocks it. He doesn't understand at all the motives of religious people, who for him are just some other segment of people. For him the religion of the Russian people is part of the human comedy, which he stands above. Dostoyevsky, on the other hand, went into it with all his heart. He does not describe accurately all the different layers of society, but he describes the



Christian element in whatever he discusses. Therefore, in this sense, you can say that Tolstoy is the great Humanist, but Dostoyevsky is the Christian who goes deep.

“Interestingly, this very professor who said that Tolstoy was greater also told me, ‘I can understand how you are infatuated with Dostoyevsky, because I too sometimes think that I should go down in the middle of Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley and get on my knees and confess my sins to everybody.’ At this his wife said, ‘Oh, Petya, [\[c\]](#) if you want to do that, go ahead.’ It was obvious that she was mocking, but I could see that he meant it, that there was something of Dostoyevsky inside of him, and it was all covered over. This illustrates the conflict between the Christian wisdom which is in Russia, which went very deeply into Russia for a whole thousand years, and the ideas that came from the West. This is a very real conflict even today.”<sup>7</sup>

**I**N giving Eugene individual instruction, Boodberg discovered how deftly his student could grasp the subtleties of linguistic interpretation and how readily he could learn both ancient and modern languages. This ability, together with his philosophical inclinations, made Eugene the student whom Boodberg hoped to make his own protégé. There is also reason to believe that his hopes, or at least those of his wife, did not end there, for the Boodbergs had an eligible daughter with whom they wanted Eugene to become acquainted. Eugene would be invited to the Boodberg home for dinner. After a lively discussion with Professor Boodberg, he would be asked into the living room, where the daughter would be playing classical music on the piano.

There were several factors which prevented Boodberg’s wishes for Eugene’s career from being realized. One of them was discerned by Boodberg’s wife, who once counseled Eugene: “Stay away from those Russians!” She, herself a Russian, could see that Eugene’s interest in Orthodox Christianity was beginning to eclipse all other concerns.

But the most compelling reason why Eugene could not follow in his

teacher's footsteps was his disillusionment with the modern academic world. Already teaching undergraduate courses in the Chinese department, Eugene saw before him the promise of a distinguished academic career, but he was seriously doubting if he could continue on this course. Most of what he saw of modern scholarship proceeded not from a love of truth, but from academic fashions. His introduction to Orthodox Christianity had made eternal Truth tangible to him; and the more he grasped it, the more intolerable became the blatant lack of it in modern academics. A year after his graduation from Cal, he wrote, with harshness resulting from bitter experience, these words of criticism:

“Youth that — until it is ‘reeducated’ in the academic environment — still thirsts after truth, is taught instead of truth the ‘history of ideas,’ or its interest is diverted into ‘comparative’ studies, and the all-pervading relativism and skepticism inculcated in these studies is sufficient to kill in almost all the natural thirst for truth.

“The academic world — and these words are neither lightly nor easily spoken — has become today, in large part, a source of corruption. It is corrupting to hear or read the words of men who do not believe in truth. It is yet more corrupting to receive, in place of truth, mere learning and scholarship which, if they are presented as ends in themselves, are no more than parodies of the truth they were meant to serve, no more than a facade behind which there is no substance. It is, tragically, corrupting even to be exposed to the primary virtue still left to the academic world, the integrity of the best of its representatives — if this integrity serves, not the truth, but skeptical scholarship, and so seduces men all the more effectively to the gospel of subjectivism and unbelief this scholarship conceals. It is corrupting, finally, simply to live and work in an atmosphere totally permeated by a false conception of truth, wherein Christian Truth is seen as irrelevant to the central academic concerns, wherein even those who still believe this Truth can only sporadically make their voices heard above the skepticism promoted by the academic system. The evil, of course, lies primarily in the system itself, which is founded upon untruth, and only

incidentally in the many professors whom this system permits and encourages to preach it.”<sup>8</sup>

Professor Boodberg himself shared some of these criticisms, though to a much lesser degree. During the last part of his life he became pessimistic about the future of Chinese linguistics. His hopes of revolutionizing his field and raising its standards were shattered by the realities of contemporary academics. Work in his field was the puppet of opportunism. Each model of inquiry was destined to be challenged and undermined by a new trend, by which scholars made names for themselves. Since he had the mind of a philosopher as well as that of a philologist, Boodberg could not stand such triviality. “In the end,” writes Edward Schafer, “a large portion of the vast and fertile resources of his mind [was] withheld from the scholarly world because of his diffidence, his perfectionism, and ultimately his bitterness.”<sup>9</sup> Boodberg continued trying to work within the modern academic framework until he died, and Eugene was to witness the disappointment and emptiness that he experienced after having served a world that had no place for his ideals.

# 16

## *Early Influences*

*When your zeal weakens, it becomes hard to lift your hand, your feet don't want to walk, the church doesn't seem so dear.... Do you see what a misfortune is the weakening of your initial zeal? Preserve it within you, and do not allow it to weaken.*

—St. Theophan the Recluse (†1894)<sup>1</sup>

*... See how music can release one from the world?... And if music so releases one from the world, then so much more does prayer.*

—St. Barsanuphius of Optina (†1913)<sup>2</sup>

**O**NE who knew Eugene at this time has written: “He very early developed a profound devotion to the Mother of God, and even before he started using the Jesus Prayer he was saying the Panagia Prayer: ‘Most Holy Mother of God, save us.’”

Eugene now took it upon himself to learn Russian without personal instruction, which was relatively easy for him due to his linguistic training and talent. Attending services at the Russian Cathedral, however, was not always so easy for him at this stage. As he later confessed, for a time he feared that he would become just a routine churchgoer. On Sunday mornings he would fill himself with Bach’s Mass in B Minor in his apartment, and then, with it still ringing in his ears, would go immediately to the Orthodox Liturgy. This was a way of keeping alive his initial flame of zeal, the inspiration that had first brought him to Christ.

Eugene understood that what he beheld in Orthodox tradition — the

worship, the spiritual teachings — provided direct access to Divinity. He could see, as so few can, the Church for what she actually is: the presence of heaven on earth. But he feared that in growing accustomed to it, he would lose it. His study of Guénon and the esoteric dimensions of Eastern religions had equipped him with the ability to go directly to the ascetic, mystical aspect of Orthodox Christianity, to perceive the essence of it, and to look above the prosaic, human aspect: the pettiness, the politics, etc. He did not want to expose himself to worldliness in church circles, to be compelled to view the Church as another institution of the world.

While this was a valid concern on Eugene's part, it also created a problem. In trying to stay above the fallen human aspect of the Church, Eugene was also staying apart from the human beings themselves. This problem was aggravated by the fact, mentioned earlier, that as a foreigner he was already set apart from the Russian churchgoers. There was still a part of him in need of spiritual healing, and this healing could only occur through the agency of other people in the Church.

**A**FTER his conversion, Eugene continued to listen to classical music, using it as a means of refining and elevating the soul. "From music," he said, paraphrasing Confucius, "you can tell what the people are thinking. Listen to their music and you can tell whether they are corrupt people or virtuous people."<sup>3</sup> Although Eugene acknowledged no greater classical composer than Bach, his personal favorite was actually Handel.<sup>4</sup> There is a measured, flowing dignity in Handel's music that brings one to a state of inward tranquility and order. This was what appealed so highly to Eugene's soul, what Confucius meant by the music of "virtuous people."

According to a friend from this period, "Eugene's favorite operas were mostly the earlier ones, especially those of Monteverdi and Handel. These Handel operas are quite obscure and rarely performed. Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* was also a great favorite, as was Gluck's *Orpheus*. He also had a

recording of Rameau's *Les Indes galantes*. He was fond of all Mozart's operas, especially *Don Giovanni* and *The Magic Flute*, although when he learned that the latter had Masonic overtones, he would never listen to it again. Beethoven's *Fidelio* was a great favorite, as, of course, was Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. Among more modern operas, his taste ran chiefly to Puccini, especially *Turandot* and *Tosca*. He loved all Baroque chamber music, as well as Mozart's and Beethoven's chamber works, especially Beethoven's famous quartets." Eugene was musically talented himself: besides furthering his training on the piano while in college, he learned to play classical guitar. He studied the history of music, and, as his analytical mind was inclined to such things, he did research into music theory.

His taste in poetry was similar to that in music. Of English poets he liked best the court bards of the Classical period, his favorite being Alexander Pope. Crystallizing lofty philosophical thoughts in poetic form, according to perfect measure, Pope was a contemporary and literary counterpart of the German-born English composer Handel.

Of twentieth-century novelists, the only one for whom Eugene seemed to have a marked interest was the German writer Thomas Mann. Although Mann did not provide Eugene with any real answers to the problems of the modern age, he was, as Eugene said, "very aware of the currents of modern thought."<sup>5</sup> Eugene was intrigued with how Mann, having witnessed the advent of motion pictures, had commented on their "abnormality" from a natural human point of view, and with how he, although a humanist, had made an investigation of spiritualism and had become convinced that there was some real power at work behind the various phenomena it produced. Of Mann's books, Eugene's favorite was *The Magic Mountain*, in which he saw an allegory of the sickness of Western European civilization; and next to this he placed *Doctor Faustus*, the story of a modern composer who sells his soul to the devil in order to create the ultimate piece of music.

Eugene read all the Orthodox Christian sources he could, although at that

time not much had been translated into English. Until he was fluent in Russian, he could read but little of the more Orthodox of the Russian philosophers: Ivan Kireyevsky, Alexey Khomiakov, and Constantine Leontiev. For the time being, he primarily read the works of the two Russian philosophers most known and translated in the West: Vladimir Soloviev and Nicholas Berdyaev. Both of these thinkers strayed far from Orthodoxy, though the former became, as Eugene put it, more “sober and serious” in his last years.

One of Soloviev’s later works, “A Short Story of Antichrist,” made a deep impression on Eugene, with its portrayal of the Antichrist as a reasonable, beneficent leader, the supreme problem-solver who unites all the churches under himself by promising them the external things they desire most. To the false unity of church organizations under the Antichrist, Soloviev contrasted the true spiritual unity of the catacomb Christians of the last days.

Eugene respected Berdyaev for his penetration into historical and social currents, but he thoroughly disagreed with Berdyaev’s vision of an earthly “New Age of the Holy Spirit,” wherein the Church would even sanctify Communism. Martin Buber, the Jewish thinker whose works Eugene admired, had similar hopes for this world, but Eugene found his error “easier to understand” than that of Berdyaev. As Eugene explained, this was because “only to the Christian is the Truth fully revealed. The Jew still harks back to the old order, the time when the world was (or seemed to be) still whole; but after the coming of Christ the imminent end of this world is obvious. The ‘new time’ inaugurated by Christ can have its fulfillment only outside time.”<sup>6</sup>

In reading the works of some traditional Roman Catholic thinkers, Eugene said he found them “quite helpful and not, after all, too distant from the Orthodox perspective.”<sup>7</sup> These included Joseph Pieper, Étienne Gilson, P. Henri de Lubac, and of course Max Picard. He regarded Pieper’s book *The End of Time*, which was based almost entirely on Western sources, as being “in no essential point at variance with Orthodox tradition.”<sup>8</sup> To the writings of the conservative Roman Catholic writer Jacques Maritain, however, he had a mixed

reaction. On reading Maritain's *Science and Wisdom*, he agreed with the author that science must have its proper place in the hierarchy of knowledge, but he was disturbed by Maritain's praise of modern scientific development and his wish to "reconcile science and wisdom in a vital spiritual harmony."<sup>9</sup>

Eugene was very moved by Thomas Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain*, which demonstrated to him that a modern man like himself could indeed pursue a calling to renounce this world and live for another. His positive impression of this, Merton's first published book, only increased his disappointment at what Merton later became, as we shall see.



## ***This World Must End***

*Philosophers are as children until they become mature in Christ.*

—Clement of Alexandria (†223)<sup>1</sup>

**T**HE process of Eugene’s conversion was one of deepening, of filling up a spiritual void. The fullness of his soul necessitated an outpouring in one form or another, and writing was the most obvious outlet. While teaching and studying at the Berkeley university, he began to write down his reflections as a Christian living and suffering in the modern world. These earliest Christian writings, completely unrelated to his academic work, were an act of love, a “giving back” to God.

In his writing, Eugene wanted to do more than confirm his new-found faith. His conversion was not only a *finding* of the Truth, but also an *emerging* out of untruth. He came from a society built upon apostasy, the historical “stepping away” from the revelation of Christ the God-man. As a result of the apostasy, he saw everywhere signs of the deterioration of culture, of humanity reverting to a kind of “subhumanity,” of noble values being replaced by crude materialistic ones. And in this state of obvious decay, his contemporaries were speaking of “progress,” of the overcoming of evil and war, of future societies of peace and brotherhood. Eugene discerned that this was not mere hypocrisy on their part, for they actually *believed* that the world was getting better. Something else was at work: a subtle deception that induced men to desperately seek satisfaction in this process of decay, to try to realize *in this world*, through the powers of human reason, the ancient longing for heavenly perfection.

“Autonomous man,” Eugene wrote, “has attempted to refashion the outer world to conform to his new idea of it by means of technology, social and economic theory, architecture, etc. All these means tend toward a utopian extreme of control, both to confirm man in his idea of lordship (for he is inwardly insecure about this), and as a necessity of autonomous reason.

“Only he who loves God can love the creation which comes from God. To love creation (or anything, for that matter) one must love it as it truly is; and since creation comes from God, one can only love it as from God and cannot help loving God thereby as well. Autonomous reason, however, by being out of contact with God, must also be out of contact with concrete reality (which is nothing else than created reality as given by God), and so can only look on things as *ideally*, as *perfect*....

“Perfection is that in which man rests; but man can only rest in God, for God alone is perfect, and the imperfections of the world and of men only lead us to what is truly perfect. Modern man, however, wants to rest in this world, so he has to make it perfect; since it is obviously not, he must make it so. Hence the ideal, utopian character of all rational schemes of the world. Without a utopia, modern man would despair — and sure enough, when deprived of it, he does despair. In normal times he would then turn to God, but most people today no longer believe He exists, so despair is futile and self-destroying. The choice before man is always the same: perfection in this world, or perfection in the other world. Man is not made to be able to live without the hope of some kind of perfection. For modern man, then, the choice is: the rationalist utopia, or God.”<sup>2</sup>

**T**HE deceptive spirit of the age, which makes man seek to fulfill his innate yearnings in this world, is, Eugene believed, the spirit of Antichrist. Eugene philosophically viewed the Antichrist not only as that which is against Christ, but also as that which replaces and mimics Him, since Satan is the “ape of God.” “The Antichrist,” Eugene wrote, “is the fake Christ who promises to give outwardly and obviously what Christ brought inwardly and hidden.”<sup>3</sup> Christ

promises a perfect Kingdom of Heaven; the Antichrist, whose master Satan was cast out of heaven and consigned to earth, promises a perfect Kingdom in this world. Modern man, having lowered his gaze from celestial reality to what is most “obvious,” succumbs to the latter, false promise; he thinks that an ideal society on earth is more attainable than a vague heaven, whereas such a society is made impossible by the unavoidable reality of the primordial fall.

On the satanic imitation of God’s otherworldly Kingdom, Eugene wrote: “Modern man lives on the dregs of Christianity, on Christian experience digested and turned into ‘ideas’ for mass consumption. Hence the parody of Christianity is to be seen in modern ideas like ‘equality,’ ‘brotherhood,’ ‘charity.’... And Christian messianism — the coming Kingdom which is *not of this world* (John 18:36)—has been perverted into the coming Kingdom in this world that practically everyone believes in today. Even those who see through the delusion of idealism — Buber and Berdyaev, for example — fall prey to the second idea, the idea that Truth can somehow be realized in this world, in the coming age of the ‘spirit,’ or in the relation of ‘man with man.’ But this world cannot hold the Truth in its fullness, any more than it could tolerate the presence in it of the God-man; for man is called upon to be more than man, he is called to deification, and this can only happen fully in the ‘other world’—which, though it constantly impinges on this world, never does so more than partially, giving us warnings and indications of what is to come. *This world must end*, man as we know him must die, must be crucified before that ‘other’ world can come into being.”<sup>4</sup>

From his own experience, Eugene believed that modern man cannot truly return to Christ until he is first aware of the apostasy of his age. And he considered it his calling, as a writer, to spread this awareness, to differentiate between that which is of Christ and that which — no matter how harmless or even “Christian” it seems — stands in opposition to Him.

## *The Way of the Philosopher*

*One thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*

—Luke 10:42

**B**YOND recording his ideas in fragments and brief essays, Eugene wished to compile a whole book that would be a systematic presentation of all that he thought important to say. In 1959, he conceived an expanded and completely revised version of the paper he had written for Alan Watts in 1957, “Pseudo-Religion and the Modern Age.” It was meant to be a general analysis of the apostasy and the various surrogates that the modern world supplies in order to satisfy man’s natural need for religion. “Man lives by faith alone,” wrote Eugene in his notes for this work. “... The stature of a man, his humanity, may even perhaps be judged by the quality of his faith, and by the objects of his faith. Modern men have faith in machines, in material well-being, in the substantiality of all that seems obvious to common sense; this is petty faith, the faith of petty men. The Christian has faith in God and the world to come, in the insubstantiality of all that is obvious, in the passing of this world and the coming of the new, transfigured world; if there is a faith worthy of men, it is surely this.” And it is only in such faith, as Eugene pointed out, that man can find true happiness: “Man hungers after what is more than himself, what is more than the world; it is man’s hunger for God, to be a partaker of His nature, that ruins all attempts to make him satisfied with less. And this hunger is so central to man that it manifests itself today most evidently in spite of the fact that men have lost

awareness of it. In fact, the ‘irrational’ character of so much of contemporary history is a result precisely of this unawareness on man’s part of what he truly desires.”

After experimenting with different approaches to his book and writing numerous outlines, Eugene found that the original title, *Pseudo-Religion and the Modern Age*, was too limiting to his subject. Pseudo-religion comprised only one aspect of the whole phenomenon of the apostasy that he was to examine. At the center of his thought was the realization that man has a choice between two faiths: faith in the eternal God or faith in the temporal world, and that modern society is the product of the latter. It was this, then, that Eugene chose to make the initial thesis of the book. A title, broad in its implications, was finally decided upon: *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*.

The book would be a monumental undertaking, demanding all his mental energy. And it was the only work that inspired him now. The pursuit of an academic career had come to appear thoroughly odious and futile in his view. He longed to shake the dust of the academic world off his feet forever; but, not being one to make sudden decisions, and knowing that his mother would be shattered by such a decision, he settled upon a tentative plan. He would leave the academic world for a year in order to write his book, and at the end of that year make a decision as to whether to go back.

On June 14, 1961, within a week after turning in his master’s thesis, he wrote the following letter to his parents with the aim of explaining the reasons for his plan:

Liebe Eltern,[\[a\]](#)

A hot day — too much like summer for San Francisco. I finally finished the thesis and turned it in last Friday, but they don’t get around to sending out the degrees until September, for some reason. For the time being I’m still involved in Chinese things, as I’m helping my former Chinese professor [Gi-ming Shien] translate an article (from Chinese) on

Chinese philosophy for a philosophical journal. The hypocrisy of the academic world is nowhere more evident than in his case. He knows more about Chinese philosophy than probably anyone else in the country, and studied with real Chinese philosophers and sages in China; but he can't get a job in any college here because he doesn't have degrees from American colleges, and because he isn't a fast talker — he's too honest, in short.

It's true that I chose the academic life in the first place, because God gave me a mind to serve Him with, and the academic world is where the mind is supposed to be used. But after eight or nine years I know well enough what goes on in universities. The mind is respected by only a few of the "old fashioned" professors, who will soon have died out. For the rest, it's a matter of making money, getting a secure place in life — and using the mind as a kind of toy, doing clever tricks with it and getting paid for it, like circus clowns. The love of truth has vanished from people today; those who have minds have to prostitute their talents to get along. I find this difficult to do, because I have too great a love of truth. The academic world for me is just another job; but I am not going to make myself a slave to it. I am not serving God in the academic world; I am just making a living. If I am going to serve God in this world, and so keep from making my life a total failure, I will have to do it outside the academic world. I have some money saved up, and the promise of some more by doing a little work, so I should be able to live frugally for a year doing what my conscience tells me I should do — to write a book on the spiritual condition of man today, about which, by God's grace, I have some knowledge. The book will probably not sell, because people would rather forget about the things I am going to say; they would rather make money than worship God.

It is true that this is a mixed-up generation. The only thing wrong with me is that I am *not* mixed-up, I know only too well what the duty of man is: to worship God and His Son and to prepare for the life of the world to come, *not* to make ourselves happy and comfortable in this world by

exploiting our fellow man and forgetting about God and His Kingdom.

If Christ were to walk in this world today, do you know what would happen to Him? He would be placed in a mental institution and given psychotherapy, just as would His saints. The world would crucify Him today just as it did two thousand years ago, for the world has not learned a thing, except more devious forms of hypocrisy. And what would happen if, in one of my classes at the university, I would one day tell my students that all the learning of this world is of no importance beside the duty of worshipping God, accepting the God-man Who died for our sins, and preparing for the life of the world to come? They would probably laugh at me, and the university officials, if they found out, would fire me — for it is against the law to preach the Truth in our universities. We say that we live in a Christian society, but we do not; we live in a society that is more pagan, more Christ-hating, than the society into which Christ was born. Recently a Catholic priest at U.C.L.A.<sup>[b]</sup> had the nerve to say that U.C.L.A. had a pagan atmosphere; and the university officials called him a “fanatic” and “insane.” But he spoke the truth — but men hate the truth, and that is why they would gladly crucify Christ again if He came amidst them.

I am a Christian, and I am going to try to be an honest Christian. Christ told us to give all our money away and follow Him. I am very far from doing this. But I am going to try to take no more money than I need to live on; if I can earn this by working a year or two at a time in a university, all right. But the rest of my time I am going to try to serve God with the talents He has given me. This year I have the chance to do this, so I shall do it. My professor [Boodberg], being a Russian (the love of God seems to be more deeply imbedded in the Russians than in other peoples), has not tried to talk me out of leaving the academic world for a year; he knows too well that the love of truth, the love of God, is infinitely more important than the love of security, of money, of fame.

I can only follow my conscience; I cannot be false to myself. And I

know that I am doing right. If what I do seems foolish in the eyes of the world, I can only answer with the words of St. Paul: all the wisdom of this world is but folly in the eyes of God. This is something we forget too easily.

But I must get back to my Chinese translation. My regards to Eileen.

Liebe,  
Eugene<sup>1</sup>

Eugene's mother, on hearing that her son planned to take a leave from his teaching post and earn only what he "needed to live on," was horrified. She had been so proud of his scholarships, the Phi Beta Kappa membership, etc.; but now, she wondered, what would it all come to? It seemed that he in whom she had put so much hope was destined never to follow in the steps of his wealthy brother, Franklin, but rather in those of his father, the janitor. It was too early for her to see that Eugene was called to a special path, and that it was only by abandoning the ordinary paths that he could pursue it.

Eugene had become one of the "angry young men" of his generation.<sup>[c]</sup> But there was a difference: while the typical "angry young man," steeped in modern culture, was calling for a new order, Eugene, steeped in ancient culture, was harking back to the old order, when dignity and meaning were still present in the mind of the times.

At the university, one of the things that Eugene found especially unnerving was to hear scholars say, "Take this idea and play around with it — see what you come up with." At one point an essay came out in his field — a comparative study of ancient Chinese toilet seats — which was generally hailed as a brilliant work of great significance. Since Eugene could not imagine himself studying ancient Chinese culture except for the sake of truth, the fact that others could derive such inspiration from something so mundane again told him he was in the wrong place. He later cited the acclaim accorded to this paper as one of the "last straws" that convinced him to leave the academic world.



Eugene would instead follow the way of the true philosopher, and would suffer all the hardships that this entailed. At the end of 1960 he wrote in his journal:

“To be a ‘philosopher’—not a ‘professional’ or ‘academic’ philosopher, but a man for whom to live is to *think*—means to suffer greatly....

“‘Philosophy’ as a matter of life or death — this is the path of the true ‘philosopher.’ He must be so attached to thinking that he will abandon it for nothing less; and he should be sufficiently unattached to it not to make of it an idol between him and Truth, which is not ultimately arrived at by a process of thought. But I have respect even for him who makes an idol of thought — if he does not give up that idol for anything less, for ‘common sense’ or ‘security.’ There is great integrity in someone like Nietzsche, who ‘thought himself to death,’ but little in Hume who in the end could not believe that thought was really important. But the greatest ‘philosopher’ is he who thinks himself out to the end, and finally accepts that which is beyond thought. But to go this far is to be more than a ‘philosopher’; it is to be fully human.

“But to return to the starting point: to think is to suffer. An idea, if it is one’s own, is not merely ‘thought out’; it is brought to birth through experience and suffering.”<sup>2</sup>

**F**OR some time after leaving the university, Eugene remained in contact with Professor Boodberg and continued to have dinner at his house occasionally. Gi-ming Shien, however, moved away suddenly from San Francisco. “In Guénonian fashion,” Eugene recalled, “he disappeared utterly, leaving no address.<sup>[d]</sup> I remember him fondly, but after becoming Orthodox I saw how limited was his teaching: the Chinese spiritual teaching, he said, would disappear entirely from the world if Communism endures another ten or twenty years in China. So fragile was this tradition — but the Orthodox Christianity I had found would survive everything and endure to the end of the world — because it was not merely handed down from generation to generation, as all traditions are; but

was at the same time given from God to man.”<sup>3</sup>

Having earned his master’s degree and finished his teaching obligations at the university, Eugene was free to begin working on his book in earnest. He painstakingly gathered information and ideas related to the past causes, the present state, and the future development of the apostasy. The reading he did was prodigious. He often went to libraries and used-book stores in San Francisco, returning to his apartment with armloads of books; and he saved newspaper and magazine articles that provided him with further insights.

He lived according to his belief in suffering for the sake of philosophy — the “love of wisdom.” Having chosen not to support himself by the teaching position for which he had been trained, he sought out the most unskilled jobs in restaurants, working as a busboy and later as a janitor. In this he was not unlike his father, who, as Esther said, “always took the lesser job.” Eugene, having worked all his life in an academic environment, found this work very exhausting. “I understand somewhat better the plight of the work-drugged proletariat,” he wrote.<sup>4</sup> But he chose such jobs for a reason: he wanted work that would require no mental strain, so that it would not interfere with the careful thought his book required.

As he wrote to his parents, Eugene had little hope that his book would sell. He had made this sacrifice only out of love for the Truth. “Let us,” he wrote in a journal entry, “throw over all who want to know the Truth ‘because’—if there is any motive for seeking the Truth outside of a deep personal hunger for it, if we wish to *use* it for *anything*, if we love it not only and purely for its own sake — then we are not lovers of Truth, and we shall not find it, and it shall not *make us free*.” <sup>5</sup>

## *A Clarified Perspective*

*The age of distinctions is gone.*

—Søren Kierkegaard

**B**Y the time Eugene conceived *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*, he had resolved many of the questions that had troubled him while working on the expanded “Pseudo-Religion” paper. The issue that had given him the most difficulty was Christianity’s relationship to other religions. This was so important to him that he had even considered writing another book on the subject. In 1959 he had attempted to somehow assimilate the “transcendent unity of religions” thesis into his Christian philosophy by stating that all true religions provide effective means for salvation or deification, but only in the incarnation of God in Christ are the effects of the primordial fall reversed. His writings of 1961, however, show a different, more consistent outlook that attempted no compromise between opposing beliefs. At this time, the “transcendent unity” concept was no longer a stumbling block to him.

“The truth revealed to the non-Christian religions is various,” he wrote. “Each tradition possesses truth, beyond doubt, but in varying measure. The truth of no one tradition can be said to be precisely equal to that of another, and the truth of none may be compared with that of Christianity, which in this respect is unique — a fact which no non-Christian tradition has been able fully to accept. The ‘equality’ and ‘transcendent unity’ of religions is a notion from the modernist ‘simplistic’ mentality which is incapable equally of understanding the essential differences between religions and of appreciating the uniqueness among them of Christianity, which by comparison with them may, from a certain

— and that an essential — point of view, not even be called a ‘religion’ at all.”<sup>1</sup>

In rereading a few essays of Ananda Coomaraswamy, an adherent of the “transcendent unity” concept who had once influenced him, Eugene commented: “How remote does this advocate of ‘mutual understanding’ and tolerance between ‘East and West,’ of ‘world citizenship,’ of the ‘*philosophia perennis et universalis*’ at the heart of all religions, sound to me now. And all the more remote is he for the fact that at least a part of what he desired may after all happen: the advent of the ‘universal scholar,’ at home in the several provinces of ‘comparative religion,’ with genuine insights into many of the common elements of all religions. But what are these men in the end but — scholars? Christ does not require ‘understanding’ of us, either for our salvation or even for the restoration of order among men; great understanding, perhaps, is even a sign of the end of worldly order.... For all the ‘wisdom’ of Coomaraswamy, Guénon, and the lesser wise men of today, we seem near an even greater collapse.

“Christ requires us not to ‘understand,’ but to suffer, die, and arise to Life in Him.... Christ is unquestionably the spiritual foundation of Western civilization, yet He spoke not a single word of ‘comparative religion.’...

“For all the ‘understanding’ of the modern ‘wise men,’ then, their vision is perhaps not so keen as that of the ‘unsophisticated,’ ‘naive’ Christians they deplore, who in being blind to the ‘wisdom’ contained in other religions yet hold fast to the Divine ‘folly’ of Christianity which, in no very ‘understandable’ way, is yet wiser than all these.”<sup>2</sup>

**E**UGENE, then, did not deny the truth contained in non-Christian religions; he only indicated its incompleteness. He took a similar approach when comparing Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism: “The Catholic Church, however much it has itself capitulated — and continues to capitulate — to the modernist mentality, has remained in contact with that Truth revealed in the Person of the God-man Jesus Christ and transmitted since without interruption in the apostolic succession. But what has been transmitted with imperfect understanding in the

Catholic Church has been transmitted in full by the Orthodox Christian East, which has even to the present day preserved intact that whole Truth from the fullness of which the Catholic West departed in schism now nearly a millennium ago.”<sup>3</sup>

Having come this far, Eugene indicated the starting point from which, in his book, he would proceed with his study of modernist errors: “Modernism being a deviation from Christian Truth, it may be fully understood only by reference to that Truth through the denial of which it owes its whole existence. The standard of measuring modernism is, and can only be, Christian Truth. There have been, before this, attempts to find this measure in the Christianity manifest in the Western Middle Ages; but even at such an early date the Christian West, cut off by schism from the whole Church of Christ, had within it distortions and errors.” Eugene believed that the present-day apostasy of Western culture had its very origin in the schism of the Roman Church in the eleventh century. “Modernism, indeed, was no sudden arbitrary movement, but had roots that reach far into the character of Western European man. It is in the Orthodox Christian East alone, then, that is to be found the whole standard wherewith to measure the denial of Christian Truth that is modernism.”

Eugene understood that this Orthodox Christian standard was by its very nature radical to the modern consciousness. In a tentative preface to his book, he accounted for the fact that some would object to his “uncompromising tone” and accuse him of “giving offense to many of sincere but opposed convictions.” The first to take offense, he expected, would be “the half-hearted, those who claim to make a decision for or against Christ without that decision revealing itself in the inmost places of their being, those who live as though life were a ‘neutral,’ an ‘academic’ thing.” For the sake of such people, Eugene indicated that “whatever may have been possible before Christ, after Him there is no possibility of ‘neutrality.’” For the sake of others, “those who deny a Christianity of whose nature they are ignorant,” Eugene pointed out that “Christianity in its fullness is not better, but much ‘worse’ (from their point of view) than they might have

thought it: more of a scandal and insult to the ‘wisdom’ and instincts of ‘this world,’ less compromising and more intolerant... where the living Truth is involved.”

Eugene wanted to make clear to his readers that the uncompromising stance reflected in his book came out of his conviction in the universality of Orthodox Christian Truth, and not out of any attempt to pose as a theological or spiritual authority. Having only recently been introduced to the Orthodox Faith and not yet having entered it sacramentally, he knew he was in no position to dogmatize. He therefore maintained his approach to be, in a loose sense, ‘philosophical.’ In concluding the preface, he wrote that “the author is not a theologian or a monk; indeed, it is his position in the world and his involvement with the very errors he attempts to explore that have led him to undertake a book like this. If his analysis of errors is substantially correct, however, it does not follow that his understanding of the spiritual Truths that dispel them is as profound as would be that of someone more advanced in the spiritual life. All ‘philosophy,’ however, especially ‘religious philosophy’ like this, must be subject to the higher correction offered by theology and the profounder insight of those advanced in the spiritual life. If, then, there be in these pages errors of theology or faith, we defer to the higher authority of the Church, whose teachings are their corrections. It is of particular importance to say this as the author’s ‘religious philosophy’ is a fruit of his Russian Orthodox faith, and in modern times ‘Russian religious philosophy’ has had an unfortunate tendency toward and reputation of being extraordinarily ‘free,’ too often to the point of actual heresy. A case in point is that of Nicholas Berdyaev, a philosopher of profound historical and social insight who was carried away by an excessive ‘individualism’ that permitted him to place himself outside and above the Church, and to consider his own personal opinions on theological subjects (of which he had a very deficient knowledge) as of greater weight than the universal teaching of the Church.

“The author sincerely hopes that this book will be a less ‘original’ and more

humble contribution to ‘religious philosophy.’”

## 20

# *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*

*Every man, by virtue of being human, must choose God or himself. Every man, in fact, has chosen, for we are what we have chosen. And with our choice we indicate our preference for one Kingdom or other: for the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of self.*

—Eugene Rose<sup>1</sup>

*Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*

—Matthew 4:17

**F**OR reasons that will be discussed later, Eugene’s work of “religious philosophy” was, unfortunately, never completed. Some sections were typed, but most of the book remained in the form of handwritten notes and outlines, categorized according to subject. The notes were exhaustive; it seemed Eugene left no stone unturned in his research. Saints, philosophers, historians, artists, scientists, historical and contemporary figures, characters in novels — all were studied by him in order to provide a background for his critique of Western civilization. On many of the pages of notes he indicated the date when they were written, perhaps because he knew his philosophy was maturing in the course of the work. The last extant draft of his provisional outline reads as follows:

Introduction: The Contemporary Situation of the World and the Church

Part I: *The Two Kingdoms, Their Source and Their Power*



Chapter One: The two loves, and the two faiths: the world, and God.

Chapter Two: The power of the world, and the power of Christ.

Part II: *The Kingdom of Man in the Modern Age*

Chapter Three: An Orthodox Christian interpretation of the modern age.

Chapter Four: The worldly idols of the modern age.

I. Culture/Civilization, judged by Orthodox Christian spirituality.

II. Science/Rationalism, judged by Divine Wisdom.

III. History/Progress, judged by the Orthodox Christian theology of history.

Part III: *The Old Order and the “New Order”*

Chapter Five: The Old Order: The Orthodox Christian Empire.

Chapter Six: The advent of the “New Order”: the Revolution of the modern age.

Chapter Seven: The root of the Revolution: Nihilism.

Chapter Eight: The goal of the Revolution: the Anarchist Millennium.

Part IV: *Orthodox Christian Spirituality and the “New Spirituality”* (About four chapters.)

Part V: *The End of the Two Kingdoms*

Chapter Thirteen: The “New Christianity” and the Reign of Antichrist.

Chapter Fourteen: The Kingdom of Heaven.

Of these approximately fourteen chapters, the only one that was typed in completed form was the seventh, on Nihilism.<sup>[a]</sup> This chapter alone comprises over one hundred pages, which gives an idea of the magnitude of Eugene’s proposed book.

In studying the thousands of pages of material compiled for Eugene’s book, one finds that the preponderance of it is devoted to refutation, and relatively little to affirmation. Its one-sidedness bespeaks Eugene’s own state at the time, when he was more capable of writing authoritatively on the realm of evil in which he had suffered for years, than on the sphere of holiness of which he had as yet only

scratched the surface. This one-sidedness makes Eugene's early thought no less true, but rather points to the need for the other side to be developed more fully later on, which in fact it was. The thoroughness of his critique in *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God* was a sign of his attempt to make a thorough break with the apostasy of Western culture; and it was from this point of departure that he was later able to take up the path of restoring the abandoned spiritual heritage of the West.

**F**OR Part One of the book, Eugene wrote by way of introduction: "The two Kingdoms have been built on two faiths: the Kingdom of God, upon faith in Christ; the Kingdom of Man, upon faith in the world." The latter faith, he stated, is based ostensibly on its "obviousness" and "necessity," but, at a deeper level, it stems from man's desire: "The fact is that the worldly man does not *desire* any other world. For the 'other world' introduces a depth and complexity of existence that men quite 'naturally' (in their fallen state) do not wish to face; the 'other world' disturbs all worldly 'peace of mind' and distracts men from the 'obvious' and simple duty of 'getting along in the world.'"

In this first part, Eugene went on to say that, although the Christian may seem to be an escapist, it is he rather than the worldly man who is the true realist, since it is he alone who can face existence as it is: "The pain and suffering and death inseparable from all life are, theoretically, accepted by the worldly, though in actual fact they do all in their power to abolish or at least mitigate them, and to forget them by looking on the 'positive' side of things; the Christian accepts them and, indeed, welcomes them, for he knows that without such trials there is no progress in the spiritual life.... The world must be faced; but in Christ we know a power that ennobles us to face and overcome the world."

**T**HE second part, called "The Kingdom of Man in the Modern Age," was to include an Orthodox Christian interpretation of the modernist mentality. One

of the “laws” of this mentality that Eugene planned to discuss was that of “simplification,” which accounted for the modern naiveté regarding things “spiritual.” By investigating, according to modern “scientific” faith in the obvious, only the physical manifestations of the spiritual world (“phenomena”), man threatens to usher in what Eugene called the “age of magic.” This was an idea introduced in Soloviev’s “Short Story of Antichrist,” in which a future technology was mysteriously combined with seemingly magical phenomena. “The omnivorousness of modern man,” wrote Eugene, “born of his need to find something to replace Christ — this attitude that underlies both his mania for experimentation and his celebrated ‘tolerance’ (which is quite limited, actually) — can only come to a natural end in magic, moral perversion, occultism, which might be defined as the ‘ultimate in experimentation.’”

In discussing the nature of modernism, Eugene also wished to judge, according to Orthodox Christian teaching, three worldly “idols” of the modern age. The first he called the “cult of civilization.” Having outlined several aspects of this idol, he indicated how Christians can succumb to it by making their service to “humanity” an end in itself; and he contrasted this with reflections on the nature of true Christian charity. A Christian responds to an immediate human need out of love, in the name of Christ; but when he begins to think, “If it is good to feed one hungry man, it is much better to feed a thousand — one is but a drop in the bucket,” then he begins to make of Christianity a system, to reduce it to an ideology. Recalling Christ’s words *Ye have the poor always with you* (Matt. 26:11), Eugene wrote: “Christ did not come to feed the hungry, but to save the souls of all, hungry or replete.”<sup>2</sup>

Science was the next idol of the modern age that Eugene planned to discuss. “Modern science,” he wrote, “... has given itself totally to *power*. Even ‘curiosity,’ the root of modern science, aims at power, for the objective knowledge arrived at through curiosity is one in which ‘facts’ are seen to be at one’s mercy.” Again, he compared science and magic, stating that “their viewpoint is the same. Both are preoccupied with phenomena and their

manipulation, with wonders, with results. Both are an attempt at wish fulfillment, an attempt to bend reality to one's own will. The difference is simply this: science (modern science) is *systematic* magic; science has found a method, where magic works in fits and starts.... Yes, scientists can consider themselves rational (in the narrowest sense of the word) as long as they keep themselves buried in the laboratory, enslaved by technique. But to someone not so enslaved, someone capable of looking at things in a larger frame of reference — do not the results of science today resemble a magical landscape?"<sup>3</sup>

The modern idol of science is related to the third idol that Eugene was to describe: the belief in the historical progress of humanity. Eugene, of course, regarded this belief as an exact inversion of the truth. According to the common opinion of his contemporaries, the "progress" of civilization somehow leaped from classical antiquity to the Renaissance, right over the back, as it were, of medieval civilization. As against this, Eugene wrote that the Renaissance was in fact "a transition between the medieval and modern mentalities, taking the form of a profound degeneration when compared to the former, and an early chaotic stage of the latter...." In this transition, new forces were arising and mingling with the old. "A compromise," he wrote, "was attempted in this period between the new and the old, 'Christianity' and 'humanism.'... The new forces were too strong to be satisfied with compromise, and the Church would sooner or later awaken to the fact that in such 'compromise' it had sold its soul."

Eugene saw the eighteenth century as a turning point, when "uncompromising modernism was to be free to do what it could, outside the Church (whether ignoring or attacking it), and to prove its own errors in practice.... Since the eighteenth century, we live in a 'new world,' a world in which continuity has been broken, a world no longer of the 'given' but a world to be constructed, a world of fragments from which man — now *against* and not *with* nature and God — attempts to build his home, his city, his Kingdom — his new Tower of Babel."

The eighteenth century saw the collapse of the rationalist hypothesis once

propounded by Descartes, Bacon, and others: that absolute, objective truth could be arrived at through human reason and observation. By the latter part of that century, the irrational was entering the sphere of human activity, as was seen in the French Revolution as well as in the new sense of the irrational and unreal in the arts. For Eugene, the fallacy of the modern idea of “progress” was evidenced by the degeneration of Enlightenment rationalism and humanism into irrationalism and *subhumanism*. Humanism, he wrote, is “a rebellion against the true nature of man and the world, a flight from God the center of man’s being, a denial of all the realities of man’s existence, clothed in the language of the opposite of all these. Subhumanism, therefore, is not a disturbing obstacle to the realization of humanism; it is its culmination and goal. Just so, the irrationalism of our day is an unmasking of Enlightenment rationalism, revealing it for the tissue of lies and deceptions it really is. Subhumanism teaches us that Enlightenment ‘humanism,’ which denies man’s true nature as the image of God, is no true humanism at all; irrationalism teaches us that Enlightenment ‘rationalism,’ which divorces itself from God the ultimate ‘reason,’ is not ultimately rational.”<sup>4</sup>

**P**ART Three, an examination of the Old Order and the “New Order,” was to be perhaps the most important section of Eugene’s book. It was here that he would uncover what he called the root of the revolution of the modern age: Nihilism. He found a succinct definition of it in the writings of Nietzsche, whom he called the fount of philosophical Nihilism: “That there is no truth; that there is no absolute state of affairs — no ‘thing-in-itself.’ *This alone* is Nihilism, and of the most extreme kind.”<sup>5</sup> According to Nietzsche, the twentieth century would mark the “triumph of Nihilism.” Eugene wrote that “Nihilism has become, in our time, so widespread and pervasive, has entered so thoroughly and so deeply into the minds and hearts of all men living today, that there is no longer any ‘front’ on which it may be fought.”<sup>6</sup>

“The question of Nihilism,” Eugene explained, “is, most profoundly, a

question of truth: it is, indeed, *the* question of truth.... No one, surely — is the common idea — no one is naive enough to believe in ‘absolute truth’ any more; all truth, to our enlightened age, is ‘relative.’ The latter expression, let us note — ‘all truth is relative’ — is the popular translation of Nietzsche’s phrase, ‘there is no (absolute) truth.’ Eugene observed that “‘relative truth’ is primarily represented, for our age, by the knowledge of science,” a system which works from the basic presuppositions that “all truth is empirical, all truth is relative.” As he pointed out, either of these statements is a self-contradiction: “The first statement is itself not empirical at all, but metaphysical; the second is itself an absolute statement.” Any system of knowledge must have an absolute, metaphysical first principle, “but with the acknowledgment of such a principle, the theory of the ‘relativity of truth’ collapses, it itself being revealed as a self-contradictory absolute.”<sup>7</sup>

The development of modern thought, Eugene wrote, has been “an experiment in the possibilities of knowledge open to man, assuming that *there is no Revealed Truth*.... The conclusion of this experiment is an absolute negation: if there is no Revealed Truth, there is no truth at all; the search for truth outside of Revelation has come to a dead end.... The multitude demonstrates this by looking to the scientist, not for truth, but for the technical applications of a knowledge which has no more than a practical value, and by looking to other, irrational sources for the ultimate values men once expected to find in truth. The despotism of science over practical life is contemporaneous with the advent of a whole series of pseudo-religious ‘revelations’; the two are correlative symptoms of the same malady: the abandonment of truth.”<sup>8</sup>

The Nihilist mentality has the single underlying aim of destroying faith in Revealed Truth and thus preparing for a “New Order” in which there shall be no trace of the “old” view of things and man shall be the only god there is. “This mentality,” stated Eugene, “manifests itself in phenomena as diverse as the men who share it.” He perceived that such phenomena reduce themselves to about four different types or stages. These stages “are not to be understood as merely

chronological, though in the narrowest sense they are in fact a kind of chronicle of the development of the Nihilist mentality.”<sup>9</sup>

The first stage Eugene described was Liberalism, a passive rather than an overt Nihilism, a neutral breeding-ground of the more advanced stages. Some beliefs of the Old Order are retained, but without the meaning and power they once had. The God whom Liberals may profess, Eugene wrote, “is not a Being but an idea.... Uninterested in man, powerless to act in the world (except to inspire worldly ‘optimism’), he is a god considerably weaker than the men who invented him.”<sup>10</sup> The liberal view of government is also weak, arising from an attempt at compromise between two irreconcilable ideas: government as Divinely established, with sovereignty invested in a monarch, and government with the “people” as sovereign. “In the nineteenth century,” Eugene wrote, “this compromise took the form of ‘constitutional monarchies,’ an attempt — again — to wed an old form to a new content; today the chief representatives of the Liberal idea are the ‘republics’ and ‘democracies’ of Western Europe and America, most of which preserve a rather precarious balance between the forces of authority and Revolution, while professing to believe in both.... A government must rule by the Grace of God *or* by the will of the people, it must believe in authority *or* in the Revolution; on these issues compromise is possible only in semblance, and only for a time. The Revolution, like the disbelief which has always accompanied it, cannot be stopped halfway; it is a force that, once awakened, will not rest until it ends in a totalitarian Kingdom of this world. The history of the last two centuries has proved nothing if not this. To appease the Revolution and offer it concessions, as Liberals have always done, thereby showing that they have no truth with which to oppose it, is perhaps to postpone, but not to prevent, the attainment of its end.”<sup>11</sup>

At the second stage of the Nihilist dialectic is “Realism,” by which term Eugene meant to include various forms of naturalism and positivism, and to indicate the doctrine that was popularized precisely under the name of Nihilism by the Russian writer Turgenev. Realism, Eugene wrote, is the simplification of

everything into the terms of the most “obvious” explanation, the “reduction of everything men have considered ‘higher,’ the things of the mind and spirit, to the lower or ‘basic’: matter, sensation, the physical.... The Liberal is indifferent to absolute truth, an attitude resulting from excessive attachment to this world; with the Realist, on the other hand, indifference to truth becomes hostility, and mere attachment to the world becomes fanatical devotion to it.” Eugene pointed to examples of Realist “simplification” in the socialist dictators of the twentieth century, with their radically simple solutions to the most complex problems, and, more profoundly, in “the simplistic ideas of men like Marx, Freud, and Darwin, which underlie virtually the whole of contemporary thought and life.”<sup>12</sup>

The attempt of Realism to eclipse all but material reality evoked a reaction that Eugene regarded as the third stage of Nihilism: Vitalism. With the Realist utopia threatening to be an inhuman technological system, protests were raised in the name of the unplanned and unsystematic needs of human nature which are at least as essential, even for a purely worldly “happiness,” as the more obvious material needs. The Vitalist movement originally took such forms as Symbolism, occultism, and various evolutionary and “mystical” philosophies. In it, “a quite understandable lament over the loss of spiritual values becomes father, on the one hand to subjective fantasies and (sometimes) to actual Satanism, which the indiscriminating take as ‘revelations’ of the ‘spiritual’ world, and on the other hand to a rootless eclecticism that draws ideas from every civilization and every age and finds a totally arbitrary connection between the misunderstood fragments of its own debased conceptions. Pseudo-spirituality and pseudo-traditionalism, one or both, are integral elements of many Vitalist systems.”<sup>13</sup>

Eugene went on to indicate the diverse Vitalist manifestations in modern society which have come out of the restless search of people “to find a substitute for the God who was dead in their hearts.” He pointed to the popular unrest revealed in politics, the media, and the arts; to the varieties of “new thought” and “positive thinking” which try to harness and utilize a vague, immanent “force”; to spurious forms of “Eastern wisdom” which claim to invoke “powers” and



“presences”; to the indiscriminate quest for “awareness,” “realization,” and “enlightenment”; and to the “cult of nature” with its “primary” elements of the earth, the body, and sex. “Perhaps the most striking manifestation of the popular unrest,” Eugene wrote, “has been in crime, and particularly in juvenile crime.” He noted the increasing number of “absurd” crimes which, unlike the crimes of former eras, are committed for no “practical” reason: “When questioned, those apprehended for such crimes explain their behavior in the same way: it was an ‘impulse’ or an ‘urge’ that drove them, or there was a sadistic pleasure in committing the crime, or there was some totally irrelevant pretext, such as boredom, confusion, or resentment. In a word, they cannot explain their behavior at all, there is no readily comprehensible motive for it, and in consequence — and this is perhaps the most consistent and striking feature of such crimes — there is no remorse.”<sup>14</sup>

In the Vitalist stage, the criterion of truth is replaced by a new standard: the “life-giving,” the “vital.” This new, “dynamic” standard, Eugene said, underlies much of the formal criticism of contemporary art and literature, as well as of discussions of religion, philosophy, and science: “There are no qualities more prized in any of these fields today than those of being ‘original,’ ‘experimental,’ or ‘exciting’; the question of truth, if it is raised at all, is more and more forced into the background and replaced by subjective criteria: ‘integrity,’ ‘authenticity,’ ‘individuality.’”<sup>15</sup>

In concluding his discussion of this stage, Eugene wrote that “the Vitalism of the last hundred years has been an unmistakable symptom of world-weariness.... It is the product, not of the ‘freshness’ and ‘life’ and ‘immediacy’ its followers so desperately seek (precisely because they lack them), but of the corruption and unbelief that are but the last phase of the dying civilization they hate.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, Eugene believed, beyond Vitalism there can be only one more, definitive stage through which Nihilism may pass: the Nihilism of Destruction. “Here at last,” he wrote, “we find an almost ‘pure’ Nihilism, a rage against creation and against civilization that will not be appeased until it has reduced

them to absolute destruction.”<sup>17</sup> This was the Nihilism of the ruthless Russian revolutionary Sergei Nechayev (the model for Pyotr Verkhovensky in Dostoyevsky’s *The Possessed*) and of Nechayev’s one-time co-conspirator Mikhail Bakunin, who, when asked what he would do if the New Order of his dreams should come into existence, frankly replied, “Then I should at once begin to pull down again everything I had made.”<sup>18</sup> It was in this spirit, wrote Eugene, “that Lenin (who greatly admired Nechayev) assumed ruthless power and began Europe’s first experiment in totally unprincipled politics,”<sup>19</sup> and that Hitler once exulted: “We may be destroyed, but if we are, we shall drag a world with us — a world in flames.”<sup>20</sup>

Eugene followed his description of the various forms of Nihilism with an exploration of their spiritual sources. He wrote: “We shall be unprepared to understand the nature or the success of Nihilism, or the existence of systematic representatives of it like Lenin and Hitler, if we seek its source anywhere but in the primal satanic will to negation and rebellion.” Finding no rational explanation for the systematic Bolshevik campaign to uproot the Christian Faith, Eugene saw it as “a ruthless war to the death against the only force capable of standing against Bolshevism and of ‘disproving’ it. Nihilism has failed as long as true Christian faith remains alive in a single person.”<sup>21</sup>

Modern men who, in Nietzsche’s words, have “killed God” in their hearts, now have a dead God, a great void, at the center of their faith. But this, Eugene observed, is only a moment of “crisis and transition” in man’s spiritual history, at the end of which he expects a new god to appear. Modern man has not come to this point by himself. “A subtle intelligence,” Eugene wrote, lies behind the phenomenon of Nihilism: it is the work of Satan.<sup>22</sup>

Having exposed the spiritual core of Nihilism, Eugene went on to discuss the “positive” program by which it seeks to further its satanic ends: “The first and most obvious item in the program of Nihilism is the destruction of the Old Order, which was the soil, nourished by Christian Truth, in which men had their roots.... It is here that the peculiarly Nihilist virtue of *violence* comes into

play.”<sup>23</sup> After this comes a stage of transition between the Revolution of Destruction and the proposed earthly paradise, a stage known in Marxist doctrine as the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Here the “Realists,” both in the Communist and the free world, work toward the New Order, “where there are everywhere organization and efficiency, and nowhere love or reverence.” Eugene saw signs of this in the sterile “functionalism” of modern architecture, as well as in the disease of total planning: in “birth control,” in experiments that look to the control of heredity and the mind, in the “welfare state,” and in all schemes where “precision of detail is united with appalling insensitivity.”<sup>24</sup>

Eugene pointed out that the destruction of the Old Order and the organization of the new earth are only a preparation for a work more significant and more ominous than either: the “transformation of man.” This was the dream of Hitler and Mussolini, and also of philosophers like Marx and Engels, who saw a magical change to be wrought in human nature through the violence of revolution. Many contemporary philosophers and psychologists have commented on the changes in humanity in the violent twentieth century, saying that man has become uprooted and the individual “reduced” to the most primitive and basic level.

An image of the “new man” has been portrayed in the painting and sculpture that has arisen, for the most part, since the end of the Second World War. “The new art,” wrote Eugene, “celebrates the birth of a new species, the creature of the lower depths, subhumanity.” But beside this image of hopeless deformity is a current of optimism that has produced its own “positive” new man, a man “both idealistic and practical, ready and anxious to cope with the difficult problems of the day.” Both the positive and negative images, Eugene wrote, “are one in issuing from the death of man as he has hitherto been known — man living on earth as a pilgrim, knowing Heaven as his true home — and in pointing to the birth of a ‘new man’ solely of the earth, knowing neither hope nor despair save over things of this world.... The age of denial and Nihilism, having gone as far as it could, is over; the ‘new man’ no longer has enough

interest in Christian Truth to deny it; his whole attention is directed to this world.”<sup>25</sup>

**N**ihilism, in coming to the end of its program, points to the goal that lies beyond it:

“The first corollary of the Nihilist annihilation of the Old Order is the conception of a ‘new age’—‘new’ in an absolute, and not a relative, sense. The age about to begin is not to be merely the latest, or even the greatest, of a series of ages, but the inauguration of a whole new time; it is set up against all that has hitherto been.”<sup>26</sup>

The second corollary of Nihilist thought is the transformation of man, not only into a “new man,” but into a god. The various conceptions of the “new man” — found in the Realism of Marx and the Vitalism of numerous occultists and artists — are but preliminary sketches of the Superman that Nietzsche envisioned beyond Nihilism. “Dead are all the gods,” says Nietzsche’s Zarathustra: “now do we desire the Superman to live.”<sup>27</sup> The “murder” of God is a deed too great to leave men unchanged: “Shall we not ourselves have to become gods, merely to seem worthy of it?”<sup>28</sup> Ten years before Nietzsche wrote these lines, this inevitable corollary of Nihilism was anticipated by Dostoyevsky, whose Nietzschean character, Kirilov, concluded: “If there is no God, then I am God.”<sup>29</sup>

The final corollary of the Nihilist annihilation of the Old Order is “the conception of an entirely new species of order, an order which its most ardent defenders do not hesitate to call ‘Anarchy.’”<sup>30</sup> Whereas Nihilism is a question of truth, “Anarchism is a question of order — the question of what kind of order is possible *without truth*.... Nihilism is the means, Anarchism the end.”<sup>31</sup>

Eugene wrote that, in the Marxist myth, “the Nihilist State... is to ‘wither away,’ leaving a world-order that is to be unique in human history, and which it would be no exaggeration to call the millennium.” The revolutionary dream of this “Anarchist Millennium” is an “apocalyptic” dream, a strange inversion of

the Christian hope in Heaven. It is “the vision of the reign of Antichrist, the satanic imitation of the Kingdom of God.” If Nihilists see the Revolutionary goal “beyond Nihilism” as a reign of love, peace, and brotherhood, that is because they have actually begun to live in the Revolutionary Kingdom and to see everything as Satan sees it, as the contrary of what it is in the eyes of God.<sup>32</sup>

**I**N Parts One and Two, Eugene had planned to discuss the modern ideas that had begun to change people under their influence. In Part Three he had wished to describe the organization and systematization of these ideas, which required a new conception of order (Anarchism) based on a new conception of truth (Nihilism). In Part Four, he was to describe the “New Spirituality” that was to flower on these foundations, causing people to accept them as naturally and spontaneously as they once accepted Christian Truth. Although Eugene never developed Part Four beyond the form of notes and outlines, many ideas from it were incorporated fourteen years later into his book *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*. At the beginning of this part he intended to reveal the philosophical origin of the “New Spirituality.” This he saw as a reorientation stemming from the time of Immanuel Kant and German Idealism, in which man’s mind replaces God as the center of the universe. Related to this “psychocentric” view is another corollary of Kant’s philosophy: subjectivism, the idea that “what I experience is all there is,” the systematization of the worship of the self.

Both psychocentrism and subjectivism have led to what Eugene called the “cult of experience.” When man, and not the God-man Jesus Christ, is regarded as the center of existence, man becomes belittled and searches for momentary “inspirations” which make him forget the pettiness of being human in the new sense. The cult of “religious experience,” Eugene wrote, is “the substitute for the true spiritual experience — and ultimate deification or salvation — of the Christian.” Eugene wished to make clear “the abyss between these two experiences: between self-centered experience that may be ‘obtained’ (by drugs,

hypnosis, or other ‘tampering’ with the mind; or by a legitimate aesthetic or ‘cosmic’ insight), a very special experience that may give man a glimpse of other realities than the everyday... but remains powerless to transform the whole man permanently, and in modern context indeed tends to make a person think he is something very ‘special’ for having the experience, and so leads to further ensnarement in self and illusion; between this partial experience which is not ‘religious’ in itself and may be demonic (modern man’s absence of doctrine renders him totally blind to demons), and true spiritual experience, which is a real encounter with the Divine... a living experience that is patient, suffering, humble, reverent, trusting, an experience which is not necessarily ‘pleasant’ or ‘satisfying’ but may cause great sorrow and hardship, an experience which ends not in itself but in Heaven....

“The negation of Christ by modern men is precisely this rejection of true spiritual experience, which is concrete and full of suffering; by making Him into a ‘symbol’ or ‘embodiment’ of some abstract principle, one can put Him into one’s *mind* and call Him out to ‘experience’ Him at one’s pleasure.... And all of this leads to the root of the whole modern aberration: the retreat of man into his mind, away from reality, into the prison of his own illusions.”

Eugene further noted that occultism and “psychic” philosophy, which had formerly been the interest of fringe movements, were now finding their way into more conventional channels. He discussed neo-theosophical cults that claimed to have contact with highly “evolved” wise men on other planets, and he commented on their similarity to modern scientists who attempt to send and receive radio messages from outer-space beings. “Scientific ‘psychic research,’” he wrote, “will have to acknowledge the reality of ‘spirit communication,’ for they are actual phenomena; cannot the same forces that produce them produce phenomena of radio communication? If they do, modern man cannot but ‘believe’ in them, for they are ‘facts.’ These are possibilities ... which open the way to an invasion of demons which will make all the ‘irrational’ phenomena of our century appear as child’s play.”

**M**ANY would-be prophets, observing the spiritual receptivity of modern man, have foreseen a coming “Age of Spirit.” This age, being actually the time of the “New Christianity” and the reign of Antichrist, was to be discussed in Part Five, the last section of Eugene’s book. Eugene noted how a new imminent unity was being sought to replace the unity of God and His creation in the “old view.” This new unity, he said, appears in many guises: the world-state, ecumenism, the “transcendent unity of religions,” etc.—all inheritors of the “universalism” of the Enlightenment. It is seen in evolutionism, including that of the Roman Catholic thinker Teilhard de Chardin, who predicted the absorption of highly “evolved” beings into one cosmic mind. Even more alarmingly, Eugene saw it in the contemporary Roman Church itself. He perceived the emerging “New Christianity” as a kind of “Religion of Humanity,” which watered down the traditional Christian confession of absolute truth in order to unite mankind under the banner of earthly “brotherhood.”

The this-worldly religion of Antichrist, Eugene noted, will be a whole and unified pseudo-tradition. The new “unity” will superimpose itself upon the collectivist order of the Communist state. Room will be made not only for man’s economic and social needs, which Communism aims to satisfy, but also for his personal and spiritual needs. The age of Communism, having fulfilled its purpose, will end, and this will correspond to the promised “withering away of the state” of Communist doctrine.

Eugene explained why the reign of Antichrist must have a pseudo-spiritual dimension. Once the promised “peace” and security have been given to man, they will no longer be capable of inspiring idealism and will be seen for what they are: conditions or means, and not as ends. Recalling the Lord’s words “Man shall not live by bread alone,” Eugene asked: “After the problem of this-worldly organization, of government and ‘bread,’ is solved — then what? The question, perhaps, is really: what kind of circuses will the new world provide for the people who have enough bread? This is not merely a question of ‘amusement’; it

will be a question of life and death for the new governments, for if they do not provide relatively harmless circuses, the people will devise their own, which will more often than not *not* be harmless. Dostoyevsky spoke of this a century ago — the people, when given all they need to be ‘happy,’ will precisely then turn on themselves and their world in a frenzy of dissatisfaction. For the hunger of man cannot be satisfied by worldly bread; man must have otherworldly bread — or a clever substitute.”

It was the necessity of this clever substitute that led Eugene to foresee what he previously referred to as “the age of magic.” This is the goal of utopian idealism as well as occult prophecies: the age of abundance and marvels when the pseudo-religion of Antichrist will be validated and made attractive by miracles and signs. Eugene wrote that “the infinite ‘curiosity,’ as well as the spiritual hunger of men, will alike demand a magical universe to serve as surrogate for their impoverished intellectual and spiritual needs.... Magic alone can keep people ‘happy’ who have everything worldly.”

In reviewing his observations, Eugene wrote that “the modern world is unique only in the extent of its satanic deceptiveness and its nearness to the reign of Antichrist which it is preparing.” As for the “last Christians” living in the modern age, they “can only give the testimony of their Truth to the world, even to the martyrdom that the world will have to exact from them, placing their hope in the Kingdom that is ‘not of this world,’ that Kingdom whose full glory cannot even be suspected by men living in the world, the Kingdom that shall have no end.”

It was with this subject — the Kingdom of Heaven which will remain when the Kingdom of Man has passed into oblivion — that Eugene planned to conclude his book.

**I**N the decades since Eugene wrote the material for *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*, the trends and movements that he discussed have grown in proportion, and the Nihilistic ideas that underlie them have continued



to be played out in human history. In 2002 a renowned cultural commentator of our times, Phillip E. Johnson,<sup>[b]</sup> acknowledged the astuteness and accuracy of the observations made by Eugene in the early 1960s: “I recall that when I first read *Nihilism* <sup>[c]</sup> several years ago, knowing nothing else about Fr. Seraphim, I thought it was fascinating but extreme, even wild. For a long time I believed that modernist rationalism needed only to be fixed, that with some adjustment it could be set on the right path. Further reading and recent experience have taught me that the situation is much worse than that, and what at first seemed wild to me now seems like sober good sense.”<sup>33</sup>

The observer of today’s culture is continually struck by news of events which corroborate Eugene’s diagnosis of modern Nihilism. The senseless, in comprehensible crimes of which Eugene wrote — especially those committed by juveniles — have steadily grown both in scale and in number during the last few decades, to such an extent that public schools are no longer generally regarded as safe places for children. While today’s psychiatrists attempt to find abnormalities of the brain that could induce children to commit such crimes, Eugene diagnosed the deeper cause many years before: the spiritual vacuum of a Nihilistic society that has “abandoned God, Revealed Truth, and the morality and conscience dependent upon that Truth.”<sup>34</sup>

In 1973, twelve years after Eugene wrote of the Nihilist dream of the “new earth” — a world without “love or reverence,” of “total planning” and “alarming insensitivity” — the United States Supreme Court legalized abortion, and since that time over forty million unborn children have been killed in this country for very “practical” reasons. The distribution to scientists of fetal body parts from these abortions has now become a multi-million-dollar industry.

The “ultimate in experimentation,” which Eugene wrote about at the dawn of the 1960s, revealed itself shockingly in the course of that decade. Most of all, it was evident in the popular youth movements, and was heard in the popular music which, as Eugene anticipated, was to take on an “increasingly primitive and savage character.”<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, the youth movements of the 1960s and

beyond have tended to correspond to Eugene's description of the four stages of Nihilism. The optimistic hippie movement of the sixties and early seventies was an example of Vitalism acting against dead Liberalism and dry Realism, while in the decades that followed this movement gave way to manifestations of the Nihilism of Destruction in a now far more fragmented youth culture: pessimistic, anarchistic, and satanic elements, revealed especially in such "music" as death metal, black metal, thrash metal, punk, goth, grunge, and rap. Further, the contemporary youth trends, which have raised up people like the blasphemous "Madonna" as cultural heroes, provide clear evidence for Eugene's conclusion that Godless humanism must inevitably revert to subhumanism. In the dazzling, artificial image of man which today's media propagates and to which young people aspire, one sees the fulfillment of a statement made by Eugene in 1961: "The subhumanist superman is a striking figure — empty, mediocre, but 'colorful' to men who know and can conceive of nothing better."

A year earlier, in August 1960, Eugene wrote: "Modern man, in his self-love, wishes to explore every possibility open to the self — and that is why he must descend ever deeper into the mire, to find some filth that no one has wanted to explore before. All the lowest possibilities of man are to be explored in this age, the dregs must be exhumed and eaten..." Yet lower levels have been reached in the years following 1960. More significantly, this vileness no longer is reserved for fringe groups of decadents and "aware" artists, but is openly promoted for mass consumption. It is seen in the images of human torture, mutilation, and slaughter that are presented for popular entertainment (reminding one of the "harmless circuses" which Eugene said must be devised lest physically harmful ones come into being), and in the misuse and exploitation of human sexuality in practically every way imaginable.

The "sexual revolution" of the 1960s played out what Eugene had written about sex at the very beginning of that decade. Having himself emerged out of the sexual immorality that was on the rise in the free world, Eugene could well discern its meaning and its enslaving power. In notes for his book he wrote: "In

the 'free world' a great exploitive force is that of 'sex.' It seems to be today a vast, impersonal power that holds men in its jaws, leading them on not only to reproduce their kind but — thanks to the many devices for 'exploiting' this power more efficiently — to indulge this impersonal force for its own sake. Some may object that 'sex' is indeed a very 'personal' thing, but nothing could be further from the truth. Like all other human impulses, the sexual instinct may be subordinated to the power of personality and attain its proper place as an expression of married, chaste love; but only the most naive romanticist could affirm that such is the 'sex' that is exalted today. Sex as pleasure, as an expression of man's freedom to do what he pleases: this is what it means to contemporary man. Marriage, banished from the Church, has become a mere license for sexual activity; sex has become the basis of marriage, another case of the 'lower' usurping the role of the higher. The easy divorce laws make of marriage as practiced by most moderns merely a kind of legalized promiscuity.

"Promiscuity is indeed the rule. Sex is good, wholesome, free, say the moderns, use it freely with whomever you please. This attitude is revealed in the face of contemporary man: that blank, greedy, faceless, totally outward face, hungry for 'experience' of any sort, ready to exploit — let us not deny the evidence of those horrible faces — who devour anyone and everyone with whom they come in contact. How different, how utterly foreign and incomprehensible to contemporary man, is the face of the Christian ascetic, who by striving to master instead of indulge his passions reveals an inwardness undreamed of by the moderns. These moderns think they are being 'realistic' when they frankly admit their slavery to sexual impulses; well, of course, they are being 'realistic' since such slavery is indeed true of weak men, men who will not strive for anything higher than the obvious — but they are surely indulging in the wildest fancies when they think that by doing this they become 'free.' 'Sexual freedom': this coupling of words that represent totally incompatible realities (since 'sex' as practiced today is slavery) is but another instance of that modern incompetence to do anything but follow one's passions and accept whatever vulgar slogan

justifies this aim.”

It hardly needs be said how relevant this diagnosis has become in the years since Eugene wrote it. Today, the sole context of sexual activity blessed by God — which, as Eugene affirmed, is marriage — has come increasingly under attack. Nearly forty percent of the babies born in the United States are now born out of wedlock; “living together” before marriage has become the norm; homosexual activity has become accepted as a “lifestyle” rather than a sin; families are being redefined to include any combination of consensual sexual partners; and in general the attitude of sex “with whomever you please” has become the rule much more than it was in 1960. The devastated lives of children, an increasing number of whom are now being kept on prescription drugs to keep them under control, are the tragic fruit of this abandonment of the true meaning of marriage.

In the realm of “spirituality,” the currents that Eugene wrote about have also gathered momentum. The “charismatic movement” that mushroomed in the sixties and seventies showed all the signs of the “New Spirituality” and “New Christianity” he had mentioned; and he was to examine this movement in his later book *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*. The “New Age” movement, an infantile stage of the “age of magic,” has become a circus for affluent Americans for whom the “question of bread” has been solved. Its many faces — including pseudo-Christian ones such as the “creation-centered spirituality” of Matthew Fox, the gnostic “Christianity” of Elaine Pagels, and the “Christ consciousness” message of Oprah Winfrey — corroborate Eugene’s statement that the “new spirituality” of Antichrist will believe in “a world that is, like man, basically ‘innocent’ and unaffected by any kind of ‘fall.’”

Today’s New Age movement is built upon the corollaries of Nihilism that Eugene described: the concept of the inauguration of an entirely new kind of time, and the idea of the transformation of man into a god. Often the human-transformation concept is cloaked in terms of “God-realization,” or of an ape-to-man-to-god “spiritual evolution” that mirrors its naturalistic Darwinian

counterpart. One of the latest catchwords in New Age circles is precisely “transformation” — a word that resonates with the vague longing of the “new man.” As Eugene explained forty years ago: “Just as nothingness, the god of Nihilism, is but an emptiness and expectancy looking to fulfillment in the revelation of some ‘new god,’ so too the ‘new man,’ whom Nihilism has deshaped, reduced, and left without character, without faith, without orientation — this ‘new man’... has become ‘mobile’ and ‘flexible,’ ‘open’ and ‘receptive,’ he is passive material awaiting some new discovery or revelation or command that is to remold him finally into his definitive shape.”<sup>36</sup>

Also in the realm of spirituality, the “rootless eclecticism” that Eugene described has taken many forms in the last several decades. In the 1980s and early 1990s its most popular spokesman in America was the late Joseph Campbell; today it is Ken Wilber.<sup>[d]</sup> Their theories of “comparative mythology” and “integral practice” sound impressive to those who are themselves without roots, but their dilettantism is easily discerned by those who are truly grounded in traditional culture and religion.

In the political sphere, one wonders whether the collapse of the Iron Curtain and Communist power in Russia and Eastern Europe corresponds to the “withering away of the Nihilist state” described by Eugene, after which there is to be a “world-order unique in human history.” Communism has done its job: it has effectively destroyed the Old Order. Now there can be an “opening up” to make way for the next stage of the Nihilist program, directed by internationalist forces. As Eugene wrote, the final epoch will not, after all, be characterized by national disputes and the Communist stifling of man’s spiritual needs, but by a superficial world unity and a fulfilling of these needs by means of clever substitutes.

Precisely three decades before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Eugene wrote the following words, sobering in their prophetic import: “Violence and negation are, to be sure, a preliminary work; but this work is only part of a much larger plan whose end promises to be, not something better, but something

incomparably worse than the age of Nihilism. If in our own times there are signs that the era of violence and negation is passing, this is by no means because Nihilism is being ‘overcome’ or ‘outgrown,’ but because its work is all but completed and its usefulness is at an end. The Revolution, perhaps, begins to move out of its malevolent phase and into a more ‘benevolent’ one — not because it has changed its will or its direction, but because it is nearing the attainment of the ultimate goal which it has never ceased to pursue; fat with its success, it can prepare to relax in the enjoyment of this goal.”<sup>37</sup>

In 1989, during the era of *glasnost* and *perestroika* immediately preceding the fall of the Soviet Union, General Secretary of the Communist Party Mikhail Gorbachev made a revelatory statement that chillingly echoed Eugene’s prediction from the early 1960s. “Having embarked upon the road of radical reform,” Gorbachev said, “the Socialist countries are crossing the line beyond which there is no return to the past. Nevertheless, it is wrong to insist, as many in the West do, that this is the collapse of Socialism. *On the contrary, it means that the Socialist process in the world will pursue its further development in a multiplicity of forms.* Let us leave it to experts in anti-Communist propaganda to rejoice in the ‘triumph of capitalism’ in the Cold War.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, many forces in the world today — from international political organizations, banks, and corporations to the New Age movement and a host of special interest groups — are working toward the common goal of a “world-order unique in human history,” quite distinct from the Old Order of the traditional Christian worldview. At the same time Gorbachev was presaging the furtherance of International Socialism “in a multiplicity of forms,” he was calling for “a new era, a new age” to replace Cold War antagonism — a “New World Order, relying on the relevant mechanisms of the United Nations.”<sup>39</sup> And as these pronouncements were being made by the head of the soon-to-be-dissolved Soviet Union, virtually identical statements about a “New World Order” were coming from the President of the United States and from heads of state in Western Europe.

In *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God* Eugene had written: “The last hope for modern man is in fact but another of his illusions; the hope for a new age ‘beyond Nihilism’ is itself an expression of the last item in the program of the Revolution. It is by no means Marxism alone that promotes this program. There is no major power today whose government is not ‘revolutionary,’ no one in a position of authority or influence whose criticism of Marxism goes beyond the proposal of better means to an end that is equally ‘revolutionary’; to disown the ideology of the Revolution in the contemporary ‘intellectual climate’ would be, quite clearly, to condemn oneself to political powerlessness....

“The Nihilist disease is apparently to be left to ‘develop’ to its very end; the goal of the Revolution, originally the hallucination of a few fevered minds, has now become the goal of humanity itself. Men have become weary; the Kingdom of God is too distant, the Orthodox Christian way is too narrow and arduous. The Revolution has captured the ‘spirit of the age,’ and to go against this powerful current is more than modern men can do, for it requires precisely the two things most thoroughly annihilated by Nihilism: Truth and faith.”<sup>40</sup>

**I**N providing a thorough critique of the modern mentality, Eugene intended to do more than show his readers that it was false and that traditional Christianity was true. He believed that, besides confessing Christian Truth, one must recognize within *oneself* the untruth, the Nihilism that cannot but be “breathed in” during these pestilential times. “The ‘Nihilism’ of our age exists in all,” he wrote, “and those who do not, with the aid of God, choose to combat it in the name of the fullness of Being of the living God, are swallowed up in it already. We have been brought to the edge of the abyss of nothingness, stand on thin soil above it, and, whether we recognize its nature or not, we will, through affinity for the ever-present nothingness within us, be engulfed in it beyond all hope of redemption — unless we cling, in full and certain faith (which, doubting, does not doubt), in Christ, without Whom we are truly nothing.”<sup>41</sup>

Eugene worked on *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God* at a time

when many thinkers, including Christian ones like Thomas Merton, were speaking of the “crisis” of the modern age. To Eugene, this crisis — as a direct corollary of the abandonment of absolute Truth and the forgetting of God — could be overcome only on the battleground of the individual human soul. He wrote: “Facile interpretations of the ‘crisis,’ of the ‘choice’ before us, abound; to take either side of these illusionary interpretations is damnation. The true crisis is now, as it has ever been, within us; it is our acceptance or rejection of Christ. Christ is our crisis; He demands from us all or nothing, and this ‘problem’ He presents us is the only one that need be answered.... Do we choose God, Who alone IS, or ourselves, who without God are nothing?—this is our only choice. Our age would have us deny, forget, neglect the question; and this is to choose ourselves, nothingness, the abyss, Hell. Our age is founded on nothingness; but this nothingness, inexplicably to us, presents, for those who can still perceive, the crisis of all men in all ages most clearly and unmistakably. Our age tells us, if we can listen, to choose the living God.”<sup>[42](#)</sup>



# 21

## *Crisis*

*Deep thinking is attainable only by a man of deep feeling.*

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge<sup>1</sup>

*He who has not the spirit of his age, of his age has all the misery.*

—Voltaire

**A**T the time he was working on *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*, Eugene wrote a separate essay entitled “The Philosophy of the Absurd,”<sup>2</sup> in which he explored one of the cultural outcomes of the modern abandonment of Truth. He stated that “nothing in the world — not love, not goodness, not sanctity — is of any value, or indeed has any meaning, if man does not survive death.” With the loss of meaning arising from loss of faith in God and the immortality of the human soul, there is no longer any center to hold things together. It is only natural that many modern artists and thinkers have come to depict the world as absurd and man as empty and dehumanized. “Absurdism,” Eugene wrote, “is, one might say, the last state in the dialectical process of humanism away from Christian truth.... The fact that the world fails to make sense could only occur to men who have once believed, and have good reason to believe, that it does make sense. Absurdism cannot be understood apart from its Christian origins.

“Christianity is, supremely, coherence, for the Christian God has ordered everything in the universe, both with regard to everything else and with regard to Himself, Who is the beginning and end of all creation; and the Christian whose faith is genuine finds this Divine coherence in every aspect of his life and

thought. For the absurdist, everything falls apart, including his own philosophy, which can only be a short-lived phenomenon; for the Christian, everything holds together and is coherent, including those things which in themselves are incoherent. The incoherence of the absurd is, in the end, part of a larger coherence.... Never has such disorder reigned in the heart of man and in the world as today; but this is precisely because man has fallen away from a truth and a coherence that have been revealed in their fullness only in Christ.”

Eugene believed that the artists of the absurd do “express a partial insight” in that they agonizingly show existence without God to be a kind of living hell. Many truth-seekers have arrived, as did Eugene himself, at this point of disillusionment in the course of their search; and it was for this reason that Eugene felt more sympathy for the absurdist than for the happy humanist who cannot face the logical end of his philosophy. To remain at this point, however, is deadly; for, as Eugene indicated, “*there is no annihilation, and there is no incoherence*, all nihilism and absurdism are in vain. The flames of hell are the last and awful proof of this: every creature testifies, with or against his will, to the ultimate coherence of things. For this coherence is the love of God, and this love is found even in the flames of hell; it is in fact the love of God itself which torments those who refuse it.”<sup>3</sup>

**O**THER important ideas which came out of Eugene during this period are found in his seventy-two-page philosophical journal, which dates from July 30, 1960 to April 3, 1962. Here he spoke of true art as a reflection of the artist’s relationship to ultimate reality; of the twentieth century as the “age of superstition”; of the Beast of the Apocalypse as the apotheosis of self-love, in whom everyone will worship himself; of the Olympic Games as another means of unifying the world on an external basis; of Hitler’s National Socialism as a product of, rather than a reaction to, the modern Revolution; of the parable of the Prodigal Son as an instructive parallel to the modern age; of Judas as the first “modern man.” He also wrote further on the use of sexuality as an “impersonal

force” by which to govern man: “Just as modern man has been made into a ‘political animal,’ so has he been ‘sexualized’—brought to an awareness of and preoccupation with sex that is proving to be another disintegrating force upon him. And so we await the ‘leader’ who can channel this newly loosed energy, just as Hitler did.”<sup>4</sup>

In August of 1960, while sitting on the shores of Bon Tempe Lake, Eugene made this entry in his journal:

“How marvelously quiet — only the sounds of a few water birds, and a few land birds behind me. High up, beyond the far end of the gently rippling lake, the Mountain. The Spirit of God is here — but there is no pantheistic confusion of Him with nature. The marvelous scene before me may be obliterated in the twinkling of an eye, and it would be as if it had not been. Indeed, is it not the Christian teaching?—rejoice in these things today, and fear God in them now; take no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow — the Apocalypse.”<sup>5</sup>

In this description of nature, one may note the flavor of ancient Chinese texts. Even Eugene’s reflection on the fleetingness of material things is characteristically Chinese, though he articulated it according to Christian teaching. But beyond this, this short passage is a succinct statement of how he viewed reality. It was not of course the created world that he hated, but rather what modern man has made of it by worshipping himself instead of God. “It is not the world that is irrational, but man,” he had written in his treatment of absurdism.<sup>[a]</sup> And yet, even amidst the evils of the modern age, he sought to find goodness. In his journal he reflected: “Evil can never even exist except beside the good. If ours were a totally evil age there would be no exit from it, and the pessimists of the age would be right. But we believe in the creation of the Christian God, not the Manichean demiurge, and so we must believe that, while the modern age is primarily a manifestation of evil, it is at the same time and in a much less obvious way, a manifestation of Good. It is not ‘good’ in the shallow sense of the ‘enlightened’ thinkers of the age, who never penetrate beyond the obvious (and what better example is there of spiritual blindness than this — to

accept only what the ‘age’ gives one, to be a slave of history), but it is Good in a mystical sense that may only be penetrated by those who are able first to suffer in intense form its great evil.” To seek the inner meaning of the modern age, he said, is to seek “not only what it reveals to us of man’s weakness, but even more what it reveals to us of God’s greatness and His incomprehensible love. Let petty minds tremble at this paradox, but let us Christians seek to experience its meaning, insofar as we are able.”<sup>6</sup>

In the passage written on the shore of Bon Tempe Lake, Eugene expressed his profound love of nature, a love that remained with him throughout his life. He believed that “only he who loves God can love the creation which comes from God. To love creation (or anything, for that matter) one must love it as it truly is; and since creation comes from God, one can only love it as from God and cannot help loving God thereby as well.”<sup>[b]</sup> At the same time, however, Eugene actually felt “guilty” about enjoying nature *too much*. This feeling was born of his fundamentally *ascetic* worldview, from which his entire philosophy was also derived. No matter how beautiful was God’s creation, it was subject to corruption. It would one day pass away, while Eugene himself would not; ultimately he was not meant for it. God’s creation was indeed good, but it was not perfect. “If it were perfect,” he observed, “men would be satisfied with it alone and not be led by its ‘broken’ character to what must be above it.”<sup>7</sup>

**W**E have seen how, before his conversion, Eugene suffered enough to know that complete fulfillment and happiness were not to be found in this life; and how, even after he accepted Christ, his deadness to the world caused him to suffer profound loneliness. He understood that Christianity was by nature ascetic, looking beyond this world and its inevitable end. So foreign was his otherworldly outlook to the spirit of his times that even contemporary writers whom he otherwise admired — such as Buber, Berdyaev, and Merton — were expressing hopes in “one world government,” “the abolition of war,” and “the final union of mankind.” “And so,” wrote Eugene, “it is still only the lonely ones

who experience the ‘end’; everyone else has ‘interpreted’ that end to fit their own desires. Only the lonely ones dare to live it in fact, in full awareness (as full as men may know) of what it is.”<sup>8</sup>

In referring to these “lonely ones” who “suffer in intense form the great evil of the modern age,”<sup>9</sup> Eugene was of course counting himself among them. He looked on his life in the world as a form of crucifixion. A telling passage in his journal reads:

“Let not us, who would be Christians, expect anything else from it than to be crucified. For to be Christian is to be crucified, in this time and in any time since Christ came for the first time. His life is the example — and warning — to us all. We must be crucified personally, mystically; for through crucifixion is the only path to resurrection. If we would rise with Christ, we must first be humbled with Him — even to the ultimate humiliation, being devoured and spit forth by the uncomprehending world.

“And we must be crucified outwardly, in the eyes of the world; for Christ’s Kingdom is not of this world, and the world cannot bear it, even a single representative of it, even for a single moment. The world can only accept Antichrist, now or at any time.

“No wonder, then, that it is hard to be a Christian — it is not hard, it is impossible. No one can knowingly accept a way of life which, the more truly it is lived, leads the more surely to one’s own destruction. And that is why we constantly rebel, try to make life easier, try to be half-Christian, try to make the best of both worlds. We must ultimately choose — our felicity lies in one world or the other, not in both.

“God give us the strength to pursue the path to crucifixion; there is no other way to be a Christian.”<sup>10</sup>

“**T**HERE is no answer to the question ‘Why?’”: such was Friedrich Nietzsche’s definition of his philosophy of nihilism. Eugene, having failed to find that answer in modern Western society, had concluded that the whole

society was infected, to a greater or lesser degree, with nihilism. It is true that the mainstream religion of that society *had* given an answer, but the form the answer took did not ring true to Eugene; and thus Eugene repudiated even mainstream religion as a less evident form of nihilism. If the majority of contemporary Christians really did accept the answer that Christ brought — namely, that this life is only a preparation for the eternal Kingdom of Heaven, in which all things here are fulfilled and given meaning — then they certainly did not, Eugene believed, *live* as though they did. He held that “the Antichrist is not to be (primarily) found among the great deniers, but among the small affirmers — among the ‘Christians’ whose ‘Christ’ is only on the lips, among the ‘religious’ whose ‘religion’ easily accommodates itself to the world, among the prophets of a ‘new’ age of ‘spiritual renewal’ who seek this renewal in the ‘Kingdom of this world’ and not above.”<sup>11</sup>

In Eugene’s view, the “heaven” of such lukewarm Christians — a shadowy realm where one takes one’s “deserved rest” after a life of toil — is but “an emotional projection, a consolation for those who would rather not face the implications of their actual disbelief.”<sup>12</sup> Having himself become a Christian after an agonizing search for Truth, and knowing that to live this Truth meant daily crucifixion, Eugene perceived that these people of weak, compromising faith were concerned first of all with being comforted in this world. They could do the “right” things according to worldly standards, feel pious, and feel totally assured of ample rewards after they die. In the words of T. S. Eliot:

Our age is an age of moderate virtue  
And of moderate vice  
When men will not lay down the Cross  
Because they will never assume it.<sup>13</sup>

On being exposed to what he saw as “comfortable Christianity,” Eugene would be filled with bitterness and despair. During a visit to Carmel in the

summer of 1961, he vented his feelings in his journal:

“The end of another descent into the maelstrom,<sup>[\[c\]](#)</sup> into the life of the common people. It is good for me, for here I see the breeding ground of Antichrist. All the fanatic anti-Christian movements of the modern age become clearly comprehensible after a visit to the ‘Christians’ of Carmel — they are not even lukewarm, and their evil, though real, is so petty that anyone but a crucified Christian would be driven to frenzy by it.... All the madness and frenzy and evil of the centuries is bred in this comfortable, respectable, secure sink of Hell.”<sup>[14](#)</sup>

But Eugene’s Christian conscience troubled him. He knew he was going against God by being consumed with such hatred for his fellow man. Trying to reconcile within himself his stormy feelings, he wrote: “But how the Devil tempts me; he wants me to see that these gentle folk of Hell are not even human — is it indeed possible to see in them the image of God?

“The whole world is given over to the Evil One. God give us who would be Christians the strength to suffer crucifixion in the midst of these people, and even *for their sake*. Oh, we are weak who hate where there is cause for hate — God give us the humility to love those whom we should, by the best worldly standards, hate. To love the hateful — is perhaps the Saint’s first duty.”

Even here, Eugene realized that he had not gone far enough. He had told himself that he should love the hateful, but he had not yet renounced his conviction — which he knew was wrong — that the people around him were deserving of hatred. And so he came to the only conclusion that could be truly pleasing to God, Who accepts the sacrifice of a broken spirit. “But let us look more deeply,” he wrote at last. “Is not the most hateful one myself?”<sup>[15](#)</sup>

Thus did Eugene struggle to humble his proud and rebellious spirit, which had to be tempered and transformed in the fire of God’s love. In calling an apostate world to repentance and humility, he knew he first had to labor for these virtues himself. He feared that, in feeling himself above the “common people,” he was failing to recognize his participation in their “common sins,” and that, in so thoroughly repudiating the *whole world which lieth in wickedness* (I John

5:19), he was failing to rejoice in what God had given him in this life. He wrote the following prayer in his journal:

“O God, do not desert us who try to remain faithful to Thee in these last days, when the darkness would overwhelm us, when even the world which Thou didst create good weighs upon us with the sin and evil accumulated in centuries of disobedience and self-will. Seldom now do we find joy in this world which Thou madest for our delight. Oh, it is our sins that make this world so heavy, that we know; we participate fully, we who would still be faithful to Thee, in the net of sin and evil that drag the world down into the abyss.

“But still we do cry out to Thee, O Lord, when the whole world has abandoned Thee. How long? how long, O Lord, wilt Thou leave us in darkness?

“We have little faith; we would have a sign. How weak we are, and we presume to admonish a world in whose sins we fully participate. O Lord, have mercy. But may Thy return be soon, O Lord, for the night falls fast, and all hope vanishes from the face of this old earth.”<sup>16</sup>

**T**HIS period of bitter repudiation of the world was, perhaps, necessary for Eugene’s spiritual and philosophical development. Years later, when he had shed his anger and bitterness, he would smile at the mention of some of the writings he produced during this period, and would say he was a “crazy convert” then. And yet these writings possess a striking intensity, a youthful ardor that comes to a man only once in life. The writings produced by Eugene in subsequent years were different in tone, and possessed a more commanding vision of the Good that was to counteract the evil of the present age, but in many of their essential points they mirrored his early Christian writings.

If Eugene’s negation of the spirit of Antichrist in the world was a stage in the process of his spiritual growth, what lay beyond it? He was not content with just possessing the Orthodox revelation of Truth, nor even with sitting in isolation and writing critiques of modern society. His love and zeal for Truth demanded that he do more. His friend Jon, who had introduced him to



Orthodoxy, had already been received into the Church. Recently Jon had even seen the publication of a book he had written, *The Transfigured Cosmos*: one of the first introductory books on Orthodox spirituality to appear in the English language.<sup>17</sup> To Eugene, however, Jon's involvement in the Orthodox Church seemed too abstract, based too much in the appreciation of Orthodoxy's intellectual profundity and outward splendor. Eugene, who believed that one of the diseases of modern civilization was the "worship of ideas," was determined that the Truth enter *practically* into the whole of his life. Orthodoxy demands death to oneself. Jon could not attain to this; but Eugene, who had already died to the world, wanted to die for the Truth. Just being an outward member of the Orthodox Church would not, he felt, satisfy his thirst for otherworldliness. He longed to enter into the Church's very heart.

Eugene needed two things: first, someone who came from *within* the Church's heart to bring him into it; and secondly, a means of devoting his life to it. He was lost on both counts. He had not yet become close to a living contact with Orthodox tradition, to a Christian equivalent of Gi-ming Shien. And the thought of one day serving the Church in one of its paid positions filled him with apprehension, first of all because of his feeling of unworthiness, and secondly because he feared to take the Church for granted and thus lose the heavenly image he had of her.

Eugene was pained at heart. He yearned as always for the Kingdom of Heaven, but he knew he had not fulfilled his designation on earth. As he continued to endure the tension this caused within him, a crisis occurred that made his predicament more immediate. In 1961 he fell ill with an intestinal disorder which caused him tremendous pain. At the time he decided to keep this to himself, to suffer in silence. He did, however, write down in his journal these poignant thoughts on his suffering:

"Why do men learn through pain and suffering, and not through pleasure and happiness? Very simply, because pleasure and happiness accustom one to satisfaction with the things given in this world, whereas pain and suffering drive

one to seek a more profound happiness beyond the limitations of this world. I am at this moment in some pain, and I call on the Name of Jesus — not necessarily to relieve the pain, but that Jesus, in Whom alone we may transcend this world, may be with me during it, and His will be done in me. But in pleasure I do not call on Him; I am content then with what I have, and I think I need no more. And why is a philosophy of pleasure untenable?—because pleasure is impermanent and unreliable, and pain is inevitable. In pain and suffering Christ speaks to us, and thus God is kind to give them to us; yes, and evil too — for in all of these we glimpse something of what must lie beyond, if there really exists what our hearts most deeply desire.

“But how doubtful would all these speculations be, how founded on nothing but human fancy, had not Christ come to show us, who else were blind.”<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps out of his dislike for modern doctors and hospitals, Eugene did not go to a doctor. Instead he checked his unusual symptoms in medical books, and concluded that he was suffering from a fatal malady. Whether his self-diagnosis was accurate we cannot say; but, as Alison has observed, “Eugene was not a hypochondriac. He did not imagine things.”

Whatever the case may have been, he later affirmed that, at the time, he was convinced he was dying. He thought he should trust in the justice of God and accept his ailment as a punishment for the sins he had renounced, knowing that *the wages of sin is death* (Rom. 6:23). But he could not keep resistance from rising within him. Something, he felt, was wrong; something was missing. Could God have fated him to die already, before giving him a chance to justify his existence? Once, when he was writing philosophical reflections in his journal and was tormented at the same time by physical pain, he was overcome by faintheartedness. The old rebel within him came out unbidden, and he began to rage, albeit indirectly, at a seemingly unjust God, only to break down in the end in contrition:

“Do we weary of life and long for rest, faintly cursing the world and whoever it was that brought us into it for leaving us in a vacuum of boredom

when we are not in pain?—again we do this out of hatred of God and out of unwillingness to be fully human — man in the image of God. In everything we do, we curse or we bless God, this unfathomable Father who, it seems, never tells us what He wants of us, withdraws when we beg Him to speak, smites us with plague when we advance in righteousness and love, and lets the world go on its way with no sign that He is watching or cares — and these lines, too, are written out of hatred and blindness. God, have mercy!”<sup>19</sup>

Toward the end of 1961, Eugene visited an art store in San Francisco. As he paused to look at a selection of postcards on a rotating rack, his eyes fell upon a photograph of an old Serbian icon of the Mother of God.<sup>[d]</sup> He started to pray, but again could not hold back the storm raging inside him. It was the kind of anger born out of confusion, of straining but not being able to see what lies ahead. He tore his heart before the Mother of God, revealing to her the desperate state of his soul. “You gave birth to Him Who gave me life,” he prayed, “to Him Who came to earth so that having, acquiring, consuming Him, we can go to heaven. Make sense out of my life. I still have talents — let them not be wasted. Grant me to enter your Son’s Church, His saving enclosure, into *the heart of hearts*. Grant me to serve your Son!”

In his desperation he spun the postcard rack around and quickly left the store.<sup>20</sup>

# PART III





Eugene with his cat, "Alexander." San Francisco, early 1960s.

## *A Revelation of Orthodoxy in the New World*

*Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

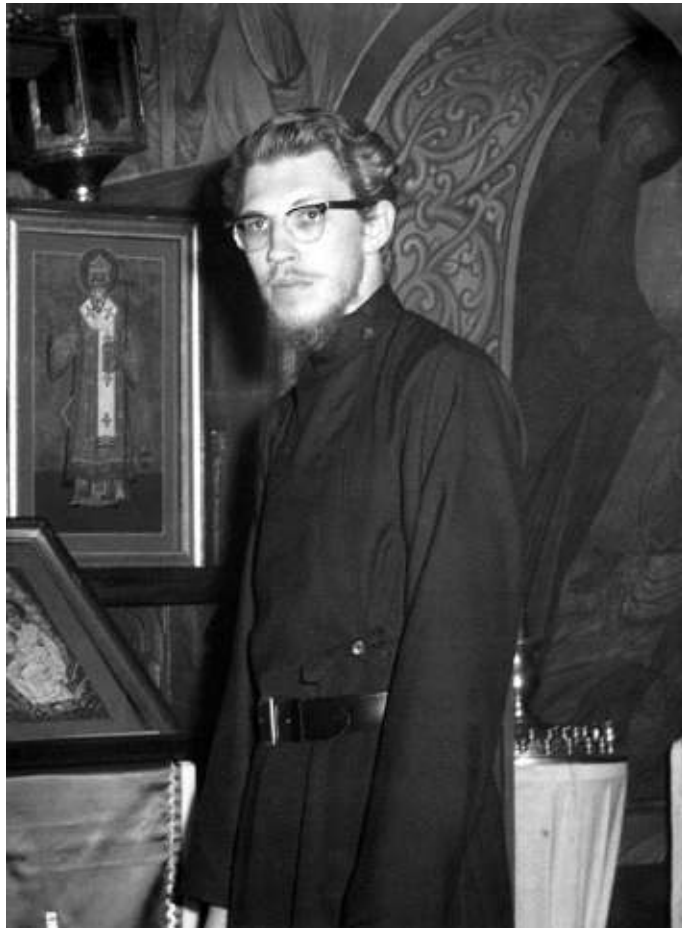
—Matthew 7:7

**E**UGENE'S prayer for a way to serve God had not gone unheard. Only a few days later it would be answered by the arrival of one who was at that time praying for the very same thing. Eugene had never met this person, a young Russian man six months older than himself, named Gleb Dimitrievich Podmoshensky. It was known only to the Lord, to Whom they both prayed, that the paths of their lives would soon be bound together.

Gleb came from a background much different from that of Eugene. Since he was of Russian descent, the outward circumstances of his life afforded him both more hardships and more access to the ancient Orthodox worldview. Unlike Eugene, he had been able to discover his Orthodox roots within the culture of his immediate ancestors, and thus he had already received a rich spiritual formation.

Gleb was twenty-eight years old when he met Eugene. He was about six feet tall, with brown hair and a thin beard. His almond-shaped eyes, slanting forehead and high cheekbones bespoke Asiatic ancestry: Mongol blood mixed in with the Russian. He had big bones and strong hands. Extroverted and creative, he was one to take charge of situations. He had a magnetic personality and could captivate listeners with his gift of storytelling. From his mother's family, which had worked in the theater and ballet, he had inherited a definite flair for the dramatic, with a tendency to humorous exaggeration reminiscent of Dickens. By

temperament he was an artist, and he looked at life as such. Largely working on artistic impulses, he was often impatient, unpredictable, and erratic. He was extremely energetic, and was seldom seen not going at full throttle. Partly through the influence of his spiritual preceptor, Fr. Adrian (of whom more will be said later), he had developed an uncanny insight into human nature. At times he would come up with a diagnosis of a person which, though no one else would have thought in the same terms, would ultimately prove to be true.



Seminarian Gleb Podmoshensky in the church of Holy Trinity Monastery/ Seminary, 1959.

Gleb was a man moved by big ideas, of the stuff that “starving artists” are made of. In this respect he was of the same stamp as Eugene, despite all the obvious differences in their personalities. Since his discovery of the riches of the Orthodox Faith and his subsequent conversion, Gleb had become a caring,

giving person who took personal interest in alleviating the plight of others. It was for this reason, perhaps, that God chose him to help Eugene break out of his shell of bitterness and isolation, and unlock the kind and caring heart that lay within. But there was another reason why Gleb's entrance into Eugene's life would be seen to be Providential: Gleb possessed a special talent for infusing others with his big ideas, inspiring them to serve God. This ability had been evidenced during his years as a seminarian at Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York, where he had helped set several young pilgrims on a path of lifelong service to the Church.



Vladimir Tenkevitch (†2003).  
Photograph taken ca. 1961.

In 1961 Gleb visited San Francisco. Having recently graduated from the seminary at Holy Trinity Monastery, he was on a long missionary pilgrimage that had already taken him to Alaska and Canada; and California was his last stop before he returned to the monastery and eventually to his home in Boston. He had funded this trip by giving slide shows for various Orthodox parishes on the subject of monasticism in America today. When he was in San Francisco, news of his shows spread among the Russian community there, and he was asked to give presentations in the city's churches. "Thus it was," Gleb recalls, "that I met Mrs. Maria Shakhmatova, the former matroness of the St. Tikhon of Zadonsk Orphanage in San Francisco, which had been founded by one of the



greatest Orthodox ascetics of modern times, Archbishop John Maximovitch. She greeted me with joy, as if she had known me for years. At once she began to insist that I meet one of her former orphans, who had definite religious inclinations and whom, she said, I should help to go to a seminary. Shortly thereafter I met this young man, Vladimir Tenkevitch, and we became friends. He was younger than myself and full of ideas new to me: he wanted to be a missionary to Norway and go to the Moscow Theological Academy. He was aware of the need of missionary work among Americans, and wanted me to meet one of these Americans. I agreed to go a day or so later, after the Liturgy of the Feast of the Entrance of the Most Holy Mother of God into the Temple.

“That day [November 21/December 4]<sup>[a]</sup> I received Holy Communion in the Fulton Street Cathedral,<sup>[b]</sup> and we walked quite a distance downtown to Sutter Street. The day was sunny and, as was usual for San Francisco, cold and windy. We were to visit a Berkeley university student who had given up a brilliant career in the Sinology Department in order to write a book on the philosophy of nihilism, and who was supporting himself by washing dishes in a restaurant just to be left alone by the academic world which he abhorred.”

Eugene’s apartment was on the first floor. Vladimir and Gleb knocked on the window. Seeing that the door was already open, they walked right in. They entered a large room, fairly dark. Part of one wall was covered with icons, illumined by a suspended vigil lamp. In front of these icons stood Eugene, wearing a green sweater, holding a pipe, and looking very much the reserved, gentlemanly intellectual. He bowed respectfully to his guests. As he later admitted, he felt he had somehow seen Gleb before.

Suddenly Gleb exclaimed, according to his “apostolic” custom, “Peace be to this house!”

Eugene looked at him inquisitively and rather cautiously.

“Where’s the plug?” Gleb added.

“I beg your pardon?” responded Eugene. Noticing the slide projector which Gleb was carrying and which, as a rule, always accompanied him in his travels,

Eugene pointed to an electrical outlet on the nearest wall. Immediately Gleb plugged in his slide projector and began to shoot on the wall a series of slides, many of which he had taken himself. The show was entitled “Holy Places in America.”

Before Eugene’s amazed expression, Gleb recalls, “a new world of Apostolic Orthodoxy revealed itself. Color icons and portraits of saints and righteous ones of America; scenes of Blessed Fr. Herman’s Spruce Island in Alaska; renewed miracle-working icons that had been brought to America from Shanghai; abbesses and schemamonks in America;[\[c\]](#) Canadian sketes; Holy Trinity Monastery and New Diveyevo Convent in New York, which brought the tradition of the Optina Elders to America, and so on. I gave a brief explanation of the slides, and of the phenomenon of the martyrdom of Holy Russia. Finally I told of the martyric fate of my father and its consequences, which had brought about my conversion to Christ and had eventually brought me here.

“The lecture was finished. My host, Eugene Rose, the future Fr. Seraphim, drawing in his breath, said, ‘What a revelation!’”

## *Holy Russia in America*

*In the conditions of emigration, when the Russian people, confused in the midst of foreign conditions of life and non-Orthodoxy, were caught in the whirlpool of fate, the Lord helped us to establish... the Orthodox way of life, a church atmosphere of the quietness of Christ and of godliness; to establish Holy Russia in a foreign land.*

—Fr. Adrian Rymarenko of New Diveyevo Convent, Spring Valley,  
New York<sup>1</sup>

**E**UGENE’S first meeting with Gleb was indeed a catalyst in his life. In a letter written less than a year afterward, Eugene stated: “For myself, my own faith grew rather gradually, as a more or less ‘existential thing,’ until the stunning experience of meeting a Christian (a young Russian [man]) for whom nothing mattered but the Kingdom of the world to come.”<sup>2</sup>

Let us now go back and trace the personal history of Gleb, whose ideas and inspirations were soon to help chart the course of Eugene’s life. In giving Gleb’s background, we will also be introducing the setting that Eugene was about to enter: a realm that Gleb, following his spiritual preceptors, called “Holy Russia in America.”

The first thirteen years of Gleb’s life were spent in Europe. Before he had come into the world, his parents had fled from Russia to Latvia to escape Communism. He was born in the city of Riga on March 26, 1934, and as an infant was baptized into the Orthodox Church. Soon the tentacles of Communism spread into Latvia as well. When Gleb was only six years old, his

father Dimitry was arrested and sent to the terrible Vorkuta concentration camp in Russia, located thirty miles north of the Arctic Circle, in order to labor as a slave in the coal mines. The shock of suddenly losing his father affected Gleb profoundly. He would pray with all his heart, especially around Christmastime, for God to return his father to him, but his father never came. It was not until fifty years later that he learned for certain that his father had died in the camps.[\[a\]](#)

Gleb and his sister Ija were raised solely by their mother Nina. Nina was descended from two families of artists in Russia: her paternal uncle was Michael Fokine, one of the greatest choreographers of all time, and her maternal uncle was Pavel Filonov, founder of Russian abstract art. From her, Gleb acquired a love for classical arts of all kinds, and a sensitivity to refined beauty.

During World War II, Gleb was evacuated with his sister and mother to Germany, where they lived in poverty and uncertainty in refugee camps. In 1949 they were able to immigrate to America, where life continued to be fraught with troubles. Gleb's mother became ill; and the seventeen-year-old Gleb, while attending the High School of Music and Art in New York City, had to work hard in order to support her together with his younger sister, who suffered from epilepsy.

While attending college in Boston, Gleb, like Eugene, entered a period of desperate soul-searching. His mother, being of the Russian intelligentsia, had not raised him in the Orthodox Church. Nearly all his life had been difficult, and most difficult of all had been the absence of the strong hand of a father. He looked at other people his age, who had fathers who provided for them, protected them, cared for them, and guided them along life's path, and he cursed the fate that had deprived him of this. Now he had to know *why* he had to keep struggling to support himself and his family. As he himself writes: "I had murder in my heart; I was suicidal. My rebellion was not the popularized rich-boy frustration of the 1950s beatnik, which was like what they said about Tolstoy: 'going crazy on a full stomach.' No, I was miserable because I had no answers to my questions, and I took them dead seriously.... I wanted life, but I *had* to know

why. To live just because I was born, in order to aimlessly suffer and die? I did not ask to be born! I did want to live; but I had already surpassed a state of such despair when everything becomes unbearably hideous, allowing some infernal energy of total indifference to take hold of one's whole being, removing all natural fear. This state might be called 'the silent horror.' Having experienced this, I know what goes on with the suicidal young people of today. I was one of them. I was eighteen/nineteen years old."

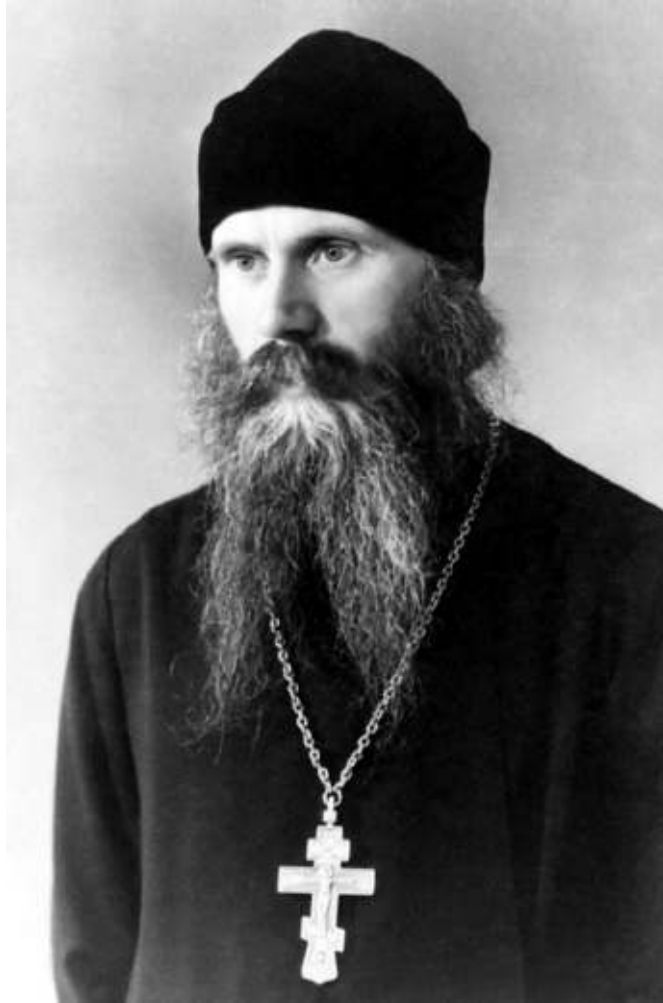
Only the grace of God was able to deliver Gleb from such a state. While standing on a bridge in Boston contemplating suicide, he was suddenly struck by the memory of several color pictures of a Saint he had known about in childhood, St. Sergius of Radonezh. This fourteenth-century Russian ascetic had lived as man was intended to live: with God in the bosom of nature. The thought whispered to Gleb: "Give it a chance; see if such a genuine life of purity, away from the world and in unison with nature, is a reality. If it is not, and all is just a daydreamer's delusion, a fairy tale, an 'opium of the people'—then take your life...."

Then something else pulled Gleb back from the abyss. One evening around Christmas, as he was dragging his cold, wet feet down Symphony Road in Boston, a total stranger unexpectedly gave him a free ticket and led him into Symphony Hall, where he attended a grand performance of Handel's *Messiah*. He wept for joy as the music, the magnificent Hallelujah chorus, spoke directly to his soul. Through this work of high art and transcendent beauty he began to perceive — not logically or rationally — that man is a spiritual being, and that what he had been seeking all these years had been simply — God.

But it was not until Gleb made his first pilgrimage to the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Monastery in Jordanville, New York, that everything made sense to him. There for the first time he encountered the Faith of his fathers in its full glory. Remembering how he arrived at the monastery church on the eve of Palm Sunday, he writes: "As the doors opened for the Vigil of Christ's Entry into Jerusalem and I heard the magnificent, deafening double chorus, coming

antiphonally from both sides of the altar, I immediately recognized that same glorious feeling of Handel's Hallelujah, which I had been searching for in churches and only now finally got hold of — and my heart was won! I was born again to life in Christ.”

**H**OLY Trinity Monastery was the main spiritual center of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. There Gleb was taken under the wing of the young and energetic Hierodeacons<sup>[b]</sup> Vladimir Sukhobok. A short monk with bright green eyes, Fr. Vladimir overflowed with joy and Christ-like love. Gleb recalls: “After Compline in the evening, Fr. Vladimir said to me, ‘Let’s take a walk to the cemetery.’ He was in *klobuk*<sup>[c]</sup> and mantle. He was absolutely jubilant, as if he would be dancing if he could. He said, ‘You want to talk?’ I was actually weighing him to know whether I could reveal to him the innermost part of my soul. We started walking, and then he said, ‘Let me first tell you who *I* am, and then you tell me who *you* are.’”



Fr. Vladimir of Jordanville (1922–88).

Fr. Vladimir unfolded his own story, which in some respects resembled Gleb's life. Born in the southern Russian province of Chernigov, Fr. Vladimir, at the age of nineteen, had been conscripted by the occupying German forces during World War II. In Soviet Russia his father had been an atheist and his mother had refrained from telling her children about religion; but as the boy left her, never to see her again, she told him, "Be aware: you've been baptized." In Germany he worked as an *Ostarbeiter*,<sup>[d]</sup> digging people out from under the rubble after the American bombing of Berlin. It was there, in postwar Germany, that the lonely youth encountered God for the first time. He was led to Fr. Adrian Rymarenko, a Russian priest of indomitable faith who at that time had formed a Christian community of forty to fifty lay people, mostly impoverished

Russian refugees, in the German town of Wendlingen. Fr. Adrian continually imparted his own inspiration to others. It was through his influence that Fr. Vladimir decided to become a monk, first in Germany and later in Jordanville.

“Fr. Vladimir’s narrative was long,” Gleb continues, “—about two hours. He revealed to me what made him tick, his inner world. I was overjoyed that I had met a man who was a normal human being, who had similar problems, who spent time with me, condescended to my unworthiness, talked with me, laughed and joked.

“When Fr. Vladimir’s story was finished, my heart was opened. It began to bubble. I wanted so much to say what was in my heart. And then he said to me, ‘Now you tell me your story.’ I poured out everything: my life, my unhappiness, my confusion, my dilemma. My conversion actually took place right there, in the middle of the night, between the cemetery and the monastery. I was *very* inspired by that talk. I felt I had found someone who *cared*.”

What Gleb called his conversion, it will be seen, occurred at the very moment when he realized he had found a father-figure in Fr. Vladimir. His conversion marked a dramatic change in the eyes of all who knew him. Before, he had commonly been known as “Gloomy Gleb.” Now he was deeply happy, with a sense of purpose.

Through Fr. Vladimir, Gleb was introduced to the ascetical, mystical dimension of Orthodox Christianity. The first book Fr. Vladimir gave him to read was the Life of the God-illuminated visionary, St. Seraphim of Sarov (†1833), one of the most beloved saints of the Russian land. This was followed by a Life of St. Sergius of Radonezh, and then by the classic book on inward prayer, *The Way of a Pilgrim*.

Gleb’s soul thirstily drank in books by and about the saints of Holy Russia. He discovered that, besides Saints Sergius and Seraphim, there was a whole host of “desert-dwelling”<sup>[e]</sup> ascetics who lived in communion with God in the vast forests of Russia right up to our own century. He was especially moved by the Lives of the Elders of Optina Monastery, who, having originally come from



among the desert-dwelling hermits of the Roslavl forest, comprised one of the most extraordinary spiritual lineages in Church history. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Optina Elders had a tremendous impact on Russian society, eliciting a nationwide blossoming of sanctity. Fulfilling the ancient prophetic ministry of the Church,<sup>[f]</sup> they were given the grace to see into human hearts and heal the wounds of soul and body. Their prophecies and Divinely inspired counsel attracted spiritual seekers from all over Russia, including the writers Dostoyevsky, Gogol, Leontiev, and Tolstoy.

**A**gain through Fr. Vladimir, Gleb was to meet a close disciple of St. Nektary, the last Optina Elder. This disciple was that very priest, Fr. Adrian Rymarenko, whom Fr. Vladimir had met in Wendlingen. The elderly Fr. Adrian and his wife were now living in Spring Valley, New York, where he had founded the convent of New Diveyevo. There, as in Europe, he also served as spiritual father to a lay Christian commune that had formed around him.

It had been Fr. Adrian's lot to endure terrible, traumatic experiences together with his flock. During World War II, shrapnel from a bomb had torn off half of his son's head right before his eyes. Fr. Adrian accepted this suffering wisely, using the knowledge gained by it to help and console people, and they clung to him. As a priest, father confessor, and orator, he attracted many hundreds of people to his Church services and his way of life. He was clearly a man who was giving his life for his flock. So fatherly was he that they called him "super-priest."

Fr. Adrian's pastoral art was not of his own invention, but was the result of his having attuned himself to the mind and heart of Elder Nektary. In 1928 the holy Elder Nektary had died beneath Fr. Adrian's priestly stole, and now the grace of the Optina lineage was upon Fr. Adrian himself. Like his Elder, Fr. Adrian had become a true "knower of hearts": one who could look at someone for the first time and say something that had tremendous import for that person, but would mean nothing to anyone else.

Before meeting Fr. Adrian, Gleb did not know all this about him. He first went to see Fr. Adrian not of his own accord, but as an obedience to Fr. Vladimir. Gleb had told Fr. Vladimir that he was absolutely satisfied to receive his spiritual instructions from the monastic warriors of Holy Trinity Monastery, and especially from Fr. Vladimir himself; but Fr. Vladimir had said no, that since he was still in the world he needed a priest who lived an ascetic spiritual life in the world. He told Gleb that if he would go all the way to New York City and up the Hudson River to a tiny women's monastery, he would not regret it.

Recalling his first meeting with Fr. Adrian, Gleb writes:

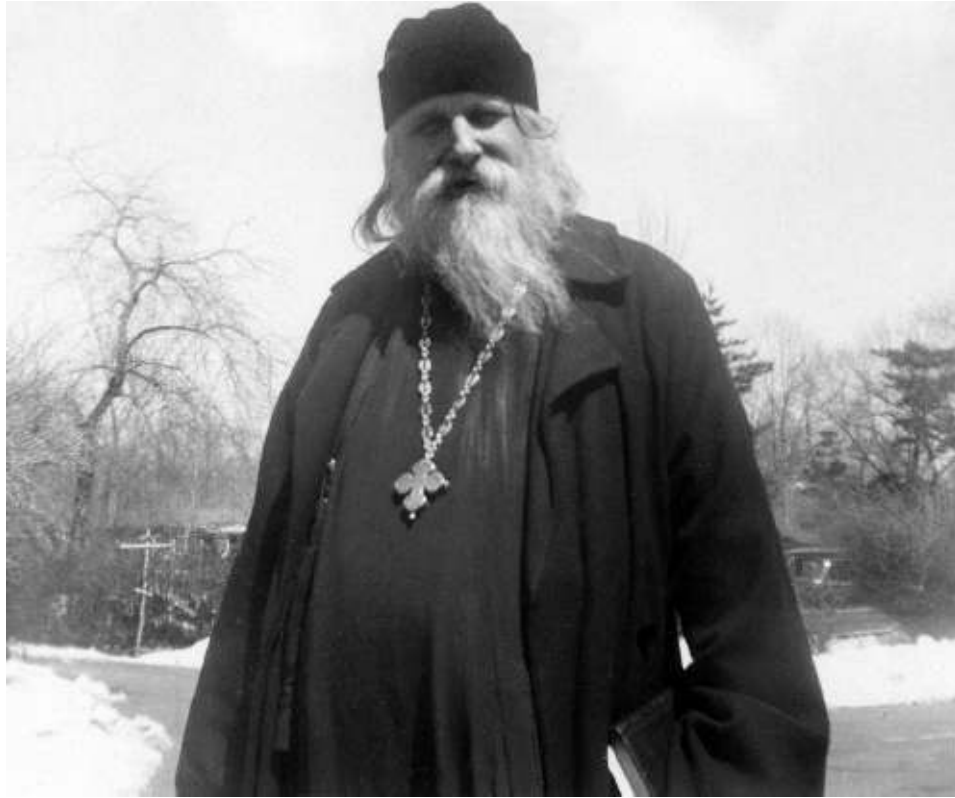
“After a train ride, a subway ride through the city, and finally an hour on a bus going to Spring Valley, I arrived and had to walk an hour or so across town to the convent. It was a small estate in a suburban area opposite a local airport, and seemed quite out of place there, meaningless to my new life. I knew no one in the convent of New Diveyevo and had not the vaguest idea of what to expect there, save for a host of imaginary pictures of what it might have looked like in St. Seraphim's old Diveyevo in Russia. I was hardly born, fresh to everything and just learning to walk in the Church atmosphere.

“I do not remember who showed me to Fr. Adrian's little cottage. It was right in the center of the court, to the left of and behind a white church, which was not yet fully built but had a nice blue dome. At my timid knocking, the door of the cottage was opened by an elderly and energetic lady, Fr. Adrian's wife, who called him. He came out from a door to my right and asked me to come into his little vestibule — an office with a low ceiling and an air of warmth and coziness. He bade me sit in a chair with my back to the window, facing an icon corner with many dark icons and a burning *lampada*.<sup>[g]</sup> Then he sat down opposite me on a little divan against the wall, and looked at me with a very inspiring smile. He was tall and handsome. His bright blue eyes were joyous, yet his whole appearance was very serious.

“I had not come to find an ‘elder,’ as I later learned that concept. Neither had I any urgency in seeking him, for I felt all was being taken care of in

Jordanville. Nor was I burdened with any questions. I basically came for a visit, and he understood this and started asking me questions about myself. It was very brief and insignificant, and I was paying more attention to the many portraits of monks in klobuks on the walls than to what he was saying — when all of a sudden he baffled me by asking whether I did a certain sin. I sank in utter amazement at his clairvoyance. I never even thought that he might have this gift. Then he drew himself closer, looking intensely straight into my eyes, and opened to me things about myself which I had never realized.

“The talk was not long, but I was utterly overtaken by the idea that before me sat the perfect embodiment of an all-knowing, caring, and convincingly well-disposed father, one who was interested in you the way you were, not trying to mold you into anything. Of course I wept, not because my heart was touched, which it was, but because I had found something wonderful, for which my soul had been hungry for so many years. I immediately had a thousand questions with which I had long been tormented, and he gave me in a nutshell principles by which to unlock these dilemmas by myself. He told me answers to the question of what is evil; he told me that the purpose of man’s life upon this earth is contained in the daily cycle of Church services; that icons are windows into heaven, which we can see into by getting to know the saints; that painting, music, and other arts can be ways to come closer to God as Creator; that the relationship between family members is connected with the mystery of knowing God; what is righteousness; what is theology; what is our duty before society, before suffering Russia, before America, which he loved. And above all he expressed his exuberance over the Optina Elders, whose faces now radiated from the walls around me. I had known that he was the spiritual son of Elder Nektary, for I had read portions of his wife’s reminiscences of the Elder’s life in persecuted Russia in a Jordanville periodical.<sup>3</sup> Fr. Adrian always referred to Batiushka<sup>[h]</sup> Nektary, and would illustrate his points with some anecdotes about that holy Elder.”



Fr. Adrian (later Archbishop Andrew) of New Diveyevo (1893–1978).

As Fr. Adrian had become a spiritual father to Fr. Vladimir, so now he became one to Gleb. Although Gleb had not been looking for a father after Fr. Vladimir had entered his life, Fr. Vladimir was wise in giving him over to the direction of his own spiritual father. Despite his failing health and the great demands on his time, Fr. Adrian took great pains to further Gleb's development. Gleb remembers how he imparted to him the Patristic teaching on guarding the mind and purifying the heart:

“He drew a beautiful image of a pure virgin who is to be beheaded the next day for her love and faith in Christ. She is proceeding through the dark, damp, windy catacomb tunnels with a flickering candle, her only source of light that will enable her to arrive at the secret place where Christians are celebrating the Eucharist — through the partaking of which she will inherit Christ and His Kingdom. Her whole future in eternity depends on that flickering speck of light that leads her away from the graceless world of darkness. With what awe and

trembling she has to guard that candlelight to obtain her desired life!

“The virgin, Fr. Adrian said, is the human soul that must guard the light of the knowledge of God, to be attentive to the various unfavorable movements which might darken or extinguish the Light that *came into the world to save sinners* (I Tim. 1:15). How important is the guarding of our senses, through which we perceive and comprehend life! Our awareness of life, our love towards the Source of it, ought to be pure before Him, so that we may better hear His voice in our hearts, the center of our God-given life. The process of purification, the constant ‘dusting’ of our senses, is essential to keep burning that candlelight of the virgin which enlightens us. ‘The Light of Christ enlightens all.’<sup>[i]</sup> That light is the grace of God....

“Fr. Adrian got up. I could see he was inspired, and almost in a whisper he bade me to follow him.

“Behind him was a door to his office or, most likely, his prayer room. As he opened it I felt as though it was his holy of holies and I was being vouchsafed to enter it. Right before us was his prayer corner with many, many icons of all sizes and shapes, and *analogia*<sup>[j]</sup> with open books, the Psalter, etc. Above, dominating the entire room, was a life-size, black-and-white photograph of the head of Christ, a reproduction of the famous painting by Vasnetsov. It depicted very realistically Christ in a crown of thorns, truly suffering, rather emaciated, and with piercing eyes. This was the key to Fr. Adrian; this holy Face spelled Suffering. But why? I was always dissatisfied with the explanation of suffering: why was it necessary for us to continue suffering after Christ conquered pain and death? If our adherence to Him promises us eternal bliss, why do we still have to suffer here on earth, as during Old Testament times?...

“From the rose-colored icon lamps, the little low-ceilinged room — really the cell of a *starets*<sup>[k]</sup> — was all in pink light. A feeling of utter awe, even slight trembling, seized me. Fr. Adrian immediately bowed down to venerate the holy objects and began to point them out to me as I too kissed them one by one with reverence. There were tiny pieces of the relics of the Saints of the Kiev Caves.

He pointed out especially St. Agapitus the Healer, who helped him all the time in his sickness; St. John the Much-Suffering, who had buried himself up to his waist in order to avoid temptation; and St. Moses the Hungarian, who had fed hungry people just as Fr. Adrian had later done during terrible Soviet times.

“There was an almost audible silence in the room. Fr. Adrian spoke virtually in a whisper all the time, which I felt was natural because of the closeness of the holiness. He held his hand on his heart and was telling me about inward peace, inward activity, quietness, and silence. I was afraid that under the impression of what my soul was experiencing I might not retain the important things he was telling me, yet I dared not interrupt because he was now speaking as if to himself, looking before him at the icons. And suddenly I understood the sweetness of the suffering that Christ did not take away. Contrary to what I had thought before, this pain is essential to retain the presence of holiness.

“The movement of my mind quieted down, died out in concentration interspersed with prayer. A sense of being responsible for each word, thought, and feeling suddenly rose in me: a warning that these can pollute, disfigure, or erase that flowing presence of Divinity. The very pain of this awareness is a sweetness, just as in the *Akathist* hymn<sup>[1]</sup> Christ is called ‘Sweetest Jesus.’ The fear for one’s sins is actually the fear of losing hold of this highly inspiring mental vision of ‘standing before God’—as if the thread of this melodious line can at any moment become inaudible through carelessness in guarding the senses, through allowing them to wander at ease in the godless darkness of the above-mentioned tunnels of the fallen world.”

Fr. Adrian repeatedly stressed the need to cultivate inward quietness (*tishina*) through both purity of heart and pain of heart. He himself had witnessed the fruits of this quietness when he had beheld his Elder Nektary bathed in the unearthly “Quiet Light”<sup>[m]</sup> of Uncreated Divinity. But for him quietness meant no mere passivism. Reiterating the words of Elder Nektary, he taught that Orthodoxy is *life*, a living apostolic power.

On one memorable occasion, he took Gleb into the church at the convent. “I

could see,” Gleb recalls, “that Fr. Adrian was burning with inspiration as he motioned to the frescoes on the walls depicting the saints in heaven. When we came outside, the sky was brilliant with stars. Fr. Adrian asked, ‘Why did God splash us like a wave over the broad expanse of the American land? Why were we scattered like these stars amidst the good people of America? Is it not so that we can recreate here the way of life of Holy Russia, as a witness of true Christianity to the world — before the end comes?’

“Fr. Adrian’s convent, together with the community of lay people he had gathered around it, was his attempt to bring into being an Orthodox heaven over America, to transplant the ancient Orthodox way of life into the soil of this freedom-loving land, to bring here that lost *quietness*. These apostolic ideas were absolutely new to me. Fr. Adrian had literally opened to me new horizons.”

**I**N 1958 Gleb entered Holy Trinity Seminary, which as noted earlier was attached to the Jordanville Monastery. The seminary was then at its height, with such outstanding instructors as the modern-day confessor Archbishop Averky Taushev, the philosophers Archimandrite [\[n\]](#) Constantine Zaitsev and I. M. Andreyev, and the theologian Fr. Michael Pomazansky. Here the living tradition of the Russian Church was breathed into Gleb by righteous men who embodied the spirit of “Holy Russia.”

Upon graduating from Holy Trinity Seminary, Gleb wanted to do something with the spiritual legacy he had been given; but, as with Eugene, the way had yet to be opened to him. His first desire was for monasticism, but for the time being this aspiration was squelched by his mother, who told him she would curse him if he became a monk. Under Fr. Adrian’s influence, his thoughts naturally turned to evangelism, to the aim of enlightening America with Orthodox Christianity. He found a model for this proposed activity in Blessed Fr. Herman of Alaska, who, besides being a monk of holy life, was one of America’s first missionaries. But as even more than an example to live by, he saw Blessed Herman (though he was then not formally canonized) as a heavenly

intercessor before God, one to whom he could pray for an indication of his life's path.



Left to right: Archbishop Averky, Seminarian Gleb, and Fr. Vladimir in front of the Holy Trinity Monastery church, 1958.

In 1794 Blessed Herman had come to Alaska from the ancient monastery of Valaam, located on an island in northwestern Russia. On remote Spruce Island in



Alaska, he had communed with God in the silence of the forest, preached the Gospel to the native Aleuts, cared for their orphaned children, and finally reposed in 1836. Gleb first read Blessed Herman's Life, which had been published at Valaam in 1894, one spring day near the end of his last year of seminary. "I was deeply struck," he recalls, "that there was such a holy man and that he was buried on the same continent I'm on! I can actually walk to him, to this Saint of Holy Russia — here in America! I can make an attempt of going to him and begging, 'praying out' from him anything I need. He is the holiest piece of sanctity on this continent! And he can help me and settle my life... and indicate from God what I should do. But I must *not* just go as a tourist; I must suffer it out without any money....

"I was struck with the idea that a piece of Holy Russia is in America. The idea of transplanting Holy Russia into American soil — which Fr. Adrian was consciously doing in New York and so earnestly talked about to me on that memorable starry night — captured my soul. O God! A 'desert' island in Alaska! A Saint's relics on that island! Going across wide America and then up to Alaska, so close to much-suffering Russia — without any money, according to the Gospel! And on top of this, getting from him, from a *podvizhnik*,<sup>[o]</sup> an answer just like it used to be done in Russia! What a crazy, inspiring idea!

"I rushed back to the monastery, came to Fr. Vladimir's cell and stated: 'Do not say it's crazy what I'm about to say, just listen. I've decided what I want to do the very day I graduate. I want to, without any money, go to Alaska to ask Fr. Herman to help me settle my life! Do not laugh!'

"'It is not crazy at all!' Fr. Vladimir said with a very serious look. 'Your forefathers (he always stated this because my father was from Pskov, and he thought that was a great thing) used to work out their salvation with such an occupation! It is called making a Pilgrimage to a *Prepodobny*.'<sup>[p]</sup> No, I don't think it is crazy or funny at all! It's a great idea, God-sent! Mark my words; before you know it, you will have ways to bring it about and be on your way. Only come back straight here from that Pilgrimage.' And he lovingly blessed

me.

“I was amazed and believed him that it all was from God, which proved to be so. He told me that there was an old Russian hermit, Archimandrite Gerasim Schmaltz, then living on the island, with whom he had been in correspondence. I wrote to Fr. Gerasim, and he invited me to come that summer. The question remained how to do it. I got the idea of giving slide-lectures along the way, across the states, visiting our churches and recruiting seminarians.”

**W**ITH the money he received for his slide shows, Gleb was able to pay his way to Alaska. He arrived on Spruce Island in August of 1961. Having been lost for several hours in the forest, he finally made it to Blessed Herman’s old monastic settlement. He met Fr. Gerasim at the chapel which the latter had built on the site of Blessed Herman’s half-earthen dwelling. The surrounding forest was mossy and wet, strangely beautiful and wholly wild. About five hundred steps away was “Monk’s Lagoon” and the roaring ocean. Gleb was afraid at his first sight of real desert-dwelling. “I sensed right away,” he wrote, “that it was definitely something real, like in Holy Russia — and very lonely, like the path of Blessed Herman.”

Some people at Holy Trinity Monastery had told Gleb to beware of Fr. Gerasim, saying he was something of a lunatic. There were even rumors that he was a Communist and a Freemason. On meeting the old hermit in person, Gleb was relieved to find that the rumors had been totally off the mark. Fr. Gerasim was a simple, down-to-earth, warmhearted old monk who had retained his love for monasticism in spite of years of hardship and abandonment. “We had much in common,” Gleb recalls. “My parents were of the same social class as his, and he loved my spiritual father, Fr. Adrian, with whom he corresponded.”

As Gleb later wrote: “Fr. Gerasim’s standard was the basic Christianity of the heart. He was a genuine transmitter of the authentic experience of Orthodox Russia, placed in the context of twentieth-century America, and yet so few valued him.”<sup>4</sup> Neither at his seminary nor elsewhere had Gleb met an ascetic

desert-dweller of this kind. Fr. Gerasim had lived on Spruce Island since 1935, caring for Blessed Herman's grave and relics, keeping monasticism alive on the island that Blessed Herman had called "New Valaam" in memory of his beloved Valaam Monastery in Russia.<sup>[4]</sup> Gleb understood that Fr. Gerasim was indeed the one whom Blessed Herman had prophesied a hundred years earlier, when he had said: "A monk like me, fleeing the glory of men, will come and settle on Spruce Island."

Gleb's visit to Spruce Island occurred during the fasting period before the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God. Fr. Gerasim had prayer services in his cabin and commemorated *all* the people he had known in his life. "The lists were endless," Gleb recorded, "and so were his tears. I was shaken to the depth of my soul at that prayer. I was caught up in the fervency of his pleading, imploring prayer, and I could not help but weep my heart out.... But the tears were not tears of sorrow, but of some sweet, unexplainable contrition of heart.... When he would finish this prayer, he would be cheerful again as usual, offering me tea and salmon pie of his own baking, and only the starry sky above the gigantic black spruces bore witness to the length of his *standing before God*."<sup>5</sup>



Archimandrite Gerasim (1888–1969), hermit of “New Valaam,” Spruce Island, Alaska.



Monk's Lagoon, Spruce Island. Photograph taken by Gleb during his pilgrimage, August 1961.



Fr. Gerasim's cabin (foreground) and the Kaluga Mother of God chapel.  
Photograph taken ca. 1990.

A week went by on the island. Gleb had several talks with Fr. Gerasim, but he received no answer in his heart concerning what he should do with his life. He began to fear that he would have to return home without having realized the main purpose of his journey.

A few days before the Feast of the Dormition, some of Fr. Gerasim's old

friends from the town of Kodiak came to visit him. Fr. Gerasim met them with lively hospitality. Gleb, meanwhile, walked a short distance away to a small spring, surrounded by ferns, which Blessed Herman had once used as his water source. Sitting down on a mossy stump by the trickling stream, he opened a book that he had borrowed from Fr. Gerasim's cabin: an anthology of the Lives of Russian ascetics. On the page he had randomly turned to, he read the following passage from the section on St. Seraphim of Sarov: "One day at the end of 1832, one monk asked the Elder [St. Seraphim], 'Why don't we have *podvizhniki* [ascetics] of the ancient strict life?' 'Because,' answered the Elder, 'we do not have *determination*. God's grace and help is the same nowadays as it was earlier for those who are faithful and who with their whole heart seek the Lord — and we also could have lived like the ancient fathers, for, according to the word of God, Jesus Christ is *the same yesterday, and today, and forever* (Heb. 13:8)."<sup>6</sup>

"Suddenly," Gleb recalls, "everything became clear to me. It was because I had not yet made an *act of resolve*, a total sacrifice of my life to Jesus Christ, that God had not yet opened the way to me. I had still been 'seeking my own.' Immediately I jumped up from the stump and ran up a narrow path away from the cabin. Within a few moments I reached the large white chapel that had been built by the native villagers over the grave site of Blessed Herman. Running up the steps, I rushed inside, fell on the righteous man's coffin, which had been placed beside the right wall of the chapel, and prayed fervently in my desire to truly serve Christ."

It was not long after this that, over a thousand miles away in that San Francisco art store, Eugene implored the Mother of God from the depths of his being: "Grant me to serve your Son!" Like Eugene, Gleb was "ripping his heart" on the altar of sacrifice. Acting on St. Seraphim's words, he was finally making his step of determination. He made a vow, offering himself wholly to God, for better or for worse.

"The next moment," Gleb writes, "I heard a faint, gentle voice, seeming to come from the coffin before me. One word was spoken: '*Mechtai!*'—the

Russian way of saying, ‘Make a wish!’ I wondered if I had imagined the voice, if I was going crazy; but no, I had heard it plainly! There was no mistaking the import of that word. I had just dedicated my life to God, wanting to apply my zeal to some holy cause, and God, through Blessed Herman, had told me to ask for whatever I wished.

“‘Send me an idiot like me,’ I prayed, ‘—someone who’ll understand me and what I’m after.’

“Again I heard the gentle voice of Blessed Herman: ‘*I yescho?*’ [‘And what else?’]

“I gasped. If my first request is granted, I thought, I should somehow repay Fr. Herman. ‘Grant me a brotherhood,’ I said with trepidation, ‘that will glorify you and proclaim your holiness to the world.’

“Having uttered these words, I could not bear to be in the presence of such holiness any longer. I left the chapel as swiftly as I had entered, and hurried down the trail to see Fr. Gerasim. Finding him preparing tea for his guests, I told him, ‘I’ve got my answer!’ Fr. Gerasim, crossing himself with reverence, said simply, ‘Glory be to God!’—not knowing what it was all about.”

What was the meaning of the two requests that Gleb had made of Blessed Herman? When he had asked for an “idiot” like himself, he had been thinking specifically of a wife who would share his ideals and help work for them. He had known several nice, pious girls whom he might have married, but they had been more interested in settling down in a comfortable home than in pursuing Gleb’s romantic visions of self-sacrificing missionary work. Since his mother had always called him an “idiot” for cherishing “unrealistic” ideas, he believed that only another “idiot” like himself could fully appreciate them.

Gleb’s second request, born of spontaneous gratitude to Fr. Herman, was less definite in his mind. He had thought of some kind of association or brotherhood that would help bring about Fr. Herman’s canonization and at the same time help support Fr. Gerasim in forming a monastic community on the island. The seeds for this idea had been given to him by Fr. Gerasim during their



talks together.

The idea of a brotherhood in the name of Blessed Herman fit in well with Gleb's missionary dreams. The example of Fr. Herman, Gleb believed, would be a powerful one for the young generation of American God-seekers. Having seen through what he called the "rich-boy frustration" popularized at this time, Gleb concluded that what the soul of complacent America now needed was the Orthodox idea of *podvig*, or spiritual ascetic endeavor, the sacrificing of oneself and the endurance of hardships for a lofty, noble cause. America's frontiers had all but vanished, but its pioneer spirit was potentially still present. In the image of Blessed Herman — a humble monk seeking oneness with his Creator in the vast northern wilderness, single-handedly continuing and spreading an ancient and holy tradition in a new land, giving fatherly protection to the oppressed and orphaned — Gleb saw an image that would provide an outlet for the latent spirit and untapped religious fervor of contemporary America.



The chapel of Saints Sergius and Herman of Valaam, built over the grave site of Blessed Fr. Herman of Alaska at Monks' Lagoon.





The interior of the Saints Sergius and Herman Chapel. At right is the coffin containing the relics of Blessed Herman.

Gleb left for home on the day of the Feast of the Dormition. Fr. Gerasim walked with him to the beach. “I hate goodbyes,” he said. For a remote desert-dweller like him, such partings usually meant he would never see the person again.

As his boat pulled away, Gleb saw Fr. Gerasim standing alone in tears on the shore of Monk’s Lagoon, blessing him. He reflected that he was leaving as a different man. “I knew then,” he later wrote, “that I had beheld, contrary to my expectation, a spiritual giant who breathed into me a *life of decision*, a resolve for a living continuation of Blessed Herman’s work for the glory of God in His Orthodox Church, and that, with God’s help, *nothing* could take this away from me.”<sup>7</sup>

**O**N his way to San Francisco, Gleb detoured to visit two Canadian sketes (small monasteries) built by a saintly missionary, the late Archbishop Ioasaph Skorodumov.<sup>[4]</sup> The surrounding birch and aspen forests were strikingly similar to landscapes in Russia, and within the sketes themselves there were still monks

and nuns who embodied the authentic spirit of the Russian monastic tradition.

Gleb also went to visit Archbishop Ioasaph's successor, Bishop Sava Sarachevich, a Serbian hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad who resided in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Bishop Sava spoke with Gleb until the early morning hours, telling him of the spiritual revival that had been headed in Serbia by the holy hierarch Nikolai Velimirovich.<sup>[s]</sup> Bishop Sava had himself been fortunate enough to take part in this revival while living in the old country, and now he wanted to bring it to North America. He felt that the time had come to lift the spirits of despondent Russians in the free world, who were tired and were losing their Orthodox identity. "He was full of energy and animation," Gleb recalls. "But no matter how much I agreed with him and was caught up in his enthusiasm, I had deep reservations. I felt that, in spite of all the spiritual wealth which the Orthodox Church preserved and with which it was able to ignite the whole world, its true representatives were for the most part incapable of passing it on to the new generation, from which they were worlds apart. The modern mentality, being based on the spirit of moderate nihilism, is diametrically opposed to the traditional values inherent in Orthodoxy. This mentality exerts a powerful influence on the new generations of cradle Orthodox in the Diaspora, causing many to neglect or reject their Orthodox roots. That is why I, having finished my seminary courses, still needed to get a satisfactory answer as to how to serve God and His Church in America. The only hope, I thought, is to go as the Apostles did to the highways of today's America and preach in simplicity the Orthodox Gospel of Christ."

With such thoughts Gleb left Bishop Sava and the Canadian sketes. When he arrived in San Francisco he visited his friend, the humble Fr. Nektary (later Bishop), who fascinated him with his firsthand accounts of Optina Monastery and its holy elders. He also met Fr. Nektary's brother, the church writer Ivan M. Kontzevitch, who lived with his wife Helen in San Francisco. Ivan and Helen had previously written to Gleb in Jordanville when they had read an article of his on Elder Macarius of Optina. Like Fr. Adrian, both Fr. Nektary and Ivan

Kontzevitch had been personal disciples of Optina Elder Nektary.

It was during his stay in San Francisco that Gleb had his first and fateful meeting with Eugene Rose, as we have already related.

## *On the Threshold*

*One can't be a half-hearted Christian, but only entirely, or not at all.*

—Fr. Seraphim Rose<sup>1</sup>

**I**N giving his slide presentation on “Holy Places in America” for Eugene, Gleb had not known that Eugene had been very much prepared for it. “Although I wasn’t aware of it at the time,” Gleb later wrote, “it was just what he needed. Someone had to open to him the realization that the Patristic world of ancient desert-oriented Orthodoxy was alive, a fragment of which was even in America, today! But that wonderful world was, alas, vanishing from the face of the earth, as I emphatically stressed in my talk to Eugene.”

Gleb turned to look at the icons hanging on Eugene’s wall. At once he noticed, in a prominent place among them, a portrait of Tsar Nicholas II. Since many of the Russians he knew were ashamed of the Tsar and monarchy as something “outdated” and “primitive,” he wondered how an American like Eugene could have conceived of placing this picture with his icons. When Gleb expressed his amazement, Eugene’s answer convinced him of his host’s full awareness of the Orthodox concept of monarchy. Eugene said that the late Tsar — as the leader of the “Third Rome,” the last stronghold of Christian civilization — had been the final restraining power against the spirit of Antichrist. This was spoken of by the Apostle Paul, who indicated that such a power must be *taken out of the way* before the Antichrist is fully revealed (II Thess. 2:7–8). Therefore, Eugene told Gleb, the patricidal murder of the Tsar and the destruction of the Christian empire he represented is a sign that we are living in the pre-Antichrist era. Russia had held back the Revolution, and when it fell, the rest of the world

was helpless before the Revolution.

As Eugene was saying this, Gleb understood why Eugene had placed near the Tsar's portrait an icon of St. Michael the Archangel conquering the Antichrist, who was symbolically depicted falling upon a collapsing civilization. In connection with this, Eugene spoke of Dostoyevsky's "Grand Inquisitor." He said that, according to the principles of the "Grand Inquisitor," international organizations such as the United Nations must be given a spiritual head and a pseudo-religious content.

"But isn't the United Nations just a political body?" Gleb asked. "How could the nations allow the leader of one religion to represent them if this would exclude all the other religions?"

"I think that they will find the need for such a leader, one of universal significance, such as the Pope," Eugene answered.

Gleb remembered how his instructor at the Jordanville seminary, Archbishop Averky, had expressed similar ideas. Archbishop Averky was in the spiritual lineage of the nineteenth-century Russian prophet Theophan the Recluse, who had foretold the catastrophe of the Russian Revolution; and so it was plain to see how he had come to such conclusions about the apocalyptic era and its spiritual deceptions. It was quite strange, however, for Gleb to hear them from the mouth of an American, especially in 1961, when such Orthodox teachings were thoroughly "esoteric" in the West. Gleb asked Eugene if he was an Orthodox Christian.

"No," Eugene replied, "but I would like to become one."

Remembering this first visit with Eugene, Gleb has written: "His tone was sober and very understated. His whole personality was reserved and unusually quiet. There was a feeling of nobility about him. Down deep in my soul I knew that here was a godly soul before me, one who had learned well the First Step of the 'Divine Ladder' of St. John Climacus, that of estrangement, detachment from the world. As it turned out later, he *was* dead to the world. He was through with all its interests, its natural desires for a portion of earthly comfort and happiness.

He had no ambition save to crystallize in his philosophic mind the absolute value of Orthodoxy.

“At this point, I did not know how much he loved Christ, but it was apparent that all his enthusiasm lay in his discovery of Antichrist, who was *already in the world* (I John 4:3), contaminating all worldly interests and activity. It was also apparent that he was timid to the extreme; and I at once concluded that I must do the utmost to have him receive the fullness of Truth.”

**G**LEB planned to return to the East Coast, and he knew he could not leave Eugene in limbo. Eugene was clearly not flirting with Orthodoxy — he was intensely serious. But how to bring him into the Church? Gleb could see that Eugene had little contact with the Orthodox community and that, being an introverted philosopher from an alien ethnic background, he could never fully fit in with the Russian church society. The contact provided by Gleb’s visit, which Eugene so obviously appreciated, had to be built upon. Gleb needed someone else to help Eugene draw closer to the Church.

Not long before Gleb left town, his new Russian friends in San Francisco gave him a going-away party and presented him with a gift. Having opened it, Gleb made an announcement. “I have a present for you, too,” he said. “You know that I came here to the West Coast as a missionary, to inspire people with Orthodox ideas. But I did not want my work to be only for Russians. With them, the task is just to bring them back into the Church. Orthodoxy has been brought to America, and now we have a chance to bring Americans to Orthodoxy. This not only helps *them*... it also helps us who are already in the Church.... I recently met an American interested in Orthodoxy. His name is Eugene. *He* is the present.” The people looked at Gleb expectantly. “I want you to make me a promise to help Eugene,” he continued, “to guard him. A seed has been planted in him, and I need you to water it.”

Everyone promised to fulfill Gleb’s wish. Gleb turned to one of his friends, a young man named Dimitry Andrault de Langeron. “I’d like you,” he said, “to

take special responsibility for Eugene.” Dimitry agreed.

Gleb returned to the East Coast by train. Arriving at Holy Trinity Monastery on the eve of Blessed Fr. Herman’s commemoration (December 13/26), he was met by Fr. Vladimir, who immediately served a memorial *Pannikhida*<sup>[a]</sup> for the blessed one.<sup>[b]</sup>

At this very time Eugene was with his parents in Carmel. While there, he attended Liturgy at the Church of St. Seraphim of Sarov in Seaside where he had taken Alison exactly two years before. This time, perhaps due to the closer contact he had made with Orthodoxy through Gleb, he overcame his natural reticence and made personal contact with the priest, Fr. Grigori Kravchina. As it happened, Fr. Grigori was the first Orthodox priest to whom Eugene ever spoke. Having been raised as an orphan in the village of Pochaev in Russia, in the shadow of the famous Pochaev Lavra,<sup>[c]</sup> Fr. Grigori was a pious, humble, God-fearing man, and was a distant relative of Fr. Adrian. In Seaside he had received a revelation from St. Seraphim to name the church in that Saint’s honor.

At the end of 1961 Eugene returned home to San Francisco. On the feast of St. Seraphim, January 2/15, 1962, he wrote a letter to Gleb which well expresses his thoughts and feelings at this time:



Fr. Grigori Kravchina.

Dear Br. Gleb,

*S Rozhdestvom Khristovym!*[\[d\]](#)

I have just recently returned from Carmel, where I spent Western Christmas[\[e\]](#) with my parents. Carmel, in case you have not heard of it, is a town about 120 miles down the coast, very beautifully situated among pines and cypresses and the ocean, formerly a colony of Bohemian artists and poets, now a rather too “quaint” and “arty” place of retirement for the moderately wealthy who have some cultural pretensions. It has a strong odor of comfortable worldliness....

To me... this worldly atmosphere is an instruction in the “spirit of the age,” as well as in humility — though I fear I take all too little advantage of



the latter. In this outwardly “neutral” and seemingly harmless atmosphere I detect all too clearly the signs of the spirit of Antichrist: the pseudo-pious “religiosity” and self-righteousness; the superficial anti-Communism which can all too easily be fanned into a pseudo-religious, neo-fascist “crusade” to make the world safe for “Christian democracy”; the mental and spiritual aimlessness, covered with a cloak of vague morality and well-meaning “idealism” that can regard a pernicious heretic like Albert Schweitzer as a “saint,” and that believes all the pious propaganda of “peace” and “brotherhood” that emanates from both sides of the Iron Curtain. All of the spiritual falseness seems to me but raw material that is waiting to be exploited by the Prince of Evil for the establishment of some monstrous, deceitful “Kingdom of this world”; indeed, I detect in this atmosphere — as in the whole spirit of the age — a sense of expectancy, as if men were awaiting the coming of some Messiah to solve all the seemingly insoluble problems and resolve all the agonizing anxieties that characterize our age; men seem ready to prostrate themselves before some great apocalyptic figure who will bring “peace” and “brotherhood” — and, most of all, forgetfulness of Christ and of the fact that the “problems” of our age are not external but internal, for they are the product of our turning away from the Face of that terrible God Who expects so much from us, and has promised us an eternal life that will be unbearable to men who want only to “get along in the world.”

All of this is the subject of the book I am writing on the spiritual condition of contemporary man, and I am sometimes frightened by the magnitude of the undertaking and by my own unworthiness to undertake it. I actually began thinking and writing about it a number of years ago, before my conversion to Orthodoxy, when I was full of pride over my own “knowledge” and hatred of this contemporary world; my visits then to my parents and their world reduced me to a state of rage and despair. But since my conversion and my growth in faith these feelings have been replaced by

a feeling of pity and helplessness: pity over the sad state of a world that has renounced Christ and is not even aware of the fact, a world full of “well-meaning” people who are miserable and do not even know it — or if they know, do not know why, and look vainly outside themselves for the cause —; and helplessness over the fact that, try as I might, I can never communicate with the vast majority of these people. My only hope is to be able to communicate what little I know — or think I know — to the more thoughtful, especially among the young, who are not totally deceived by this false world but still do not know where to turn for the Truth.... For the others, my uncompromising tone (for I think it is too late to speak “mildly” about such things, for there is the danger of being confused with the vague “new spirituality” of Berdyaev and other “well-meaning” people that is so increasingly prevalent) will no doubt provoke hostility, if not ridicule; so much so that I have doubts of even finding a publisher. But even this hostility may be of some use; for I think it a good thing for people to know that not all who call themselves “Christians” are satisfied with the vague pseudo-religious “spirituality” being propagated on all sides today; and I think it needs to be pointed out with absolute clarity that the religion of “compromise” is self-deception, and that there exist today at bottom only two absolutely irreconcilable alternatives for man: faith in the world and the religion of the self, whose fruit is death; and faith in Christ the Son of God, in Whom alone is eternal Life.

I would like very much to receive your comments and criticisms of all this.

Fortunately, Carmel is but five miles away from Seaside, where there is the marvelous little church of St. Seraphim I told you about. I attended Liturgy there several times on previous visits, but this time for the first time I went to see the priest, Fr. Grigori Kravchina. (I visited him, by the way, quite unintentionally, on the day of St. Eugene.) My visit confirmed the very favorable impression he had already made on me, both from his

appearance and from his careful celebration of the Liturgy. He is a very sensitive and intelligent man, and he seems very genuinely humble and simple. If the choice were mine, I should certainly go to him as a spiritual father.... It is unfortunate that you were unable to see him; I am sure you would have received a favorable impression of him — as well as of his beautiful church. I mentioned you to him, and he had heard of you and wondered why you had not visited him and shown your slides to his flock. I hope you can meet him sometime. It seems strange to me that he is so little known in church circles; he appears to be quite isolated.

I cannot express to you my joy over your visit. I had become accustomed to almost total isolation from Orthodox people, and your visit was truly providential. My own faith has been greatly strengthened by yours and by your revelation of the spiritual life at Jordanville. I hope to hear from you soon, and I ask your prayers, as I pray for you.

Your brother in Christ,  
Eugene

## *Into the Father's Embrace*

*One cannot help looking upon the whole modern aberration as a kind of last “fall” of man, an imitation on a worldwide scale of the sin of the first man — the desire to be as God, to know fully. And who can say why God allows this — unless it be simply that in the end, as in the beginning, we confront Him. There was no “reason” for the fall of the prodigal son — and yet how much joy there was on his return. Perhaps after all God “allowed” the modern age for the joy over the reception of repentant sinners at the end of it.*

—Eugene Rose, January 18, 1961

*The son said... Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.... For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.*

—Luke 15:21–22, 24

*O taste and see that the Lord is good.*

—Psalm 33:8

**G**LEB’S friend Dimitry kept his promise and visited Eugene often. Of French and Russian descent, Dimitry belonged to a line of French nobility. Having grown up in Belgium, Germany, France, and Peru, he knew many languages, and spoke English with a French accent. Although he was a

blue blood, he had received a devout upbringing in the Church through his pious Russian mother, Svetlana Romanovna.



Eugene with his godparents, Dimitry and Svetlana, in San Francisco.



Fr. Nicholas Dombrovsky, the priest in San Francisco who received Eugene into the Church.

Dimitry's unaffected faith was an example for Eugene. It was this

naturalness of Orthodox Christian life that Eugene needed, since he had been deprived of it while growing up and was of course not able to make up for this lack by merely intellectual means. To the end of his life Eugene kept up a correspondence with Dimitry and also with Svetlana, who spent her last years in Fr. Adrian's New Diveyevo Convent.

Gleb, Dimitry, and their circle provided the last needed impetus for Eugene's entrance into the Church. His fear of being boxed into complacent and provincial "church worldliness" was alleviated by contact with young people like himself who desired to work for Orthodoxy as the universal Truth, and not just as an ethnic religion.

On Sunday, February 12/25, 1962, the commemoration day of his patron St. Eugene of Alexandria,<sup>[a]</sup> Eugene was received into the Church. The service was performed by an archpriest of the Russian Church Abroad, Fr. Nicholas Dombrovsky, in the San Francisco "Joy of All Who Sorrow" Cathedral. Fr. Nicholas had been instructed by Archbishop Tikhon to receive Eugene through the Sacrament of Chrismation. Dimitry and Svetlana stood on either side of Eugene, having been chosen as godparents. After Eugene had been anointed with the Chrism, Fr. Nicholas began the Liturgy.

It was the Sunday of the Prodigal Son; and the priest read that parable from the Bible during the Liturgy. Eugene thought it very significant that his entrance into the Church should take place on such a day. Remembering the torturous years in which he had vainly tried to run from God, he felt, like the prodigal son, that he had sinned against heaven and before God, that he was unworthy to be called His son. And yet, in spite of this, he was being lovingly accepted into the embrace of his Father, fully inheriting the unmerited rights of sonship and being received into his Father's household, the Church. Upon his entrance into this "saving enclosure," as he called it, all his past sins were washed away; he was a free man. And in return, as Alison says, "Eugene renounced not only his past, but everything, even himself. He gave everything over to God."

When at the end of the Liturgy Eugene received the Eucharist for the first

time, the grace of God was miraculously made evident to him. He was in a state of utter peace and happiness, and felt an indescribable, heavenly taste in his mouth which lasted for over a week. He did not even wish to eat anything. Some years before, he had felt the taste of hell; now, in a most literal way, he was given to know the taste of heaven. Years after this, when he became a priest and baptized people, he gently asked if others experienced something similar on becoming Orthodox, and found that as a rule they did not. He concluded that this must have been a special case of grace.

During the decade following Eugene's entrance into the Church, a controversy arose in which "improper" receptions into Orthodoxy were said to be invalid and without grace. Although Eugene was not baptized by an Orthodox priest after his Protestant baptism as an adolescent, but rather was canonically received into the Church through Chrismation, he remained at peace in the midst of the controversy.<sup>[b]</sup> His experience of grace upon entering the Church was too undeniably real to allow for any uncertainty.

It was perhaps due to the miracle of his first Holy Communion that, in subsequent years, Eugene was to speak often of the indefinable "savor" or "fragrance" of Orthodoxy.

**I**N the first paper he had written as a full-time student at the Academy of Asian Studies, Eugene had stated: "The clearer knowledge... is that which is more closely related to the being of the knower; the clearest, that in which knowing and being are one — in which something is known insofar as it is *lived*." Eugene now understood what Christianity truly was because he not only knew that Christ existed, but actually *knew Christ*. He now looked at Friedrich Nietzsche's limited concept of Christianity, which he had formerly held to, and said it "seems as trivial and flabby as the shallowest 'liberal Protestantism.'" He saw that even thinkers like Guénon and Schuon, whose much more positive concepts of Christianity he had shared while at the Academy, could not penetrate its essence without living the Christian life and thereby knowing Christ in the

heart.

In January of 1961, a year before his reception into the Church, Eugene had written in his journal: “‘Ye shall *know* the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’ Without truth there is no Christianity, and without knowledge of Christian truth one cannot be a Christian. And the end of this knowledge is not power, what science wishes; nor is it consolation or comfort or security or ego-bolstering, whatever the cults of the subjective desire. Its end is *freedom*, Christian, Divine-human freedom, the freedom of men, the sons of God.

“The knowledge that brings freedom is beyond any subject-object categorization; it is knowledge in which the *whole man* participates, which informs the human being in his entirety. It is gained not by research or special experiences, but by *living* a Christian life, with the aid of the sacraments, prayer, fasting — and our encounters with other human beings. It is not a knowledge of which one can say, ‘I know (or have experienced) *this* or *that*,’ but one which is revealed in all that one does, alone or in company, and is present in all that one thinks. The Christian desires to be one with the Truth, Who is Christ Jesus; and so the Christian *is* what he knows. He who rejects Christ does not know Him; he who accepts Him but does not live the fully Christian life, does not know Him fully. Only the deified man knows fully — as fully as man may know; the rest of us are merely striving to be Christians, that is, knowers.”<sup>1</sup>

**N**OW that he was a member of Christ’s Body, Eugene belonged fully to Christ, and he took seriously the words of the Apostle Paul, that *those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts* (Gal. 5:24). He began to live more ascetically. He dressed more simply, no longer wearing a tie and jacket everywhere. He began to eat less food, strictly keeping the fasts of the Church; he ceased dining out, and had no desire to go to theaters. Now counting himself among the body of Orthodox Christians, he explained in one of his early writings: “We do not indulge the passions of the natural man but, with the aid of the disciplines provided by the Church, crucify them, knowing that *if ye live*



*after the flesh, ye shall die, but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live (Rom. 8:13)."*<sup>2</sup>

People from Eugene's past, who had known him to be "brooding over some nameless terror within," said that he "blossomed out with Orthodoxy." With the help of his new Orthodox friends, the warm and down-to-earth side of his personality began to surface. In Orthodox Christianity he found room for his heart, for which there had not been a place when he had been primarily a probing intellectual.

Over a year after his entrance into the Church, he wrote to Alison of the changes wrought in him: "When you last heard from me I was very near to the Russian Orthodox Church, though still somewhat uncertain; and though I had renounced the worst of my sins, I still lived very largely as the world lives. But then, unworthy as I am, God showed His path to me. I became acquainted with a group of fervent Orthodox Russians, and within a few months (it was, significantly enough, on the Sunday of the 'Prodigal Son' just before the beginning of Lent) I was received into the Russian Orthodox Church in Exile,<sup>[c]</sup> whose faithful child I have been for a year and a half since then. I have been reborn in our Lord; I am now His slave, and I have known in Him such joy as I never believed possible while I was still living according to the world."

<sup>3</sup>

These last words must have come from deep within him: nearly two decades after writing them he was to use almost the same words when wishing his inward happiness upon a young seeker not unlike his former self. "It is my prayer for you," he wrote to this young man, "that God will open your heart, and you yourself will do what you can to meet Him. You will find there happiness you never dreamed possible before; your heart will join your head in recognizing the true God, and no real truth you have ever known will ever be lost. May God grant it!"<sup>4</sup>

## *Good Ground*

*... And other [seed] fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold.*

—Luke 8:8

**O**N Thanksgiving of 1962, Gleb left his home in Boston and came to the West Coast to stay. At first he worked as a busboy in San Francisco, where he visited Eugene on several occasions. A few months later he was given a job teaching Russian at a language college in Monterey, not far from where Eugene's parents lived in Carmel. Monterey, having been the capital of California at the time Blessed Herman had come to the Russian-American colonies, had many old, historic buildings. There were still virgin forests along its coast, through which Gleb would often take long walks. Sitting on the moss for hours on end, he would pray the Jesus Prayer and read books on the northern Russian desert-dwellers or the Optina Elders. These books were rare treasures sent by his spiritual father on Mount Athos, Schemamonk Nikodim, or borrowed from Ivan and Helen Kontzevitch. The latter, being spiritual children of Optina, possessed priceless texts from the ruined monastery itself.

When paying regular visits to his parents in Carmel, Eugene always visited Gleb in Monterey. Gleb recalls their first meeting there:

"I moved to Monterey during Great Lent, and all was new and fresh to me in that historic city. I was especially attracted by the abundance of flowers in bloom so early in the year. I settled in a small cottage overlooking the bay, as a roommate to my former seminary comrade who had got me the job teaching in

the language school. The rather shabby cottage was surrounded by overgrown mimosa bushes, which were covered in bright yellow bloom....

“It was not long before Eugene came to see me for the first time at my cottage, coming by train. It was early afternoon, and we had time to visit the old buildings of the city, witnesses of the time of the first American-born Orthodox martyr, St. Peter the Aleut, about whom Eugene knew nothing. He showed me the Carmel Mission and the distant shoreline, with a lonely convent facing the sea, housing cloistered nuns who had given vows of silence and contemplation.”

ON succeeding visits Eugene and Gleb roamed for hours on the seashore and through the woods. “I was interested in what made him so deep and penetrating,” Gleb writes. “I asked him what movie or opera moved him deeply, what books, poems, philosophers. Then I did not know what made him tick, as the saying goes. *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Turandot* moved him a lot, as did the movie *Tales of Hoffman* and others which I knew also. But it was not enough for me. I wanted to know his soul.

“One night we were walking on the beach in Pacific Grove. The night was warm and fragrant because of the blooming oleanders and other plants which blossom early in the year. The sea was agitated and the moon was bright. I thought I sensed a feeling of inspiration in him, and was ready to devour what would come out from that highly inspired soul which was, as I thought, ready to open. But I was mistaken. He was closed and tightly shut. I could not enter his world, to which I felt so akin. So I decided to go ahead and open up my world to him, a world filled with great mystics and ascetics, some of whom I knew personally, treasuring every bit of knowledge about them. I told him all about the Optina, Valaam, and Mount Athos *podvizhniki* [ascetics]. He was silent and deeply taken by it. But to my great surprise I felt it was all familiar to him. Not the factual information, but the spirit which moved these ascetics, and which was so foreign to the cold, materialistic reality of our days and to our prosaic American lifestyle. He *understood* what I was so energetically trying to instill in

him!! How was it possible that he knew? That fervency was familiar to him. All I could get out of him that wonderful March night was that he knew what suffering meant! But how could a kid of southern California — full of comforts and complacency—*understand*, how could he relate to the ascetic fervency of an Orthodox struggler in the cold, faraway north of Russia?

“Of course I loved the whole thing. Of course I saw that my listener was gobbling up my own treasure. In his quiet, reserved way he was very happy. He marched with his long strides along the glistening sand, transported into another world. But he did not share it with me aloud.

“Later, we continued our walks in the mossy ravines. We hunted for mushrooms, and I read to him in Russian from Optina books on the Roslavl desert-dwellers. He was reserved, sober, fully aware of the magnitude of the narrative. I disclosed to him the Lives of Zosima, Basilisk, and Peter Michurin of Siberia. I even gave him a Russian book for Pascha — a biography of Optina Elder Joseph — having already fully retold the book on Elder Gabriel of Pskov. The Life of Blessed Theophil, Fool-for-Christ of the Kiev Caves, was next. But Eugene was silent. Why? What held him back from expressing out loud what was in his obviously moved heart? I knew not. Be it that we were of different temperaments: I, an extrovert, and he, perhaps, an introvert. But this was still not convincing enough for me — until I finally discovered the meaning of that hesitancy in his emotional reactions. He had an analytical mind and a heart that was more absorbing and deep than mine, but his mind had to evaluate everything, perhaps even a step ahead, to see how it all fits into the grandeur of God’s created world and the closeness of His Providence. And I was at awe! What a rare, deep phenomenon was before me! Immediately the Gospel image came to my mind, of a seed falling on good ground that brings forth fruit a hundredfold. And then I knew: I must do anything in my power to help him bring forth this spiritual harvest — in a time and place so hostile to genuine Christianity.

“Here was a genius out of place, a man whose life was to be spent among

those who were below him. Although there would be some in our Russian Orthodox Church — such as Fr. Constantine of Jordanville — who would most assuredly understand him, there would be others who would not understand or care who he was. The danger, I felt, lay in his getting all fired up at first and then suffering shipwreck, disappointment, and perhaps loss of faith in all his ideals, since nobility was a quality inherent in him. How was I to help? I must dream up a situation in the Church wherein he could grow and blossom out.”



Archbishop John Maximovitch (1896–1966) with altar boys, San Francisco, 1965.

## *Wonderworker of the Latter Times*

*Chosen wonderworker and superb servant of Christ, who pourest out in the latter times inexhaustible streams of inspiration and a multitude of miracles. We praise thee with love and call out to thee: Rejoice, O Holy Hierarch John, wonderworker of the latter times.*

—Kontakion[\[a\]](#) to St. John (Maximovitch) of Shanghai and San Francisco (Tone 8), composed by Fr. Seraphim Rose

**G**LEB, as we have seen, had been much more privileged than Eugene in having known a whole host of great “living links” with Orthodox tradition. In December of 1962, however, Eugene met the greatest of them all: the future Saint, Archbishop John Maximovitch.[\[b\]](#) Interestingly, Archbishop John arrived in San Francisco one year to the day after Eugene had first met Gleb: the Feast of the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple.

Archbishop John was well known to the Russian community in San Francisco. He had once been the Bishop of Shanghai, where he had gathered hundreds of sick and starving children off the streets and housed them in an orphanage. When the Communist takeover of China occurred, he was forced to evacuate his orphans and his Russian flock, taking them first to the Philippines and then to America, where he founded the St. Tikhon Home for orphans in San Francisco. He was then appointed Bishop of Paris, but still he came to visit his orphans in San Francisco whenever he could.

At the end of 1962, circumstances arose that enabled Archbishop John to return to his exiled flock. Archbishop Anthony Sinkevich of Los Angeles, who

had replaced Archbishop Tikhon on the latter's retirement, had governed that diocese in such a way that the whole congregation became divided. Work on the new Russian Orthodox Cathedral of San Francisco, which had been begun by Archbishop Tikhon, was halted. As the controversy over the building of the Cathedral raged, the hired workers were being paid, according to contract, for doing nothing.

The San Francisco congregation, composed largely of Archbishop John's spiritual children from Shanghai, appealed to the Synod of Bishops to send Archbishop John to save the day. After some hesitation the Synod agreed, and Archbishop John was assigned to the San Francisco diocese on a temporary basis. Suddenly the Orthodox community there became alive. Donations poured in for the building of the new Cathedral. Committees, fellowships, and charities were established; and, despite some difficulties caused by Archbishop Anthony's old guard (of which more will be said later), church activity in general increased in a wave of enthusiasm.

Eugene was immediately aware of the change. When he attended services in the Cathedral, he saw the new bishop wholeheartedly taking part, sometimes pulling out services to relatively unknown saints, especially those of Western European lands. There was something unearthly in this tiny, bent-over old man, who by worldly standards seemed hardly "respectable." Archbishop John's hair was unkempt, his lower lip protruded, and he had a speech impediment that made him barely intelligible. He sometimes went about barefoot, for which he was severely criticized. Instead of the glittering, jeweled mitre worn by other bishops, he wore a collapsible hat pasted with icons embroidered by his orphans. His manner was at times stern, but a playful gleam could often be seen in his eyes, especially when he was with children. Despite his speech problem, he had a tremendous rapport with children, who were absolutely devoted to him. Occasionally the Cathedral clergy were disconcerted to see him, in the middle of a service (though never in the altar), bend over to play with a small child.

Commenting years later on the Archbishop's apparently strange actions,



Eugene wrote: “Even though I didn’t understand them, I glimpsed something deeper in them, and they taught me not to be satisfied just with fulfilling the external parts of services, etc.”<sup>1</sup> Such actions were related to what in Orthodox tradition is known as “foolishness for Christ’s sake”: the renouncing of the “wisdom of this world” for the wisdom of God.<sup>[c]</sup>

There was indeed much more to the Archbishop than the strange sight that met the eye. From Archbishop John’s flock Eugene and Gleb heard accounts that offered further insights into his hidden life with God. It sounded like something straight from the Acts of the Apostles, but it was occurring right now, in modern times.

Archbishop John was a severe ascetic. Ever vigilant before God, he was in a constant state of prayer. He ate only once a day, at midnight, and never lay down in a bed. His nights he usually spent in prayer, and when he finally became exhausted he would catch a few hours of sleep before dawn, either bent over in a chair or huddled on the floor in the icon-corner. Upon waking, he would splash cold water on his face and begin the Divine Liturgy, which he served every day without fail.

That he was a worker of miracles was widely known. Wherever he had been — China, the Philippines, Europe, Africa, America — countless healings had taken place through his prayers. There were also many cases of his having saved people from impending disaster through God-revealed knowledge. At times he had appeared to those in need when it was physically impossible for him to reach them. He had also been seen levitating in the altar during prayer, surrounded by celestial light.<sup>2</sup>

As Eugene was later to write, however, such miracles were not remarkable in themselves: “All this can easily be imitated by false miracle-workers.... In the case of Archbishop John, those who have come to believe through him have been moved not first of all by his miracles, but by something that moved their hearts about him.”<sup>3</sup>

Eugene heard stories of the Archbishop’s profound compassion: of how in

Shanghai he had gone to the most dangerous neighborhoods to rescue neglected children from brothels, and abandoned ones from garbage cans; of how emotionally scarred children, closed in upon themselves after witnessing the brutalities of war and revolution, would blossom out at a word from him; of how he would always visit people in hospitals, after which believers and unbelievers alike would be healed through the grace that flowed from him; of how hardened criminals would suddenly and inexplicably weep when they saw him making the rounds of their prisons, though they had never set eyes on him before; of how, wherever he was, he had a practice of making rounds all night long, stopping before people's rooms to bless and pray for them as they slept on, unawares.

As in Christ's parable of the man who sows seed and later watches plants spring up *he knoweth not how* (Mark 4:27), Archbishop John's courageous acts of love and mercy continued to bring forth unexpected blessings in the lives of men. It so happened that one of the children whom Archbishop John had rescued from the crime-ridden slums of Shanghai was Vladimir Tenkevitch — the same person who, many years later, brought about the meeting of Eugene and Gleb.

**I**T did not take long for Archbishop John to take notice of the thirsty soul of Eugene, who stood at the back of the Cathedral and ardently prayed. People who were with Archbishop John during that time noticed that he took a special interest in Eugene, as if seeing in him something extraordinary. He summoned him several times to draw closer to the *kliros*<sup>[d]</sup> and the altar. In the beginning Eugene was reluctant, first of all because he felt he could not adequately take part in the services, which were all in the ancient Church Slavonic language, and secondly because he did not want to be distracted from prayer by the talking that sometimes occurred on the *kliros*. Forcing his will, however, he began to try to take part. Once Archbishop John perceived Eugene's submission to this out of love for Christ, he called him to himself and told him not to pay any attention to anything or anyone outside the context of the flowing cycle of services. In the altar Archbishop John himself never said a word apart from the services. And

when he was in the nave outside the altar (except sometimes when he was with children), he limited himself to a few brief words, or mostly to nods and gestures.<sup>4</sup>

With the encouragement of Archbishop John and his devoted priest Fr. Leonid Upshinsky, Eugene was soon chanting and reading Church Slavonic services not only at the Cathedral but also on the kliros in St. Tikhon's Home, where Archbishop John lived. Having overcome his bashfulness, he felt at peace. In spite of his American accent, he was accepted by everyone as if he had always belonged on the kliros.

**A**RCHBISHOP John needed to give Eugene few instructions and explanations. Eugene internalized the spiritual image of the Archbishop, whom he perceived as a reflection of Christ Himself; and he was to carry this image throughout his life as a source of guidance.

Someone who knew Eugene in his later years recalls: "One time I asked him how he came to Orthodoxy from Chinese studies: from Taoism, Chinese philosophy, etc. He said to me, 'I found in Chinese philosophy the noblest view of man, until I encountered Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Lives of Saints. Then, shortly after I was received into the Orthodox Church, I met Archbishop John, who was the noblest man I had ever met.'"<sup>5</sup>

Toward the end of his life Eugene was to write: "If you ask anyone who knew Archbishop John what it was that drew people to him — and still draws people who never knew him — the answer is always the same: he was overflowing with love; he sacrificed himself for his fellow men out of absolutely unselfish love for God and for them. That is why things were revealed to him which could not get through to other people and which he never could have known by natural means. He himself taught that, for all the 'mysticism' of our Orthodox Church that is found in the Lives of Saints and the writings of the Holy Fathers, the truly Orthodox person always has both feet firmly on the ground, facing whatever situation is right in front of him. It is in accepting given

situations, which requires a loving heart, that one encounters God.”<sup>6</sup>

The fact that Archbishop John had extensive theological knowledge meant much less to Eugene than the fact that he was one who *knew God* and had direct contact with Him. Although his speech was barely intelligible, Archbishop John was able to transmit to Eugene the “heart of hearts” of Orthodoxy in a way that no words could. All the riches of the Orthodox Church — the services, sacred texts, icons, and music — were but the means of becoming what Archbishop John already was.

Some time after Archbishop John’s repose, Eugene wrote a passage that indicated what the Archbishop represented in his life. Not wishing to exalt himself in print, Eugene wrote of himself in the third person, calling himself a “young Western convert.” He began this passage by telling of a sermon he heard at the Convent of the Vladimir Mother of God in San Francisco. The Superior of the convent, Abbess Ariadna, had known Archbishop John when he was still in Shanghai, and she recognized his sanctity.

“Not too many years ago,” Eugene wrote, “the Abbess of a convent of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, a woman of righteous life, was delivering a sermon in the convent church on the Feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God. With tears she entreated her nuns and the pilgrims who had come for the feast to accept entirely and wholeheartedly what the Church hands down to us, taking such pains to preserve this tradition sacredly all these centuries — and not to choose for oneself what is ‘important’ and what is ‘dispensable’; for by thinking oneself wiser than the tradition, one may end by losing the tradition. Thus, when the Church tells us in her hymns and icons that the Apostles were miraculously gathered from the ends of the earth in order to be present at the repose and burial of the Mother of God, we as Orthodox Christians are not free to deny this or reinterpret it, but must believe as the Church hands it down to us, with simplicity of heart.

“A young Western convert who had learned Russian was present when this sermon was delivered. He himself had thought about this very subject, having

seen icons in the traditional iconographic style depicting the Apostles being transported on clouds to behold the Dormition of the Theotokos;<sup>[e]</sup> and he had asked himself the question: are we actually to understand this ‘literally,’ as a miraculous event, or is it only a ‘poetic’ way of expressing the coming together of the Apostles for this event... or perhaps even an imaginative or ‘ideal’ depiction of an event that never occurred in fact? (Such, indeed, are some of the questions with which ‘Orthodox theologians’ occupy themselves in our days.) The words of the righteous Abbess therefore struck him to the heart, and he understood that there was something deeper to the reception and understanding of Orthodoxy than what our own mind and feelings tell us. In that instant the tradition was being handed down to him, not from books but from a living vessel which contained it; and it had to be received, not with the mind or feelings only, but above all with the heart, which in this way began to receive its deeper training in Orthodoxy.

“Later this young convert encountered, in person or through reading, many people who were learned in Orthodox theology. They were the ‘theologians’ of our day, those who had been to Orthodox schools and had become theological ‘experts.’ They were usually quite eager to speak on what was Orthodox and what non-Orthodox, what was important and what secondary in Orthodoxy itself; and a number of them prided themselves on being ‘conservatives’ or ‘traditionalists’ in faith. But in none of them did he sense the authority of the simple Abbess who had spoken to his heart, unlearned as she was in such ‘theology.’

“And the heart of this convert, still taking his baby steps in Orthodoxy, longed to know *how to believe*, which means also *whom to believe*. He was too much a person of his times and his own upbringing to be able simply to deny his own reasoning power and believe blindly everything he was told; and it is very evident that Orthodoxy does not at all demand this of one — the very writings of the Holy Fathers are a living memorial of the working of human reason enlightened by the grace of God. But it was also obvious that there was

something very much lacking in the ‘theologians’ of our day, who for all their logic and their knowledge of Patristic texts, did not convey the feeling or savor of Orthodoxy as well as a simple, theologically uneducated Abbess.

“Our convert found the end of his search — the search for contact with the true and living tradition of Orthodoxy — in Archbishop John Maximovitch. For here he found someone who was a learned theologian in the ‘old’ school and at the same time was very much aware of all the criticisms of that theology which have been made by the theological critics of our century, and was able to use his keen intelligence to find the truth where it might be disputed. But he also possessed something which none of the wise ‘theologians’ of our time seem to possess: the same simplicity and authority which the pious Abbess had conveyed to the heart of the young God-seeker. His heart and mind were won: not because Archbishop John became for him an ‘infallible expert’—for the Church of Christ does not know any such thing — but because he saw in this holy archpastor a model of Orthodoxy, a true theologian whose theology proceeded from a holy life and from total rootedness in Orthodox tradition. When he spoke, his words could be trusted — although he carefully distinguished between the Church’s teaching, which is certain, and his own personal opinions, which might be mistaken, and he bound no one to the latter. And our young convert discovered that, for all of Archbishop John’s intellectual keenness and critical ability, his words much more often agreed with those of the simple Abbess than with those of the learned theologians of our time.”<sup>7</sup>



Archbishop John, as his flock best remembers him.



Bishop Nektary Kontzevitch (1905–83).



Archbishop John (left) with Archbishop Tikhon († 1963), his lifelong friend and predecessor on the San Francisco cathedra.



## *Links to Ancient Sanctity*

*Remember your instructors, who have spoken unto you the word of God; and considering the issue of their life, imitate their faith.*

—Hebrews 13:7

**B**ESIDES Archbishop John and Abbess Ariadna, there were other “living links” in San Francisco with whom Eugene made contact. We have already mentioned Fr. Nektary and Ivan M. Kontzevitch, two blood brothers who had both been disciples of Elder Nektary of Optina.

Fr. Nektary Kontzevitch was a tall, handsome man, with smiling blue eyes, a long blond beard, and curly hair down to his shoulders. A prize swimmer in his youth, he had a robust frame which had now grown rather stout. Big and generous in his gestures, he was yet the most humble, gentle, and pious man one could ever hope to meet. His world was a small one, for he shut himself off from all that was not related to the Church; and because of this, unfortunately, he never learned English. He had a wonderful sense of humor, and would tell stories from his life in Russia with such endearing warmth that his listeners would want to join him in his little world, where even the saddest event would be transfigured in the light of Christian love.

Fr. Nektary lived and breathed the warm, Christ-loving spirit of Optina. When he came to San Francisco, he became the cell attendant of another Optina disciple, Archbishop Tikhon.<sup>[a]</sup> He kept the Archbishop’s huge prayer rule, which, added to the daily cycle of services, usually kept him up until two or three o’clock in the morning. He followed this rule to the end of his life. Gleb

had met Fr. Nektary some years earlier in Jordanville, and had liked him at once. In Optina, Elder Nektary had handed Fr. Nektary over to the spiritual care of Fr. Adrian. And now Fr. Adrian, when Gleb moved to the West Coast, said, “I’m handing you over to Fr. Nektary.” With this he moved his upturned hands as if transferring a baby from one place to another.

Through Archbishop Tikhon’s influence, Fr. Nektary was made a bishop in 1963, and became a vicar to Archbishop John. He regarded both Archbishops Tikhon and John as living saints.

Bishop Nektary’s older brother, Ivan Mikhailovich Kontzevitch, was a professor of engineering as well as a church scholar. Having been converted at Optina, he sought to pass on its legacy through his writings, combining careful, honest scholarship with a firsthand knowledge of saints. It was he who first identified the essence of Christian eldership as a continuation of the prophetic ministry of the ancient Church.<sup>[b]</sup> His classic work *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*<sup>[c]</sup> — a treatise on “inward spiritual activity” and its historical manifestation in Russia — had so enthralled Gleb that for a while he had carried it around with him wherever he went and had even slept with it under his pillow.

Professor Kontzevitch’s wife Helen was no less of a rarity. She was the niece of the famous Russian church writer Sergei Nilus, who had authored books on Optina and uncovered the famous “Conversation of St. Seraphim with N. A. Motovilov.” Like her husband, Helen had known saints and martyrs in Russia, including Elder Anatole the Younger of Optina. In France she had been the spiritual daughter of one of the greatest Russian ascetics and Patristic theologians of the twentieth century, Archbishop Theophan Bystrov of Poltava. Although she took no credit for it, she actually did a lion’s share of the work for her husband’s books, doing research while he was working as an engineer for their livelihood. She was a strong-willed woman, quite open in expressing her views; and she told Gleb and Eugene valuable things which no one else would have told them. When Gleb met them, the Kontzevitches were living in a tiny,

damp basement apartment in San Francisco, underneath the apartment of Bishop Nektary. From there they moved to a small house in Berkeley in order to be closer to the university library. They were dignified, refined, highly cultured people, which of course Eugene could appreciate at once.

“Mr. and Mrs. Kontzevitch,” Gleb recalls, “had no children, and hence all their energy and time was dedicated to the matter closest to their hearts: Optina and the propagation of the Patristic outlook on life — the very essence of Christianity, that salt which the Christian world is losing fast, and upon the exhaustion of which the end of the world will occur. They had a wonderful Patristic library. I would visit them in enthralling, several-hour-long sessions, covering a wide range of profound subjects. When I would leave their dear little house off Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, I would be in a state of exaltation, carrying with me a new heap of Patristic books from the later period, some of them from the very libraries of Optina and Valaam. I realized full well that the very books I held, in trains and buses going home, had been held and touched, perhaps pored over with tears, by the great Optina monks, and even by the great saintly Elders themselves! What a feeling! Fr. Adrian had instilled in me the idea of transplanting Holy Russia’s holiness upon the vastness of America’s fertile soil. These books I trembled over were the seeds for this transplanting.”



Ivan Kontzevitch (1893–1965) and his wife Helen (1893–1989) in front of their icon corner, at the time they collaborated on *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*, Paris, 1950.

Gleb called Bishop Nektary, Ivan, and Helen “my three Kontzevitches.” These rare carriers of the Patristic worldview and the Optina tradition were to have a great impact on the lives of both Gleb and Eugene. In time, they were to make them their spiritual heirs.

**I**N 1963 there arrived in San Francisco another valuable “living link,” a spiritual son of Archbishop John by the name of Fr. Spyridon Efimov. Eugene and Gleb were never to meet a person closer in spirit to Archbishop John. Although Fr. Spyridon was not a figure built on such a grand scale as Archbishop John, he was like him in having repudiated the standards of the world and taken on a certain measure of “foolishness for Christ’s sake.” Together with Archbishop John, he had an unusual rapport with children. Although already old and gray-haired, his face was like that of a seven-year-old boy.

Fr. Spyridon had grown up in the town of Kronstadt in northern Russia, where his family had been close to the extraordinary pastor and miracle-worker, Fr. John of Kronstadt. In 1927, at the age of twenty-two, he arrived in Yugoslavia, which at that time was the heart of the Russian anti-Communist emigration, and entered the theology department of Belgrade University. It was then that he met the future Archbishop John, who was a fellow student at the university, six years his senior. His friendship with the future Archbishop changed his life, opening to him an inner reality that was not earthly, and helping to determine his life’s path in monasticism. When he was eventually ordained to the priesthood and stationed in a Russian refugee camp in Trieste, Italy, Archbishop John was his ruling bishop and came to visit him regularly. In 1963 Archbishop John asked him to come to San Francisco, where he made him one of the leading clergymen and the inspector of the cathedral high school.



Archimandrite Spyridon Efimov (1902–84).

Eugene and Gleb first met Fr. Spyridon when the latter gave his first sermon in San Francisco. “Our first impression of him,” Gleb later wrote, “was magnificent. We could see right away that he was a childlike and guileless person. We noticed that his speech was filled with deep theological knowledge and that his face shone with an otherworldly radiance.”

On leaving the church after the service, Gleb asked Eugene what he thought of Fr. Spyridon. Eugene said he liked him very much, but could see that the Russian society in San Francisco might make fun of him. And indeed, from the point of view of social “respectability,” Fr. Spyridon was something of an embarrassment. As Gleb recalls: “His archimandrite’s mitre and monastic klobuk often stood askew on his head, with tufts of unruly gray hair falling over his eyes and the rest hanging down in streams on either side. His little fingers on both hands were broken and bent. His cassock was a bit too short, and from under it the tall black socks on his thin legs could be seen. His shoes were enormous and their tips pointed outwards; in them he would briskly march around with a noticeable limp, his face beaming. How endearing was the sight of this odd character, so set apart from the prosaic tumult of our secularized

society!”<sup>1</sup>

In 1964, Eugene and Gleb met yet another close disciple of Archbishop John: Fr. Mitrophan Manuilov, a jovial, warmhearted priest-monk with a ruddy complexion. Born Alexey Manuilov, Fr. Mitrophan had grown up in the town of Voronezh in southeastern Russia. There the young Alexey had known a genuine fool-for-Christ named Theoktista Mikhailovna, and had been the spiritual son of a righteous man of prayer and disciple of the Optina Elders, Archpriest Mitrophan Buchnev, who later became one of Russia’s New Martyrs. Alexey married Archpriest Mitrophan’s daughter Nadezhda, who as a child had often accompanied her father to Optina and about whom Elder Nektary had said, “She has the soul of an angel.” Later Alexey and Nadezhda fled to Germany. When his wife died of cancer in 1953, Alexey fell into despair, but he was greatly consoled by Archbishop John, who was at that time stationed in Europe. Archbishop John advised him to go to the St. Job of Pochaev Monastery in Munich, and to pray there for his wife’s repose. The desire to become a monk ripened in him. Within a year he was tonsured a monk by Archbishop John, taking the name of Mitrophan after his martyred father-in-law; and soon thereafter he was ordained to the priesthood. “By God’s Providence,” Archbishop John wrote to the new priest-monk Mitrophan, “our earthly sorrows sometimes work to our great advantage in eternal life. Thus the repose of your spouse has prompted you to go in the footsteps of her father, and she herself will receive indispensable benefit from being commemorated [by you] at the Liturgies.”<sup>2</sup>



Archimandrite Mitrophan Manuilov (1900–1986).

In Archbishop John, Fr. Mitrophan saw the same grace-filled fruits of prayer that he had seen in his father-in-law, and he also recognized something of a genuine fool-for-Christ, of the same spirit as Blessed Theoktista Mikhailovna. He became an absolutely dedicated spiritual son of Archbishop John, absorbing his spirit of pastorship and prayer, and following him to the cities in which he was stationed. It was, in fact, to be near Archbishop John that Fr. Mitrophan came from Paris to San Francisco in 1964. Moving into St. Tikhon's Home, he immediately took up a busy schedule of services and visits to hospitals.

Not long after Fr. Mitrophan had arrived in San Francisco, Eugene wrote of him: "From the first moment I saw him, without knowing who he was, I could see that he was a real Orthodox priest and one of 'ours.' He is truly a man of



prayer. He has held several services before the icon ‘Unexpected Joy’ which he brought from Paris, and they were very moving, filled with the spirit of prayer.”[\[d\]](#)

In San Francisco, Fr. Mitrophan worked hard to raise funds in support of the monastic communities in the Holy Land. Eugene helped Fr. Mitrophan with this work, and thus had more opportunities for contact with this man of prayer, who, together with Fr. Spyridon, became known as a “transmitter” of Archbishop John’s spirituality after the holy hierarch’s repose.

## *Of Stars and Music*

*Alone upon a road I now alight.  
Through fog my rocky path is shining far.  
The desert hearkens, in the dead of night,  
To God, and star is speaking now to star.*

—Mikhail Y. Lermontov

**I**N the year 1963, Eugene also met the outstanding theologian and humble hierarch, Metropolitan Anastassy Gribanovsky, together with Gleb's friend, Bishop Sava Sarachevich of Edmonton.

The ninety-year-old Metropolitan, having been consecrated a bishop in Russia in 1906, had carried the grace of an apostle for over half a century. Since 1936 he had been the chief hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad, and had upheld the Church in the Diaspora through great events and shocks, especially during the Second World War. His circumspection in dealing with complex and at times volatile matters affecting the Church had earned him the title “Most Wise” among the Russian bishops. A refined and cultured man, he was the author of a fascinating philosophical book entitled *Conversations With One's Own Heart*, consisting of random meditations on theology, art, literature, and music. He was the senior hierarch of Archbishop John, who had great respect for him and later wrote his short biography.<sup>1</sup>

Eugene's brief but close contact with Metropolitan Anastassy occurred only two years before the latter's repose, and under unusual circumstances. Gleb relates how the meeting occurred:

“In July of 1963, one of my students, who took part in my singing group, informed me of a Bach Festival held annually in the nearby village of Carmel. I was very interested to attend, especially since I was expecting Eugene to visit his parents in Carmel at that time, and I knew he would want to go also. He especially loved Baroque music....



Metropolitan Anastassy Gribanovsky (1873–1965).

“Just before the opening of the Festival, my student told me that he had been offered to be an usher there and that, if I wished, I too could get to the concert in the same way, helping them out as an usher. I gladly accepted and arrived way before the beginning. It was fabulous: the opening program included a complete oratorio of Handel, *The Judgment of Solomon*. The singers were highly professional, and the orchestra and chorus were huge.

“Just before the beginning I was pleasantly surprised to see at the concert Eugene, who, to my astonishment, was ushering in the ninety-year-old Metropolitan Anastassy. The Metropolitan was with his devoted chauffeur, who, I was told, was a great connoisseur of music like the hierarch. Bishop Sava of

Edmonton, Canada, followed the procession.

“I had been aware that the Metropolitan was visiting the West Coast, but of course I never could have expected to see him here in Carmel. Many people stood up out of respect as the ancient patriarchal figure of our dear Metropolitan was slowly, actually barely, walking down the aisle of this beautiful church-like concert hall, in his white cowl and black robes. He was very small in stature and highly awe-inspiring. I took his and Bishop Sava’s blessing and was asked by the latter, who was my old friend from my Canadian sojourns and a frequent correspondent, to see to it that the doors be kept shut as the Metropolitan had a bad cold and drafts were fatal to him. I at once understood why I of all people had to be, for the first time in my life, an usher that very afternoon.

“The Metropolitan was well known to me from my Jordanville days. I had several conversations with him there. One of them concerned Elder Herman of Alaska, whom he highly regarded, since I asked his blessing to go to Alaska on a pilgrimage right after my graduation. He blessed my good intent and asked me to pray fervently at the grave of the Elder (whom he emphatically called “the future saint”) for the whole Russian Church, which is in great need of heavenly protection. ‘You be our messenger,’ the ancient prelate said to me then, ‘and bestow our blessing upon the faithful guardian of his holy remains — Archimandrite Gerasim,’ which of course I did....

“The orchestra began. Eugene was asked to sit right next to the frail Metropolitan and was instructed to keep covering him with a blanket. On the other side of Eugene sat Bishop Sava, who clearly enjoyed the musical rendering of the Biblical story and was constantly smiling and rubbing his hands. And I too, standing and guarding the door, lest any foreign gust of wind disturb the vibrant air of the audience’s apprehension, enjoyed every minute of that occasion....

“When the first part of the overpowering, superb oratorio was over, the ailing Metropolitan began to shuffle out of his seat. He had no strength to stay for the rest of that night’s program. But I was elated. With my own eyes I saw a

great, truly Orthodox theologian, one who had lived long enough and had certainly led a rich enough life of purely ecclesiastical refinement to be able to discern what was great music. He had troubled himself to come all the way here in order to relish with us this dignifying music on a Biblical theme. That was a gift to me from above.

“This was the last time that I saw the Metropolitan. As we came out into that warm summer night, with that *Judgment of Solomon* still ringing in my ears, this kind and gentle little man of a Metropolitan, a giant in my sight, bestowed his last blessing upon my sinful head.... ‘O Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner,’ I whispered in my heart with a feeling of gratitude, as the car with the hierarchs swiftly rolled down the hill toward the blinding sunset over the shining sea.”<sup>2</sup>

**F**ROM the time of Eugene’s first visit to Gleb’s cottage in Monterey earlier that year, he and Gleb had found common ground in their love for classical music: music that had helped lead both of them, in different ways, to the threshold of Orthodoxy. Remembering that day in early spring, Gleb writes:

“After seeing the historic sites in Monterey, Eugene and I went to his parents’ house in Carmel. I met his parents for the first time, had dinner with them, and then had the opportunity to listen to some of Eugene’s music. He walked with me all the way back to my cottage, a distance of about five miles, through all kinds of shortcuts he knew. I was being inwardly fulfilled by our discussion. That night I learned much about his soul, not through what he said about himself, but through what he said about his appreciation of music. There was a language — a link — between him and the world of music, which he was reluctant to share. Monteverdi, Telemann, and Corelli were the subject of his talk. As we walked I almost heard the music, and somehow associated this with his soul’s deep dissatisfaction with the way the world operates.

“It was late at night. The sky was strewn with stars. I was so hopeful about my job, California, and the future; yet nothing concrete pleased me. I longed for my love for the world of ascetics to be realized. Eugene was far from the factual

knowledge of the ascetics, but somehow he knew what moved them to undertake the desert *podvig* [struggle].

“Eugene remained an enigma to me, as we stood at the door of my cottage, surrounded by the mimosa bushes with their bright yellow blooms. Our talk ended on the subject of stars. ‘I have to confess,’ he said to me then, ‘that what touches me most in the world is the stars.’

“We parted. He went all the way to Carmel on foot, probably walking through the whole night, while I entered my cottage. Since it was my custom then to read the daily Compline Canon to the Theotokos, I opened my large Slavonic liturgical book and began to chant aloud. I sang far into the night, with my candle burning and the mimosa bushes swaying outside my open window. And I thought, in connection with the repentant thoughts of the Canon: How mysterious is the world, how short and fleeting! And what great opportunities God sent to this New World, if we could only tap the ancient wisdom of the Orthodox Church.

“Then and there that night, I placed in my heart a decision: to make available the mysteries of the fragrant desert to the young God-seeker Eugene, who wandered the nights in prayer, deeply longing for the immortal realm that was only hinted at by the music we had just heard, and by the stars that filled the sky.”<sup>3</sup>

## *A Saint on Trial*

*The ungodly, reasoning within themselves not aright, said: let us oppress the righteous man... he was made to reprove our thoughts; he is grievous for us even to behold, for his life is not like other men's, his ways are of another fashion. We are esteemed of him as counterfeits, he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness, he pronounceth the end of the just to be blessed.*

—Wisdom of Solomon 2:1, 10, 14–16

*I speak to your shame.... Brother goeth to law with brother, and that before unbelievers.*

—I Corinthians 6:5–6

*The sword of our soul does not acquire a keen sharp edge unless another's wickedness hones it.*

—St. Gregory the Great<sup>1</sup>

**N**EARLY all the “living links” whom Eugene met in San Francisco were members of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (also called the Russian Church Outside of Russia, or simply “the Synod”), which as we have noted was then headed by the venerable Metropolitan Anastassy. Of this branch of the Russian Church Eugene was an ardent member. As far as he could see, the Russian Church Abroad was blessed to have in its membership the most vivid representatives of Holy Russia who were then living in the Diaspora: miracle-workers, prophets, elders, true theologians, and philosophers. Eugene had

become a young Orthodox zealot, and in America the Russian Church Abroad had been the Church most zealous in upholding Orthodox traditions. It was one of the few Orthodox Churches in the West that had not accepted the Church Calendar reforms of the 1920s and had remained on the Julian (“Old”) Calendar. For Eugene, who understood well the infernal nature of the modern Communist movement, it was also important that the Russian Church Abroad had not compromised with the Soviet regime in Russia. Formed in 1920 in accordance with an emergency decree issued by Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow in that same year,<sup>[a]</sup> the Church Abroad had resolved to remain administratively separate from the Church in Russia until such time as the latter was liberated from persecution by the godless Soviet authorities. At the same time, as its founding hierarchs affirmed, the Church Abroad considered itself from the beginning to be “an inseparable, spiritually united branch” of the Mother Church in Russia.<sup>[b]</sup>

But while everyone in the Russian Church Abroad was for upholding tradition and against capitulation with the Soviet regime, Eugene was soon to learn that not everyone was of the same spirit. As he later remarked in a letter: “I think you well realize that not everything in the Synod is the same quality as gold, and for our own sake and the sake of those who trust and listen to us we must find out and cling to only the best quality. All of us who have the ‘one thing needful’ at heart should become even closer together in the dangerous days ahead.”<sup>2</sup>

Within the episcopate of the Church Abroad itself, there were some who did not see eye to eye with the hierarchs whom Eugene had come to love and admire. It was the outspoken Helen Kontzevitch who first brought this to Eugene’s attention. “From the first ‘milk’ I drank in as an Orthodox Christian in the Synod,” Eugene was to recall in later years, “I was taught that we have two kinds (or perhaps ‘traditions’) of bishops: on one side Vladikas<sup>[c]</sup> John, Averky, Leonty, Nektary, Sava; on the other, those who now seem to have the governing positions.”<sup>3</sup>

It was the lot of the great and holy hierarchs of the Russian Church Abroad



to suffer much at the hands of those of the “other” tradition. And the one to suffer the most was the holiest of them all: Archbishop John.

Archbishop John was himself a loyal member of the Russian Church Abroad, and believed that it should remain administratively separate from the Church in Russia — the Moscow Patriarchate — so long as the Communist regime enslaved his homeland. While in China he had remained under Metropolitan Anastassy and the administration of the Russian Church Abroad even when the five other Russian hierarchs in the Far East had placed themselves under the Moscow Patriarchate. As Eugene wrote, however, “he was absolutely above ‘parties,’”<sup>4</sup> and thus he could not be counted on to adhere to the isolationist position that many wished to see prevail in the Church Abroad. He had been known to concelebrate, for example, with clergy of the Moscow Patriarchate, the “Evlogiite” Church,<sup>[d]</sup> and the New Calendar Orthodox Churches, an action which many considered taboo. In 1945, while serving as Bishop of Shanghai, he had also been known to commemorate the newly elected Patriarch of Moscow, Alexey I, along with Metropolitan Anastassy during Church services. For this he was suspected by some people of having mixed loyalties and a dangerous sympathy with the Soviet-dominated Moscow Patriarchate. And indeed, although he himself never compromised with the Soviet regime, he had compassion on those in the Church in Russia who could not escape or resist the Communist authority. Looking to the deeper spiritual unity that exists in the Church as a whole, he saw beyond temporary administrative divisions resulting from unfortunate outward circumstances. He told Eugene that the divisions in the Russian Church were provisional, and that once Russia was free these divisions would end.<sup>5</sup> In all this he was very much in keeping with the founding principles of the Russian Church Abroad.

Archbishop John’s lack of political partisanship — coupled with his eccentric appearance and behavior, and the fact that he was first in line to succeed the ailing Metropolitan Anastassy as the next chief hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad — made him a very troublesome person for some

people in the Church Abroad to deal with. At the same time, many thousands of *other* people within the Church Abroad regarded him as a living saint, and were ready to defend him to their last breath.

**I**N San Francisco, Eugene was to witness at close-range the most dramatic clash between the two “traditions” in the Russian Church Abroad. This was undoubtedly the most painful time in Archbishop John’s life, hastening his death three years later. At its culmination, he was publicly tried in the Superior Court of the State of California, having been charged, along with others, with holding an illegal church election and embezzling church funds.<sup>[e]</sup>

The attack on the Archbishop was raised by the parish council of the San Francisco Cathedral, but, as Eugene could see, it was actively supported by some of his own brother bishops. The parish council itself was composed of followers of the aforementioned Archbishop Anthony of Los Angeles.

When Archbishop John had first come to San Francisco at the end of 1962, the existing parish council had refused to let him see its financial records. Upon finally receiving them at a parish council meeting (but not without someone trying to snatch them out of his hands), he found them to have been irregularly kept. Putting them in a publicly accessible place, he called everyone to pay their past debts.

At the beginning of the following year, Archbishop John recorded, “the Great Fast passed in San Francisco with a great number of worshippers and fasters; and Pascha was met with great spiritual enthusiasm. Interrelations in the congregation were observably being ironed out, and they spoke of the previous year’s difficulties as ‘former.’”<sup>6</sup> Archbishop John now called for the work on the new Cathedral to be resumed; and shortly after Pascha there occurred a large gathering to raise donations for this purpose.

Within the parish council, however, trouble continued to brew. With the support of Archbishop Anthony of Los Angeles, the council began to try to stop the building of the Cathedral and have Archbishop John removed from his

position. With this aim the council members composed a petition filled with accusations against Archbishop John, which they sent out to bishops and clergy throughout the free world. The accusations drew the attention of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which reported that “the controversial petition alleged that Archbishop John was ‘generally unstable’ and preoccupied with spiritual matters: failed to investigate thoroughly the controversial finances of the partially built Russian Orthodox cathedral on 26th Avenue and Geary Street, and recognized the Soviet Church while he was in Shanghai.”<sup>7</sup> Other newspaper articles noted that Archbishop John was accused of “red leanings” and “Communist sympathies,” and of “favoring ties with the Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union.”<sup>8</sup> Since it was then at the height of the Cold War, such statements did not reflect well on Archbishop John. As his former orphan Boris Massenkoff told the reporters, however, all Archbishop John did was to commemorate the Patriarch of Moscow during the Divine services.<sup>9</sup>

Apparently because of the petition that had been sent around, Archbishop John was recalled to the Synod office in New York for a special session of the *Sobor* of Bishops.<sup>10</sup> His supporters in San Francisco were upset at this, fearing that he would be made to vacate his see, but he softly reminded them, “I’m a monk, so I have to obey whatever the Synod decides... obey without asking questions.”<sup>10</sup>

At the session in New York, Archbishop John’s opponents in the Synod forced a decision ousting him from his position as Archbishop of San Francisco.<sup>11</sup> Archbishop John had to wait outside the bishops’ meeting for more than four hours while this decision was being made. The news immediately spread to San Francisco, so that by the time Archbishop John returned home there were hundreds of men waiting for him at the airport. “The excitement,” he recorded, “was indescribable.” The tumult and tension continued for more than two weeks. When Archbishop John’s supporters in San Francisco sent a request to the Synod of Bishops to change their decision, such a terrible revolt broke out against these supporters that, as Archbishop John wrote, “there was a danger of

fist-fights, which could have risen to great proportions. I restrained the people as much as I could, since my presence held back somewhat the zeal not according to knowledge; but to my profound sorrow, that which had been done to establish peace in the flock during the course of four months was destroyed in one day, with one stroke.”<sup>12</sup>

Archbishop John’s friend and chief hierarch, Metropolitan Anastassy, telephoned him and talked with him for over an hour. The next day, thanks to the chief hierarch’s influence, the decision of the Synod of Bishops was changed, and Archbishop John’s temporary authority in San Francisco was extended for six months. Still, the fact of the original decision showed Archbishop John’s opponents in San Francisco that they had some influential bishops behind them, and thus they moved forward.

The battle broke out in earnest when Archbishop John called for the election of parish council members and a church warden, together with a General Assembly meeting of the parish, on June 9. The existing parish council, knowing itself to be outnumbered nearly two-to-one by those who loved Archbishop John, began to do everything possible to prevent the election from taking place, going to the state court and acquiring a restraining order against it. <sup>[g]</sup> The restraining order came with a Court summons. As Archbishop John recorded: “On Thursday [June 6, 1963], the evening Divine services had only just ended when an American Court official arrived, attended by one Russian. As soon as I left the church, he delivered to me a copy of a complaint of sixteen members of the parish council and of their collaborators, against sixteen members of the former parish council,<sup>[h]</sup> and against ME and Archpriest Nicholas Dombrovsky.<sup>13</sup> <sup>[i]</sup> I was served a Court order which forbade me from making appointments to have the meeting [for a parish council election] and from signing contracts [with building contractors to continue the building of the Cathedral].<sup>14</sup> Together with this was a summons to appear in Court on May 31/June 13. The former parish council was charged with causing losses for the church in the conducting of its economic matters, and I was charged with

covering up [the actions of] that council.”<sup>15</sup>



Archbishop John visiting the school at the Convent of the Vladimir Mother of God, San Francisco, 1963. At right, Abbess Ariadna (†1996). Photograph from the *San Francisco News Call Bulletin*, April 29, 1963.

Fortunately Archbishop John’s friend, Bishop Sava, had come to San Francisco from Canada to help him out of his difficulties. Having been a court judge in Serbia, Bishop Sava was well prepared to deal with the legal charges.

Archbishop John’s opponents, meanwhile, had been publishing notices and sending letters to each home, stating that the election was not going to take place

and that no one should come. They had in their possession a telegram from the Synod of Bishops, signed by the chief hierarch himself, full of threats to Archbishop John if he were to go ahead with the election. Hearing of this, Bishop Sava contacted the chief hierarch, and on June 7 he received a telegram from him stating that he was in agreement with the carrying out of the election and assembly as planned. On the following day Bishop Sava attended a short hearing of the Court together with Archbishop John. The Judge, after he heard their case, lifted the restraining order.<sup>16</sup>

Despite all the attempts to stop it, the election took place. It was done with voting machines to ensure its validity and was attended by over four hundred people. A new parish council was elected, and, at the General Assembly that followed, immediate arrangements were made to resume building the Cathedral.

The defeated parish council submitted a new complaint to the Court as a supplement to the first. The newly elected members of the parish council were added to the list of the defendants together with Archbishop John,<sup>[i]</sup> and the June 9th election was alleged to be illegal.<sup>17</sup> Eugene's godfather, Dimitry, who was Archbishop John's secretary and was elected as a member of the new council, was listed among the accused. The next court date was set for July 8, but until a verdict was reached, the Court forbade the new parish council to continue the building.

At this point some members of the Synod of Bishops arrived in San Francisco and collaborated with the plaintiffs who had filed the charges. They had special meetings with the plaintiffs' lawyers and offered them what assistance they could to win the case against Archbishop John and the other defendants. One of them, Archbishop Vitaly Ustinov of Canada, claimed to have come as a special representative of the chief hierarch in order to establish peace. "Practically," Archbishop John recorded later, "this expressed itself in a lively intercourse of Archbishop Vitaly with the lawyers of the plaintiffs, and in the presenting of statements to the court that he as a representative of the Synod attested to the illegality of the June 9th assembly."<sup>18</sup> Another prelate,



Archbishop Seraphim Ivanov of Chicago, avoided Archbishop John and instead “participated together with Archbishop Vitaly in a meeting of lawyers supporting those who lodged the complaint.”<sup>19</sup>

On the other side of the dispute, Bishop Sava continued to use his legal experience from Serbia in order to defend Archbishop John. On July 5 he filed a four-page affidavit in which he demonstrated that the June 9th election was in fact legal, offering as evidence the telegram that he himself had received from Metropolitan Anastassy on June 7.<sup>20</sup>

As the trial of the Saint approached, the San Francisco Russian community was in an uproar. At parish meetings, people showed total disrespect to Archbishop John, as if he were no bishop at all. Chaotic shouts broke out. Bitter, abusive speech was hurled at his supporters, especially at Fr. Leonid Upshinsky, the same priest who had helped Eugene to learn and take part in Church services. One church member, who was only a teen-age girl at the time, recalls:

“Archbishop John was really being persecuted something terrible. I heard blasphemous things that people made up to try to destroy him. It was ugly. My parents, unfortunately, were totally against him, being aligned themselves with the bishop in Los Angeles who wanted to have the power and control. My little sister remembers something that was traumatic for her, since she was just a little girl then. ‘I was with Mama,’ she says, ‘and she and this other group of women were running after him, calling him names, and spitting at him. I saw my own mother spit at him right in the face!’—And this was right after Church services!

“Why people hated him, I don’t understand. We children knew he was innocent. He had a rapport with us; he loved us and always took great interest in us. What I remember of him was this old man, all scrunched over, with the most wonderful eyes. He was so tiny! He couldn’t speak very well, but there was just something about him. My little sister tells me that when she met him and he looked into her eyes, she felt the grace come from him.”

Eugene, coming regularly to the San Francisco Cathedral, carefully observed Archbishop John’s response to the intrigue and tumult going on around

him. In a letter to a convert like himself he wrote: “Vladika Ioann<sup>[k]</sup> is my favorite among our bishops, even though I find it next to impossible to understand him. He is constantly filled with such a deep peace and joy that it is spiritually beneficial just to be in his presence. I was present at several crucial moments in the past months, when Vladika was surrounded by excited, weeping, practically hysterical crowds (you know how Russians can be!), but he was exactly the same as ever, still calm and even joyful.”<sup>21</sup>

In another letter from the same time, Eugene said of Archbishop John: “He leads a life of real crucifixion — the strictest asceticism (he never lies down), a totally selfless giving of himself to others, Christian kindness and patience even in the face of the most evil and slanderous accusations (for Satan attacks our Church very strongly, in many ways); but always he is full of such love and joy that one is always happy and at peace in his presence, even in sorrow and the most trying circumstances.”<sup>22</sup>

Eugene also saw how Archbishop John’s flock, out of love for their dear pastor who had delivered them out of war-torn China, tried zealously to defend him. Boris Massenkoff, speaking as a spokesman for all of Archbishop John’s orphans who were then living in San Francisco, told a reporter from the *San Francisco News Call Bulletin*: “We would be in Russia today, or starving to death in China, if it wasn’t for Archbishop John.” As the reporter noted, the orphans “were among 3,500 Russians and other displaced people whom the Archbishop was able to bring to America in 1950–51.”<sup>23</sup>





Photograph printed in the *San Francisco Examiner*, July 9, 1963. Archbishop John in court, surrounded by his friends. Left to right: Bishop Sava, Archbishop John, Archbishop Leonty, Bishop Nektary, Fr. Nicholas Dombrovsky, and Fr. Leonid Upshinsky.

Eugene was present when Abbess Ariadna, staff in hand, spoke out boldly in the Cathedral in her indignation over how a faction of church members had risen up against a living Saint. She told the congregation that those who felt as she did could come instead to her for services. They marched with her out of the Cathedral, leaving it empty, and went directly to the convent.

The strife was so intense that Archbishop John blessed several members of his flock to go to the Moscow Patriarchate church in San Francisco instead of his own church. Here, once again, he showed a lack of political partisanship and a spiritual vision of the unity of the Church that transcended jurisdictional divisions. Boris Massenkoff and other orphans were among those whom Archbishop John sent to the “rival” Russian church.

**S**AN FRANCISCO’S three leading newspapers of the time, the *Chronicle*, the *Examiner*, and the *News Call Bulletin*, published articles on the dispute throughout the days of the trial, focusing their attention on the controversy surrounding Archbishop John. On July 9, 1963, the *Examiner* featured a

photograph of Archbishop John sitting in the courtroom.

The trial lasted four days, and each day the courtroom was packed. Gleb was working in Monterey and so could not attend, but Eugene went to all the hearings. He saw the bishops and clergy who came to defend Archbishop John lined up next to him on the bench. Besides Bishops Sava and Nektary, his friend Archbishop Leonty Filippovich of Chile had come to be with him, having traveled all the way from South America. Fr. Spyridon, Fr. Mitrophan, and Abbess Ariadna were also there.

From the beginning of the trial, Judge Edward O'Day, a kindly old Irish Catholic, could see that he had no ordinary defendant before him, but a true man of God. For the first time in the history of San Francisco, the judge allowed the defendant to say a prayer at the beginning of each session.[\[1\]](#)

Following the monastic principle of not seeking to justify oneself, Archbishop John sat through all the hearings without saying a word.

At the beginning of the first hearing the Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, Archpriest George Grabbe, unexpectedly arrived. "His continual meetings with the plaintiffs' lawyers," Archbishop John recorded, "arrested one's attention." On the third day of the trial the Synod Secretary testified for the plaintiffs, and on the following day the plaintiffs' lawyer gave a speech directed chiefly against Archbishop John. "The accusations were so many," Archbishop John wrote, "that the Judge said that if each one were considered, the business would never end.... The Judge, wishing to end the business in peace, for which he repeatedly called in his talks in court, adjourned the session.... The session was suspended until further notice."[24](#)

Within a few days, three lawyers of the plaintiffs were flown to the Synod headquarters in New York City. There, noted Archbishop John, "they deliberated with Archbishop Vitaly, who had arrived [at the Synod headquarters] again, and with Archbishop Nikon and Fr. George Grabbe. Their meeting lasted for more than four hours."[25](#)

One of the most disturbing aspects of the whole affair had been the

telegrams supposedly coming from the chief hierarch, Metropolitan Anastassy, through the Synod Headquarters. Whenever Archbishop John or Bishop Sava had spoken on the telephone with the Metropolitan, they had found him supportive of their actions and judgments; he had confirmed Archbishop John's authority in San Francisco and, as we have said, had sent signed telegrams as proof of this. At the same time, however, other telegrams were being sent, also bearing the Metropolitan's typed name as author, which stated things exactly to the contrary, undermining Archbishop John's authority, going against all his decisions and enabling the plaintiffs to tell the Court that they were only "acting in obedience to the Synod." These telegrams were sent directly to the plaintiffs and their lawyers, and in one instance to Judge O'Day himself; and Archbishop John would only learn of them later. The Metropolitan was then quite frail; and, as Archbishop John hinted in his report to the Metropolitan and the Archiepiscopal Sobor, the telegrams most likely did not come from the Metropolitan at all. "Recently," Archbishop John wrote, "the still glorious and esteemed name of Metropolitan Anastassy was covered with disgrace because of the contradictory decisions, the appeal to the Court and other actions which have injured his prestige, not only in our flock but also among those of other faiths, since they proceeded from his name. We, his closest co-workers, know how incompatible this is with his character, and we are unable to lay complete responsibility for this upon him."<sup>26</sup>



Archbishop John with his fellow hierarchs during the time of his trial, San Francisco, 1963. Left to right: Archbishop Leonty, Archbishop John, Bishop Sava, Bishop Nektary.

As Eugene later remarked in a letter, Archbishop John considered this situation to be so grave that he expressed “his concern over the continued existence of the Church Abroad as a unified entity — i.e., the San Francisco crisis threatened schism and anarchy and the undermining of the authority of the bishops.”<sup>27</sup> In his report to the Metropolitan and the Sobor dated July 23, 1963, Archbishop John wrote of the disturbing actions and decisions apparently coming from his Synod:

In the beginning I did not especially feel this, since the presence of Archbishop Afanassy and Bishop Sava controlled that which was coming out officially from the Synod. But after their departure and the coming of a new session, business set off with unrestrained swiftness, with no control... decisions flew out provided only that they satisfied the plaintiffs.... The execution of the illegal decision of the Synod threatened church life with great complications and not only did not bring peace, but on the contrary provoked new complications and shocks....

The impression appears that the “Synod” — or, rather, persons who speak in its name — was bound up with those who were elected to the parish council of the preceding year, who want to retain power for themselves or at least for their close associates and those of one mind with them, be this by legal or illegal means.

In every parish, there are people who are dissatisfied with the way things are. There were also such people in San Francisco before the present disturbance. But the creation from them of a united group working now in defense of the local church authority, now against it, now in accordance with the canons, now in contradiction to them, but always unanimously and obstinately, is not just a local phenomenon, but is now guided by someone who is near to the Synod.

With this explanation, all that happened in San Francisco becomes understandable, from the beginning of the origin of the disturbance even to this day. Certain events which arose in other dioceses also become understandable.

What then are the consequences? The authority of the Synod is nearly annihilated....

That which happened in San Francisco has quickly spread to all the Diaspora and threatens the existence of the whole Church Abroad with a falling away of part of her offspring in general from the Faith....

With pain it comes about, then, to watch and see the breakdown of the Church Abroad, profitable only to her enemies. We, her hierarchs, cannot allow this, nor this: that one organized group should dominate over the other bishops and by any means promote whatever that group wants.<sup>[28](#)</sup>

While Archbishop John was completing this report, Metropolitan Anastassy came to the West Coast to help resolve the crisis and support Archbishop John without the interference coming from the Synod headquarters. It was at this time that Eugene and Gleb met the Metropolitan at the Bach Festival in Carmel. It is

interesting that at the very time the Judge was deliberating his decision in the San Francisco Court and the Metropolitan was also determining what to do about the conflict, the Handel oratorio they had heard that night was *The Judgment of Solomon*, on the theme of delivering righteous judgment. Three weeks later a righteous judgment was reached and Archbishop John was established as the permanent hierarch of San Francisco and Western America.

In the meantime, in order to show the court that the charges of embezzlement were false, Archbishop John and the other defendants had to do a very costly audit, for which they hired a nationally known independent accounting firm, Price, Waterhouse & Company. In the end, Judge O'Day acquitted Archbishop John and the others of all charges, finding absolutely no evidence of financial misdealing. As for the church elections, the judge ruled that it was not the state's business to determine whether or not they had approval from the Synod of Bishops. Thus defeated, the plaintiffs yet continued to invent new charges, making appeals to the court for the course of two and a half years, almost up until the time of Archbishop John's death. Repeatedly the charges and appeals were thrown out of court as insubstantial. Finally the lawyer for the defendant, James O'Gara, Jr., told the court that things had gone too far:

To date the defendant has been needlessly forced by the plaintiff faction to incur legal expense totaling several thousand dollars in efforts to protect parish interests. The delay in construction of the cathedral occasioned by this litigation has increased the construction costs beyond belief.

At no point in this litigation has the plaintiff faction come forward to the Court with a single shred of legally sufficient evidence to support any of the unfounded charges made by them....

The Court is aware of the needless dissension and strife among the parish members caused by the unfounded allegations made by the plaintiff faction. Great religious unrest within the parish has been the direct result of the litigation.

The true business of this [parish] corporation, that of furthering the religious ideals of the parish members, has been seriously interfered with by the furor and disharmony resulting from the litigation.

The financial losses suffered by the corporation would in and of themselves be sufficient reason for the court to deny the plaintiffs' Motion. Neither the Court-supervised receiver nor Price, Waterhouse & Company reported any evidence of financial wrongdoing in connection with the church affairs. The damage to the corporation, both from the theological as well as the financial standpoint, approaches that of irreparable injury....



Archbishop John during the building of the new Cathedral, 1963. Behind him, to the left, is Fr. Elias Wen, a Chinese priest originally from Shanghai.

The continuation of the litigation would be an abuse to the judicial process through continuing an action that was and is without merit.<sup>[29](#)</sup>

In the autumn of 1963, Eugene wrote in a letter: “Vladika Ioann, as you must have heard, has been confirmed as Archbishop of San Francisco, and if the diocese is still a long way from real peace, at least there is some order at last. I believe work on the new Cathedral has finally begun again.”<sup>[30](#)</sup>

While attending Archbishop John's trial, Eugene had watched a Saint following his Lord to Golgotha. Like Christ, Archbishop John had been sent there by blind leaders of the blind. But like Christ again, Archbishop John had forgiven them all in the end. When asked who was to blame for all the church discord that had occurred, he replied simply, "The devil."

The living Gospel of Jesus Christ, ever demonstrating its truths in the lives of men, could not have been preached to Eugene in a more effective way. The sight of the Saint's final Golgotha was one he was never to forget.



## *Thomas Merton, Chiliasm, and the “New Christianity”*

*Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing  
of your mind.*

—Romans 12:2

**W**HILE Eugene was working on his book *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*, Gleb sent a preliminary draft of the chapter on nihilism to Archimandrite Constantine Zaitsev, then the editor of Russian and English language publications at Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville. Himself a penetrating philosopher who thought and wrote about the apostasy along similar lines, Fr. Constantine was highly impressed with Eugene’s work. Later, on the basis of this chapter, he referred to Eugene in a Russian journal as “an established ecclesiastical writer.”

In 1963 Eugene undertook to write an essay on Dostoyevsky’s “Grand Inquisitor” and the “New Christianity” of Rome, utilizing material he had written for the “New Christianity” chapter of his book. When finished, he planned to send the essay to Fr. Constantine in the hope that it would be published. A few hundred pages were written and rewritten, but, like Eugene’s *magnum opus*, the essay was never completed and polished due to changes that were to occur in his life.

**A**T the beginning of the essay, Eugene outlined the principles of the reign of Antichrist as described in Patristic writings and in the works of the Orthodox

authors Soloviev and Dostoyevsky. The religion of Dostoyevsky's "Grand Inquisitor," he wrote, "is the religion of earthly bread. It has one central doctrine, and that is: *the welfare of man in this world is the only common and indispensable religious concern of all men*. To anyone capable of distinguishing between them, such humanitarianism seems indeed a paltry substitute for Christianity; but it is by no means superficial. It appeals to some of the highest human emotions; and its logic — once one grants the initial premise — is irrefutable. It is, in fact, the profoundest and most ingenious substitute for Christianity ever devised."

The religion of the "Grand Inquisitor," Eugene maintained, takes fundamental Christian values — peace, brotherhood, unity, love — and distorts them to be used toward the furtherance of purely earthly aims. It does not openly do away with Christianity; it only *reinterprets it*, so thoroughly that sincere Christians are eventually led to work for the same goals as secular idealists who are seeking to build their kingdom of heaven on earth.

Eugene identified the worldly idealism of the modern age, whether it comes from "Christians," occultists, Communists, or Western secularists, as a form of the ancient heresy of *chiliasm*. Apart from its theological definition as a specific Christian heresy — the belief that Christ is soon to come to earth and reign right here with his saints for a thousand years before the end of the world<sup>[a]</sup> — chiliasm can refer more generally to any secular belief in a future age of perfect peace and heavenly blessedness on earth. Along with nihilism (of which it is only the "brighter side"), chiliasm is the key to understanding the spirit of the age, for it is the hub around which many disparate elements will unite.

In the proclamations of the contemporary Roman Church, Eugene saw the most obvious indications of a "transvaluation" of Christian values in the direction of secular chiliasm. He quoted Pope John XXIII's appeal to Orthodox Christians to listen to the "spirit of the times" and his remarkable statement that "the voice of the times is the voice of God." He related how the Pope mocked the idea that the end of the world might be at hand and how he expounded, on

the contrary, the doctrine of an imminent “new order of human relations.”



Archimandrite Constantine Zaitsev of Jordanville (1887–1975).

In contrast to the Scriptural injunction to “love not the world” (I John 2:15), Eugene cited the words of Pope Paul VI: “We shall love our time, our civilization, our technical science, our art, our sport, our world.” Just as this worldly feeling of universal optimism is a denatured form of true Christian love, so also the “New Christianity’s” concept of unity is an externalized form of the spiritual, inward unity of believers that Christ spoke of. Pope John XXIII rejoiced at what he called the “unity in esteem and respect for the Catholic Church which animate those who follow non-Christian religions.” In light of this statement, Eugene concluded: “If mankind is indeed, as Rome claims, to attain a visible religious harmony on this earth, there will doubtless be involved, not one common Christian Faith, but some such agreement based on tolerance and esteem.”

“Humanitarian idealism,” Eugene wrote, “is what is left of Christianity when specifically Christian truth has evaporated from it. It is the one ground on which Christians and non-Christians can unite; for, having sprung from Christianity and derived its specific coloration from Christian doctrine, it yet

appeals to everyone who believes first in man and in earthly happiness. Everyone, receiving this doctrine, can read his own meaning into it. Christians may find in it the earthly side of a doctrine which in its fullness speaks also of Heaven; non-Christians can find in it a doctrine of man and a 'higher reality' that does no violence to their own specific ideas of what lies above man and outside this world; and anti-Christians may find in it an expression of universal wisdom that itself exhausts the religious needs of man. Rome thus can become the teacher of mankind, the fount of universalistic humanitarianism which 'every man of good will' can accept without accepting the specific Christian Faith from which it sprang."

Two years after Eugene wrote this, on October 4, 1965, Pope Paul VI gave an unprecedented address before the United Nations. This event corroborated exactly what Eugene had told Gleb about the United Nations back in 1961, on the day of their first meeting.

"An examination of the Pope's address," Eugene wrote, "reveals a singular fact: the purpose of the Church of Christ is not mentioned, and the name of Christ appears in it only once, in an ambiguous final sentence. It is perhaps assumed that the audience knows for what the Pope stands; he said, indeed, 'You know our mission.' But later, when characterizing the 'aspiration' of the Church of Rome, he said only that she wished to be 'unique and universal'—'in the spiritual field'!

"For a single moment only in his address did it seem that the Pope might be about to speak a word of genuine Christianity. Citing the commandment of our Lord to His Disciples to 'go and bring the good news to all peoples,' the Pope announced that he indeed had a 'happy message' for 'all peoples' represented at the United Nations. For Christians, this can only mean one thing: the good news of salvation, of eternal life in God. The Pope, however, had a different, an astonishing message: 'We might call our message... a solemn moral ratification of this lofty institution.' This is what Rome offers today in place of the Christian Gospel!...

“The Pope’s ideals come not from our Lord, not from the Apostles and Fathers of the Church of Christ, but rather from the rationalist dreamers of the modern age who have revived the ancient heresy of *chiliasm*—the dream of an earthly millennium. This heresy was explicit in the Pope’s evocation of the ‘new age’ of humanity, and of a ‘new history — peaceful, truly human history as promised by God to men of good will.’ The Church of Christ has never taught this strange doctrine; it is, however, one of the cardinal doctrines of Freemasonry, of occultism and numerous related sects, and even (without mention of God) of Marxism. For adopting this sectarian fantasy into the body of Latin doctrine the Pope was acclaimed by the press as a ‘prophet.’

“Involuntarily one calls to mind the last work of the nineteenth-century Russian philosopher, Vladimir Soloviev — the ‘Short Story of Antichrist’ (from *Three Conversations*)—in which, basing himself primarily on the Holy Fathers, he draws a chilling picture of Antichrist as a ‘great humanitarian’ and superman, accepted by the world as Messiah.

“This ‘Messiah’ wins the world by writing a book, *The Open Way to Universal Peace and Prosperity*, which was ‘all-embracing and all-reconciling, combining noble reverence for ancient traditions and symbols with broad and bold radicalism in social and political demands.... It brought a better future so tangibly within reach that everyone said: This is what we want.... The wonderful writer carried all with him and was acceptable to everyone.’ Those who were concerned because the book did not mention Christ were given the assurance that this was not necessary, since it was ‘permeated by the truly Christian spirit of love and all-embracing benevolence.’ Swayed by the great man, an ‘International Assembly’ was formed to create a world government; he was unanimously elected world ruler and issued a manifesto, proclaiming, ‘Peoples of the world! My peace I give unto you. The ancient promises have been fulfilled; eternal and universal peace has been secured.’

“... Paul VI is not Antichrist; but in the whole ‘drama’ in which he was the chief ‘actor’ something of the seductiveness of Antichrist is already present. To

be sure, it is nothing original with him; it is rather the culmination of centuries of apostasy.”<sup>1</sup>

**A**LTHOUGH Eugene never finished his essay on the “New Christianity,” he did complete another lengthy statement on the same topic, in the form of a letter to Thomas Merton.

It was the first years of the 1960s. Having long been on the rise, Catholic humanism would soon change the face of the Roman Church at the Second Vatican Council. Thomas Merton, already famous as a proponent of “contemplative spirituality,” had not only caught the spirit of the age, but was to some extent directing its course. He became an outspoken advocate of the new Christianity of Pope John XXIII; and, like the “religionless” humanism from which it was copied, he upheld man’s reason, with or without faith in God, as the key to global felicity. “Pope John’s optimism,” Merton wrote, “was really something new in Christian thought because he expressed the unequivocal hope that a world of ordinary men, a world in which many men were not Christians or even believers in God, might still be a world of peace if men would deal with one another on the basis of their God-given reason and with respect for their inalienable rights.”<sup>2</sup> In recent articles Merton had affirmed in no uncertain words: “War must be abolished. A world government must be established.... A truly international authority is the only answer [to] the critical needs and desperate problems of man.”<sup>3</sup> He spoke of a possible “birth agony of a new world,” of the duty of Christians today “to perform the patient, heroic task of building a world that will thrive in unity and peace”; and in this connection he spoke of “Christ the Prince of Peace.”<sup>4</sup>

Eugene wrote to Merton that, in light of what seemed to him to be the plain teaching of the universal Church, he found such remarks disturbing. In expressing his disagreement, Eugene was challenging but at the same time respectful. He probably took the time to write this letter because he felt that Merton was one who would consider seriously what he had to say. Years earlier,

as we have related, Merton's first book, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, had made a deep impression on Eugene as a description of a typical modern man who, having experienced the world's delights and discerned their emptiness, had renounced them to seek the world to come.

In his essay on the "New Christianity," Eugene had written: "The tragedy of these times is that men, rediscovering the fact that they require more than earthly bread, turn in their spiritual hunger to what seems to be the 'renewed' Church of Christ, only to find there an insubstantial imitation of genuine spiritual food. Starving men cannot distinguish flavors."

It seemed that Merton had done just this. For whatever reason, this monk, having made a sincere monastic beginning in the strict, cloistered Trappist Order, was now starving for true spiritual life. Grateful to Merton, Eugene hoped to turn him back to his "first love." The fact that Merton was not Orthodox did not deter him. Despite the chiliastic pronouncements of recent popes, Eugene knew that the true, otherworldly eschatology of traditional Christianity was not entirely dead in the Roman Church, as was witnessed by the recent book by the Catholic writer Joseph Pieper, *The End of Time*.

**I**N his letter, Eugene told Merton that "we are witnessing the birth-pangs of... a 'new Christianity,' a Christianity that claims to be 'inward,' but is entirely too concerned with outward result; a Christianity, even, that cannot really believe in 'peace' and 'brotherhood' unless it sees them generalized and universally applied, not in some seemingly remote 'other world,' but 'here and now.'..."

"Christianity become a 'crusade,' Christ become an 'idea,' both in the service of a world 'transformed' by scientific and social techniques and a man virtually 'deified' by the awakening of a 'new consciousness': this lies before us. Communism, it seems clear, is nearing a transformation itself, a 'humanizing,' a 'spiritualizing,' and of this Boris Pasternak<sup>[b]</sup> is a sign given in advance; he does not reject the Revolution, he only wants it 'humanized.' The 'democracies,' by a

different path, are approaching the same goal....

“An age of ‘peace’ may come to weary — yet apocalyptically anxious — man; but what can the Christian say of such ‘peace’? It will not be the peace of Christ.”

At the end of his letter, Eugene encouraged Merton not to be ashamed of genuine, otherworldly Christianity, no matter how foolish it may appear in the eyes of worldly men. “Above all,” he wrote, “the Christian in the contemporary world must show his brothers that all the ‘problems of the age’ are of no consequence beside the single central ‘problem of man’: death, and its answer, Christ. Despite what you have said about the ‘staleness’ of Christianity to contemporary men, I think that Christians who speak of this problem, and in their lives show that they *actually believe* all that ‘superstition’ about the ‘other world’—I think they have something ‘new’ to say to contemporary man. It has been my own experience that serious young people are ‘tired’ of Christianity precisely because they think it is an ‘idealism’ that hypocritically doesn’t live up to its ‘ideals’; of course, they don’t believe in the other world either — but for all they know, *neither do Christians*....

“The outward Gospel of social idealism is a symptom of this loss of faith. What is needed is not more busyness but a deeper penetration within. Not less fasting, but more; not more action, but prayer and penance.... If Christians in their daily life were really on fire with love of God and zeal for His Kingdom *not of this world*—then everything else needful would follow of itself.”<sup>5</sup>

Eugene was one with Dostoyevsky in believing that any true improvement of society must come through the spiritual transformation of each person. As Elder Ambrose of Optina clearly expressed it: “Moral perfection on earth (which is imperfect) is not attained by mankind as a whole but rather by the individual believer according to the degree to which he fulfills God’s commandments and the degree of his humility. Final and complete perfection is attained in heaven in the future eternal life for which the short terrestrial life serves only as a preparation.”<sup>6</sup>



**I**F Eugene ever sent his letter to Thomas Merton, no reply from the latter has been preserved.<sup>[c]</sup> In succeeding years, Eugene was to watch with sadness as the consequences of Merton's "disturbing" orientation played themselves out. In 1966 Merton formally rejected the outlook he had held twenty-five years earlier, when he had entered the monastery and written *The Seven Storey Mountain*. He mocked what he felt to be his former delusion in renouncing the world, believing this to be part of the "negative," "world denying" Christianity that had existed throughout the centuries but was now outmoded, ready to be replaced by the new vision of Pope John XXIII. In outlining his new way of thinking, Merton said that the true duty of the Christian was "to *choose* the world."<sup>7</sup>

The tragedy of Thomas Merton — and such it was, no matter what the world may try to make of him — bore witness to Eugene's statement that "the outward Gospel of social idealism is a symptom of loss of faith." At the same time that Merton made a break with the tenets of his younger days, he began to take his spiritual search outside Christianity and into Eastern religions. At first Eugene hoped that this search would free him from the straitjacket of Roman Catholic institutionalism with which he was struggling as a monk, and would lead him, as it had Eugene himself, to the "Eastern," mystical dimension of Christianity — Orthodoxy. But such was not the case. Merton's investigation of Buddhism and Hinduism only led him deeper into them. Following from his Church's striving for "universality in the spiritual field," he gradually lost his faith in the uniqueness of Christian Truth. "Starving men cannot distinguish flavors." By the time of his famous pilgrimage to Hindu and Buddhist centers of Asia, Merton viewed Christianity as but one path among many; he said he felt more rapport with Buddhists than with Roman Catholics,<sup>8</sup> and expressed his desire to "find a Tibetan guru and go in for Nyingmapa Tantric initiation."<sup>9</sup>

One can imagine where Merton's course would have taken him and his millions of admirers had he been able to finish his Asian pilgrimage and return to America. When he died suddenly in Bangkok after lecturing at a conference

of United Religions in Calcutta, Eugene felt that he had been mercifully stopped by God's Providence. With sorrow he remarked to Gleb on the fate of this man who had once given him hope — hope that it was indeed possible for a modern man to live for the otherworldly Kingdom of Christ.

Eugene was now going in a direction opposite to the one Merton had taken at the end of his life. For Merton, pagan Asia was “clear, pure, complete... it needs nothing.” But Eugene, from his own years of searching in Buddhism, had already felt most excruciatingly that it still lacked the most essential thing of all. Merton, who had reached a spiritual impasse in contemporary Roman Catholicism, believed that he had “fully utilized his own tradition and gone beyond it.”<sup>10</sup> Eugene, on the other hand, had already experienced the limitations of the non-Christian religions which Merton had been exploring. He had already gone beyond *them* to find, for the first time in his life, joy and spiritual regeneration in Jesus Christ; and his growth within the Orthodox tradition had only begun.

## *Old Ties*

*A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*

—Proverbs 17:17

**O**N July 12, 1963,<sup>[a]</sup> on returning home from church where he had partaken of Holy Communion, Eugene received a letter from Alison. He had lost contact with her for almost three years and had, as he said, “despaired of ever hearing from her again.” Since he had last heard from her, she had gotten married and moved to a farm in Illinois. In her letter she told Eugene that, although she had no intellectual doubts about Christian Truth, she now found her faith to be more or less dead.

“And so,” Eugene wrote back to her, “it seems that in these few years our roles have been reversed: I, who was still seeking then, have found the object of my search; and you are now once more seeking. But this is as God wills.

“I am very happy to hear again from you, and I am quite certain about the meaning of your writing now. I have prayed for you always, and have thought often about you.”

Eugene went on to tell Alison about his entrance into the Church, and said he believed that she had written at this time because God wished him to tell her about Orthodoxy. He wrote of how the Orthodox Church continues to produce saints, and cited Archbishop John as an example. “If you are really interested in Orthodoxy,” he offered, “I can begin to send you books (not books *about* Orthodoxy so much as books of very practical spiritual advice which are a necessary nourishment of the Orthodox life), icons, etc., as well as introduce you

to Orthodox people.... One of the joys of the Orthodox life is knowing such people (even if only by correspondence), for in Orthodoxy especially the sense of community is very strong; among devout people, everyone is ‘brother’ and ‘sister,’ and these words are not mere metaphors. All who have taken the name of Orthodox Christians are striving together for the same goal; and even in this life we have a foretaste of the perfect love that will bind us together in our Lord in the eternal Kingdom He has prepared for His faithful.”

Eugene went on to state that “the heart of Orthodoxy is prayer; and I may truthfully say that before I found Orthodoxy I never had the slightest idea of what prayer was or what power it had. Often, of course, one is cold in prayer; but I have known times, both by myself and with others, of truly warm and fervent prayer, and of heartfelt tears of repentance: and I have known the joy of seeing my prayers answered. Thus encouraged I, feeble and unworthy, have been bold to speak to our Lord and to His Mother and His Saints (I have known no one who prays to the Saints with such faith and fervor as Orthodox believers), and their guidance in my life is as real to me as my own breathing.”

“Write soon and tell me what is in your heart,” Eugene concluded. “If I have spoken boldly, it is out of the intense certainty and joy with which I am filled by our Lord when I receive His Most Holy Body and Blood. How can I not speak boldly when it is as clear as day to me that everything in this world passes away in an instant, and all that remains is our Lord and the indescribable Kingdom He has prepared for us who take His light yoke upon ourselves (and indeed, how light is that yoke that looks so heavy to unbelievers!) and follow Him. Pray for me, who am unworthy of everything that has been given me.”<sup>1</sup>

A few months after writing this letter, Eugene wrote to a devout young woman named Nina Seco, an American convert to Orthodoxy, and asked her to make contact with Alison. About Alison he wrote: “The last time I saw her she was a fervent Anglican (High Church), with a great deal of spiritual awareness and a great love for Our Lord.... I know she is capable of suffering a great deal in silence if need be.” He told Nina that he would be sending Alison some

Orthodox books and icons, but that “what she needs most is contact with real believers and fellow pilgrims on earth.”<sup>2</sup>

From another letter that Eugene wrote to Alison in 1963, it is evident that his parents were growing concerned that he was becoming overly religious. “Speaking of my family,” he wrote, “I saw them last week, and it is obvious that they are becoming more and more worried about me. They would have been only too happy if I had followed a normal worldly vocation, but they set their hopes so high on me and now I turn out to be a religious ‘fanatic.’... A young Russian friend of mine who lives in Monterey [i.e., Gleb] showed them some slides of Russian monasteries and churches in North America, and they thought they were ‘quaint’ but old-fashioned, etc. But what really shocked them, my father especially, was a photograph of an old monk who had spent forty years in his cell and hardly even spoke with other people. He has perhaps attained to a high spiritual state, but all my parents could see was the example of a totally ‘wasted life.’ I fear I became rather desperate when I spoke of a life of prayer and spiritual attainment, and how the true values are not of this world but of the next — only to meet with total incomprehension and the suggestion that too much religion is really ‘sickness.’ Well, where communication breaks down at least prayer is still possible; but it makes me both angry and sad to think of the many Protestant ministers posing as preachers of ‘Christianity,’ but actually leading their flock down the path of seduction and leaving them totally unprepared for the severe realities of the next life. I met my parents’ minister: he never once spoke of God or religion, and on hearing I was writing a religious book he seemed anxious to change the topic of conversation.”<sup>3</sup>

In yet another letter to Alison, Eugene expressed his hope that they would be together in the Kingdom of Heaven: “In reading your letter over again, I see that you say, ‘Your life is now complete, and you have many friends a great deal dearer than I. I am not one of you.’ But that is not true. As a matter of fact, I have very few close friends; but that is not what I mean. Spiritual friendship (and every other kind, while having its consolations, ends with death) does not require

the conditions (common activities or work, a common circle of acquaintances, frequent meetings, etc.) without which worldly friendships simply evaporate. Spiritual friendship is rooted in a common Christian faith, is nourished by prayer for each other and speaking to each other from the heart, and is always inspired by a common hope in the Kingdom of Heaven in which there shall be no more separation. God, for His own reasons, has separated us on earth, but I pray and hope and believe that we shall be together when this brief life is over. Not for a single day have you been absent from my prayers, and even when I heard nothing from you for two years and thought perhaps I would never hear from you again, you were still closer to me than most of the people I see frequently. Oh, if we were real Christians, we would be strangers to no one, and would love even those who hate us; but as it is, it is all we can do to love a few. And you are certainly one of my ‘few.’”<sup>4</sup>

**E**UGENE was still working on *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God* while supporting himself with menial jobs. In his letter to Nina he wrote: “The book I have been writing is in much better form, though still far from finished.... I sometimes despair that I am making it too abstract and philosophical, so that no one will be interested in it or read it.” While he was bussing dishes, his mind would turn to his true work, which he described to Nina as “a study of the consequences of atheism as contrasted with the consequences of faith (historical-spiritual-philosophical-theological).”<sup>5</sup> Once his philosophical cogitations caused him to accidentally drop a stack of dishes. Turning around at the sound of the crash and seeing the broken pieces on the floor, the angry restaurant manager put his hands on his hips and bellowed: “ROSE! YOU’RE FIRED!”

“It is somehow a sobering thought for me,” wrote Eugene to Alison, “with all my philosophical and abstract pretensions, to be a failure as a lowly busboy.”<sup>6</sup> Later Eugene worked as a busboy in a restaurant which he said was a “pleasanter place,” but he lost this job, too. As he explained: “They sensed that

my heart wasn't in my work, which it certainly wasn't."<sup>7</sup>

In between jobs Eugene would devote himself full-time to his book until his money began to run out. After his busboy jobs he got employment as a janitor, just like his father Frank. He found that being a busboy was easier, but he preferred working as a janitor because it was quieter and he was able to work at night, when the restaurant was closed.

Eugene wanted to visit the Jordanville monastery and seminary during Christmas of 1963, but failed to save enough money for the trip. This was unfortunate, for within a dozen years nearly all of its great teachers would be gone. In 1975, Eugene was to make this statement on what Jordanville had been when he had first planned to make a trip there: "Today an education on Orthodox principles is just about extinct. The seminary in Jordanville in the 1950s and 1960s was actually one of the models in the modern world although few people were aware of it, because it had a greater collection of true Orthodox thinkers than has been gathered at any place since 1917, in Russia or outside of Russia, if we except the prison camp at Solovki. But the great men who were there — such as Professors I. M. Andreyev and I. M. Kontzevitch,<sup>[b]</sup> Nicholas Talberg, Archbishop Averky, Archbishop Vitaly [Maximenko]<sup>[c]</sup> before him, Archimandrite Constantine, Fr. Michael Pomazansky and others — these men are now gone or almost gone, and one must confess with some sadness that not many people appreciated them. And now there is no one to replace them."<sup>8</sup>

Eugene did, however, take advantage of opportunities to meet with the Russian Orthodox thinkers who were then living in San Francisco. His godfather Dimitry recalls: "The 1960s was a time of a great Russian émigré renaissance in San Francisco, both religious and cultural. There were many outstanding personalities — clerics, writers, artists. The center of this radiance was Archbishop John, together with several outstanding bishops with links to the spiritual traditions of old Russia. It was a great privilege to be there at that time!



Dimitry Andrault de Langeron. Photograph taken during the time he was living in San Francisco.

“My friends, the brothers Zavarin, had organized in their home meetings of the *Umolyubtsy* (Lovers of Wisdom), which had a philosophical but also a religious and literary orientation. Eugene came, and talked about his ideas.<sup>[d]</sup> Professor Ivan Kontzevitch, a gifted and well-known theologian, also came, as did professors of the university at Berkeley. Discussions lasted long into the night. The thinkers we discussed included Hegel, Kant, Dostoyevsky, and Professor Ivan Ilyin; and we dealt with such topics as the boundaries between science and religion.”<sup>9</sup>

**D**IMITRY later remembered Eugene as a shining light from those golden days in San Francisco: “Eugene became a very dear friend. I cannot forget his kind, penetrating eyes, his smile, his sobriety, his calmness, his composure, his natural nobility. He was intense, but shy.... We met very often. I read and translated to him classical texts of Russian spirituality. We had many



discussions....

“I remember a Pascha morning I spent with Eugene in his house after the Paschal service. According to Russian custom, we watched the sun rise. It is said that at that time the sun ‘dances.’ We contemplated it in awe. We spoke about the sensation of ‘light’ which can be experienced in church, which is not the usual physical light, but something deeper, filling the heart with joy. Everything remains the same and yet everything is transfigured....”<sup>10</sup>

Eugene likewise had a deep appreciation for his godfather. At the end of 1963, when Dimitry (then engaged to be married) moved with his mother Svetlana to New York, Eugene wrote to him these words of thanks: “I am now near the end of my second year as an Orthodox Christian, and if I am, not worthy of Orthodoxy — for no one can be worthy of it — but at least pointed in the right direction, I owe a great deal of gratitude to you for helping me. Your friendship and spiritual example have been very important in setting me on the straight Orthodox path. I only hope that there will be more Orthodox to take such good care of their spiritual ‘children,’ once American conversions to Orthodoxy become more frequent, as I think they will. Only by such immediate spiritual contacts and examples can Orthodox converts in America hope to preserve the fulness of Orthodoxy and avoid the common pitfalls of relaxation and modernization.”<sup>11</sup>

The influence of Dimitry’s friendship and his example of guileless faith stayed with Eugene for the rest of his life. By learning what he later called “natural” or “normal” Orthodox piety from his godfather and others like him, Eugene himself was to become an example to the Orthodox converts of the succeeding generations.

## *Meeting Russia in Monterey*

**I**N July of 1963 Gleb's mother Nina came to Monterey and moved into a rented house with Gleb. Gleb's younger sister Ija had already been living in California for over a year, in the city of Oakland, and made frequent trips to Monterey to visit her mother and brother. Thus it was that Eugene, on his own trips down the coast to visit his parents, got to know all three Podmoshenskys.

Eugene's parents had liked Gleb from the time they met him, and when they learned about Ija they hoped that a relationship might develop between her and their son. They invited the three Podmoshenskys for dinner one Sunday afternoon, and the two families got along famously. This was a great relief to Eugene, since in the past his mother had generally disapproved of his friends.

When in Monterey, Eugene played guitar for Ija, continued to roam for hours with Gleb on the seashore and through the woods, and went mushroom hunting with both Gleb and Nina in the Monterey Presidio Park. Mushroom hunting is a favorite activity of Russians, and it became such for Eugene, with Nina as his instructor. In a letter to his godfather Dimitry he wrote: "Last week I was in Carmel, and I spent several enjoyable days hunting mushrooms with Gleb and his mother in the woods near their house. I had always been terrified of wild mushrooms before, but now I discover that there are many varieties that are both delicious and easily (and safely) identified."<sup>1</sup>

**N**INA PODMOSHENSKAYA, who was then sixty-seven years old, became for Eugene one more link to Russia — as well as a flesh-and-blood witness of his whole philosophy. Having lived in Russia both before and after the Revolution,

she provided a firsthand description of how a nihilistic society manifests itself, producing “subhumanity.” Eugene asked her detailed questions about the Soviet judicial and prison systems. Not only had her husband been imprisoned, but her father and twenty-year-old brother had as well. Her father had lost all his hair and her brother all his teeth within a week due to the terrible conditions of the Vologda prisons; and the ruthless Soviet agents — mere hooligans trained specifically in sadism — had even shot the family dog, since they believed pets were “capitalist parasites.”



Eugene in 1963.



Eugene and Ija in San Francisco.



Eugene at the Podmoshensky home, Monterey, 1963–64.



Eugene playing guitar for Ija.



Nina Podmoshenskaya.

Nothing gave Nina greater pleasure than to pour out her rich life experience before such an avid listener as Eugene, speaking in her native tongue with dramatic force garnered from her Fokine ancestry. “He absorbs it like a sponge!” she told Gleb. She did not limit her discourse to the horrors of Communism — which to her was nothing less than a satanocracy — but spoke just as emphatically about the glories of pre-Revolutionary Russia. “You wouldn’t

believe it,” she would say. “*Everywhere* there were churches, sometimes three on a block! Huge churches of all kinds, of bright colors. Rich benefactors would build one in memory of a loved one, or a community would build one in honor of some miracle. All over you would see shining cupolas. In the morning hundreds of bells would be ringing, calling people to prayer and making the whole atmosphere of the city light and joyful. And there were holy shrines all over, too, with lampadas burning all day and night before holy icons. People often stopped in the middle of their daily tasks to venerate them and say a prayer.”

Being from a high-society family of the Russian intelligentsia, Nina had not appreciated these religious manifestations while in the old country; it was only after she had seen her son “born again” as an Orthodox Christian that she had come to realize their value. Before, she had been taught to view Russian Orthodoxy as the mere “religion of maids and cooks.” Now she recalled how her family cook in Russia had, after putting food in the oven, gone to church every morning. When he returned to serve the meal, Nina said, he emanated a deep spiritual peace that had a calming effect on the entire household: “It was like being in the presence of a real saint. And he was just an ordinary layman — people like him were quite common.... How great was Holy Russia!” Nina concluded. “But here in America,” she sighed, “everything is based on making money!” and she pretended to slap a wallet on her hip.

This appraisal of contemporary American culture, of course, more or less matched Eugene’s. He felt so much more at home in Russian culture that, in a letter of 1963, he wrote that he felt himself “to be more Russian than American.”<sup>2</sup> But there are some things a true American never loses; and no matter what Eugene may have thought of himself at this moment of his life, he retained to the end a peculiarly American spirit of independence and a strong work ethic.

In his love for Russia, Eugene did not go so far as to believe that becoming Orthodox required one to change one’s ethnic identity. To another of the rare (at

that time) American converts to Orthodoxy, he wrote: “I am quite interested in your English-language Orthodox Church and would like to hear more about it and about the priest. While I am quite satisfied with the Church Slavonic myself... I realize that one can’t expect many converts to go so far. In fact, one of the chief difficulties I’ve had in my own modest missionary endeavors is the linguistic and cultural barrier. People are invariably fascinated by the Slavonic services, but any more intimate contact with the Church seems out of the question to them. What kind of success has your Church had?”<sup>3</sup>

As he continued to work on his book, Eugene kept Gleb informed of its progress and read portions to him. Gleb felt that it was a tremendously important work. He was fascinated with Eugene’s insights into the modern world, which reminded him so much of those of his former instructors Archbishop Averky and Archimandrite Constantine. He had, however, one major objection, which was that Eugene’s book was too one-sided.

At the Jordanville seminary, Gleb had expressed a similar objection to Fr. Constantine’s philosophy. Fr. Constantine, he knew, grasped the very essence of Orthodoxy, having been awakened to spiritual reality while living as a Russian exile in China. There, receiving guidance and inspiration from Archbishop John and from the clairvoyant Elder Ignatius the Blind of Harbin, Manchuria, Fr. Constantine had been transformed by Christian Truth and had dedicated his life to spreading and defending it, both as a priest-monk and as a writer. And yet, when Fr. Constantine defended Orthodoxy, it seemed to Gleb that he spoke and wrote more about the *apostasy* from Christian Truth than about the Truth itself.

Having been born into a family of Jews who had converted to Orthodox Christianity, Fr. Constantine was like Eugene in his belief that modern man first needed to realize why and how he had departed from the fullness of Truth before he could return to it. Gleb, on the contrary, believed that this was starting at the wrong end of the problem. He maintained that, since people did not know the true Christ from Whom they have apostatized, all this talk about the apostasy

would hold little or no meaning for them. Before anything else, he felt, they needed to have the fullness of Truth hit them square in the face. They needed to be exposed to the abundant sources of Orthodox experience — to Lives and writings of the saints, and especially of the ascetics of recent times.

Thus it was that, just as Gleb had argued with Fr. Constantine at Jordanville, so now he contended with Eugene. In hearing Eugene read to him from *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*, he sensed two things: first, that Eugene was still a rebel inside; and secondly, that he was a warrior of the mind and needed to develop his heart more. There remained in him an element of past bitterness which, Gleb believed, needed to be worked out with time.

“Why is the whole emphasis on the Kingdom of Man?” Gleb asked. “I’m already *in* it — I’m rotting in it. What about the Kingdom of God?!”

“Well,” responded Eugene, “for that we have the Scriptures and the writings of the Holy Fathers.”

“That’s true,” Gleb said. “But those come down to us from the past. What about now? Doesn’t the Kingdom of God exist simultaneously with the Kingdom of Man? The Kingdom of God is also going on, and we have to make it real in our lives.”

As time went on and Eugene’s faith deepened, his past bitterness was indeed overcome by the grace of Christ, and he was to put all his heart into making the rich sources of Orthodoxy available to his fellow man. At the same time, however, he never ceased warning his contemporaries of the deceptions of the apostasy, just as Fr. Constantine had always done. When Fr. Constantine reposed in Jordanville in 1975, Eugene wrote words in his defense that could just as well have been applied to himself: “It was our times — the age of the counterfeit in religion as in everything else — rather than his own basic views that made Archimandrite Constantine seem sometimes a ‘negative’ thinker.... But he was above all a Christian realist and always placed his ultimate hope, not on anything earthly at all, but only in the Church of Christ.”<sup>4</sup>



# 34

## *“I Trust You”*

*Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, one mind.*

—Philippians 2:2

**A**T this time Eugene was considering what to do with his life after completing his book. He was strongly drawn to monasticism. In 1963 he wrote to Alison: “God willing, I intend to become a monk (and perhaps a priest) in the service of God when I have finished the book in a year or two.”<sup>1</sup> Considering all the inspired activity that Archbishop John had generated in the San Francisco community, there were surprisingly few potential monastics there. As Eugene remarked in a letter: “There are few any more who think of the monastic life or take it seriously, even among Russians; Gleb’s mother, for example, gave me some very ‘practical’ advice on why I shouldn’t be a monk.”<sup>2</sup>

Bishop Sava, when he came to San Francisco to defend Archbishop John, spoke of his hopes of establishing a monastery and looked around for prospective monks. “For myself,” Eugene wrote with regard to this possibility, “I have yet to finish my book and see Jordanville before I make my choice.”<sup>3</sup>

Gleb, meanwhile, was facing his own questions about the future. For now he had to stay in Monterey to support his mother, who had told him he could not leave without having first bought her a house and found a good husband for his sister.

Gleb was, it is true, getting on quite successfully at his job at the language college. With his outgoing personality, he was popular with the students, and

had been asked to take further courses in order to obtain a better position in the field of linguistics. Inwardly, however, he felt unfulfilled. He longed for the realization of those “dreams” which he had expressed to Blessed Herman on Spruce Island. He had already laid the beginning for a missionary brotherhood that would glorify Fr. Herman, having written a letter of intent to Archbishop John and having recruited young men in San Francisco, including Eugene. As yet, however, this brotherhood had not taken shape or accomplished anything.

Where was the “idiot” whom Gleb had begged from Blessed Herman, the one who was to be a lifelong partner in fulfilling his missionary dreams? Since the threat of his mother’s curse still hung over him if he left her without means and became a monk, he thought that he was to become a married missionary priest, and that his partner would one day be his Russian girlfriend in San Francisco, Sonya.<sup>[a]</sup> Sonya was a devoted churchgoer, but after some time she made it clear to Gleb that she wanted a normal life in the world and was not interested in pursuing his “big ideas” of total self-sacrifice for God. They both understood they would have to part ways. After what turned out to be his last meeting with Sonya, Gleb went to Eugene’s apartment and with tears told him that he had just given up his last hope for happiness in the world. Later, when Gleb was about to return to Monterey, Eugene looked at him with a very serious expression. As Gleb recalled, “He expressed to me the following thought: Whatever the future now held, I must not forget that I, having made this break with Sonya, had thereby made a commitment to God to serve Him, helping people to come closer to the spiritual heart of Orthodoxy. I knew how sorry Mother would be, and that Fr. Vladimir in Jordanville would have to wait longer for me to be a priest.<sup>[b]</sup> — But I felt a victor, and had to make new resolutions.”

**G**LEB continued to roam the forests around Monterey, reading the Lives of the ascetics and praying to God for enlightenment. “Once I walked off into the woods,” he recalls. “The ocean was shining through the trees down below on my right, as I walked and walked on the moss. I was reading the Life of the desert-

dweller Elder Zosima of Siberia.... I fell asleep and woke up well into the night. The moon was high and very bright, and the ocean below was bathed in its light. I decided to go south along the shore but within the forest. The thoughts in my heart were transfigured — I felt I was somewhere in Holy Russia or Mount Athos, because I had recently read portions of Fr. Denasy's descriptions of his visit to forlorn and lost desert-dwellers. I knelt facing east and our St. Seraphim Church [\[c\]](#) several miles away — and I prayed fervently — asking one question over and over again: 'Why, O Lord, cannot this wonderful land of Fr. Herman — this California of Fort Ross [\[d\]](#) — produce this desert-dwelling fervency? Why should such exalted dreaming, wishing and inspiration ultimately go sour and revert to prosaic, smug adjustment to the world? Make more misfits, 'fools,' outcasts from the world, and give them this indescribable happiness which I now experience!' I prayed to Elder Zosima and Elder Basilisk and their disciple Peter Michurin; to Anthony and Moses of Optina and all the Roslavl Elders, including my beloved Theodore of Sanaxar, Theophan of New Lake, etc. I don't know how long I prayed, kneeling on that soft moss in that blessed spot with bright stars and the moon above me.... I wandered more, fell to the ground again, and made a thousand promises.—Just let this feeling I had be *passed on* to someone smarter than me who could find ways and means to propagate on rooftops this unexplainable oneness with God's creation, that is outside of personal egotism or gain."

On their forest walks together, Gleb could see that Eugene shared his aspirations: "It was clear in my mind and heart that Eugene also loved nature and did associate religious feelings with it. But his was a silent love, a stillness that sensed the inner essences of created things. I discovered how he became absorbed in the contemplation of nature, in total external and internal silence, and how he profoundly longed for this. I was amazed and began to disclose all the 'Roslavl forest' dreaming of mine. He was entirely into it, stating that it was *his* old dream — but the question remained as to how to bring it into reality. We read the Canon to the Mother of God, kneeling in the moss....

“Once Eugene expressed a desire that I go with him to the Muir Woods, around Sausalito, where he used to go, getting lost for a day. I was to meet him on Van Ness Street very early in the morning, and we would take a bus to Mill Valley with the intention to spend a night there with a bonfire. We spent the whole day in almost total silence, and shivered the whole night somewhere in some gazebo-type shelter against horrible wind and rain. Something like that was also experienced on a beach, where for hours he sat like a statue, deeply engrossed in thought. It did not strike me as something constructive. But then the intent was to endure exposure to outdoor living. The bonfire made me very sad for some reason. The sky became beautifully red, and he ‘consoled’ me with roasted marshmallows, which was new to me but brought him some old childhood recollections, and he was talkative. My sadness was due to the ‘miss’ in our ‘hit and miss’ experiments. They did not do anything to further the *podvizhniki* idea of Siberia or Blessed Herman of Alaska. But the aim, of course, was to grow accustomed to each other and see how we worked and interacted with each other — realizing full well that the two of us were of almost opposite natures....

“As the months went by, I became more and more pressured by my conscience that I was wasting my time. But above all I was concerned about Eugene’s book, *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*, part of which I had sent to Fr. Constantine, who loved it, calling Eugene an ‘established ecclesiastical writer.’ Although this book was so needed by modern man, I knew that no one would bother to print it. The big commercial book companies would abhor it because of the terribly negative way Eugene treated the modern age, calling it the pre-Antichrist period. But at the same time no church publisher would venture to support the printing of such a huge undertaking: they would not even read it, never mind attempt to publish it! Even Fr. Constantine had been reprimanded for publishing a big book of Christian philosophy when contemporary church people were not interested in buying such things.

“So, Eugene was spending time writing the book — for whom? Who would

ever see it? Yet, I knew that it was absolutely imperative, not only that the book be printed, but that the very voice of a man of such calibre be heard, which would be of such great benefit to the true believer of Orthodoxy! How could I combine two things: for the Church to utilize Eugene's talent, and for Eugene to benefit from the Church? Some solution must be found. How could he avoid going sour like other converts had? I knew there had to be an answer — and I fervently prayed to St. Seraphim.

“There is a spiritual law: in the work of the Lord one can't pursue personal gain or be moved by egotism. Clearly, Eugene lived by this law; he did not care for himself. He was a selfless idealist, but with a head well screwed on, as Russians say: a man who wanted to live for God, and God alone.

“I looked on Eugene as a kind of romantic figure, like some consumptive poet who could wither and die in the rain without anyone knowing or understanding what he lived for. What I saw as Eugene's nobility was precisely the suffering of a soul that yearns for Beauty and Truth despite the fact that worldly reality works against this. This was inborn in him, and it had to be preserved....

“As a rule I always walked to and from the St. Seraphim Church along the beach, about two miles. The sea always put me into a state I loved best to be in — removed from the tumult of the world. One Saturday evening at the end of August, 1963, I walked to church at sunset — golden and beautiful, when the sea and the sand and the sky and everything turns into one glorious hue. The church was unusually empty for the Vigil service. The priest served all alone, and I alone sang the service with him. He had a beautiful, high tenor voice and knew all the monastic chants. He was a wonderful man, but a bit scared inside. The local ‘intelligentsia’ teachers drove him to this state, so that he refused to give sermons, and when he rarely did he feared for every word he said. What a pity — he was a bastion of wisdom and knowledge and human kindness. These people should have learned from him, but they did not.<sup>[e]</sup>

“After this lonesome Vigil I went home by way of the beach. Instead of

being inspired by the service, I was filled with a feeling of helplessness and futility at the sight of the unappreciated priest serving alone in the church. And here I was praying to God to help Eugene find his place in that very Church! What if he were to get involved and then, when the newness wore off, he was to find himself in the same dead state that so many others are in? The key was this: he was new wine, and I must find for him new bottles; for none of our converts, if they are honest with themselves, can fit into our old bottles.

“With these thoughts I walked towards home along the beach. The horizon glowed with ominous red, its color soon to disappear into night. When I came to Fisherman’s Wharf in Monterey there was already total darkness, save for the neon lights of late commerce. I walked on the railroad tracks towards Cannery Row and Pacific Grove. I could not go home in this state of burden. I had to find a way out of that dead end which I felt was ahead of Eugene. I wept bitterly in this state of dark helplessness, and walked on the rocks which surrounded the bay, high above the splashing dark waters beneath me. I looked into the faded horizon and cried out into space: ‘O God, what must be done?! Enlighten me!’

“And all of a sudden I clearly heard coming from out of that dark abyss, as if billows of air rolling towards me, repeating several times, in rhythm with the beating of my heart, ‘bookstore,’ ‘bookstore,’ ‘bookstore,’... and fading away the same way they had rolled in. Like a wave that splashed at my feet, this tremendous idea! I immediately grasped the message and heard myself repeating several times until I came to myself: ‘Bookstore, bookstore, bookstore!’

“That was God’s obvious help and revelation. I had had some thoughts on the subject before, along with a whole lot of other ideas. But now I clearly got the answer, like a long sought-for piece of a jigsaw puzzle. It fit Eugene, the Fr. Herman Brotherhood, his book, the converts, the desert ideal, the Orthodox Church — all, all into one whole. The picture was immediately clear.

“The bookstore would house the Brotherhood, proclaiming the *podvizhnik* desert-lover Herman. It would sell books. The profit from the books would enable us to get a printing press, which in turn would print Eugene’s *Kingdom*

book, which would give us money to get deserted land for a skete, which would enable us to prepare, by doing missionary work, to go to Alaska and restore Fr. Herman's New Valaam! How clever, how obvious!

"I was overwhelmed with the whole clear plan that lay before me. Right then that very night I conceived the idea of '*holy money*,' that is, profit from the sale of purely Orthodox material which sets forth the integral Patristic worldview — no heresies, or even freethinkers. I wanted to propagate *podvizhniki* using holy means (as opposed to the jesuitical idea of 'the end justifies the means'). The 'holy money' we earned, upon which would rest God's blessing, would be the foundation rock upon which we could safely build.

"And the second idea was *yedinodushie* [oneness of soul], which in practice meant not doing anything without each other's blessing. Through this we could avoid the way of the world, which is for everyone to play God and each one to seek his own will.

"I had to know if this was all God's doing or my feverish daydreaming. I resolved to pray hard and then present these ideas of mine to Eugene first, even before revealing them to Archbishop John and other potential brothers. Already I had told some of my ideas concerning a brotherhood to Archbishop John, when I had come to California in November of 1962.

"Soon I arrived at Eugene's place. Jon was also there. At once I stated that I had come with the most important proposal of my life, and that I begged their attention and time. We at once faced the icon corner and on our knees read and sang the entire Supplicatory Canon to the Theotokos. After its completion, I stated points about the Brotherhood based on a bookstore and asked for an honest reaction. We stood up. Even before finishing I felt that Jon was upset. The first thing he said was: 'I don't want to have anything to do with it! It's too involved. And besides, it's repulsive to combine religion and money. Count me out.'

"Then in silence I turned to Eugene, who struck me as being absolutely peaceful and inwardly still, while I was literally burning. He looked deep into

my eyes and calmly said with total firmness, so that Jon could clearly hear, as I at once understood: ‘I TRUST you!’

“That was all that was needed. I knew right then and there — that before me stood that very ‘idiot’ for whom I had asked Fr. Herman over his coffin, after which I had been given an affirmative feeling in my heart—‘you’ll have one.’

“I stood still but my whole being was charged with energy, for at this moment I knew that all my ideas would come true: that there *will* be a Brotherhood glorifying Fr. Herman; that he *will* be canonized and made a saint; that we will have the store with the ‘holy money’—and a magazine, and the desert; and that I’ll buy the house Mother wanted, and my sister will get married well, and Eugene’s book will get printed — and some day we will have a *New Valaam* in Alaska.

“Eugene did not know all that. He continued looking at me with firmness, emphatically so, while Jon swayed angrily back and forth, and soon left. I understood that Jon really could not enter upon this whole venture. I knew he’d be a help and would take part in all this, but it was beyond him. What amazed me, though, was that Eugene had not said to me, ‘how smart of you,’ or ‘this idea is prudent,’ or ‘let’s see if it works,’ or ‘what will others say?’ No. With this word TRUST he had hinted without any of my probings that we could have oneness of soul, even though we were so different in temperaments, personalities, etc. In spite of it! And it proved to be right!”



# PART IV





The Brotherhood's icon of Blessed Father Herman, painted by Gleb Podmoshensky in 1962.

## *The Brotherhood*

*Obtain by thine intercession a speedy softening of our hardened souls, pray that we may understand what is the will of God; and though we have done nothing good before God, may we make a good beginning....*

—Service to our God-bearing Father Herman of Alaska<sup>1</sup>

**A**LL this time, almost from the time of his arrival in San Francisco, Archbishop John had been praying before an icon of Blessed Herman for the realization of a missionary brotherhood in his name. Gleb relates how this came about:

“While at Blessed Herman’s New Valaam site in Alaska, I had wanted to see a traditional painted icon of him. Since I had never seen such an icon, depicting him in a halo, I asked Fr. Gerasim to bless me to paint one. This he did, stating that he’d like to see a photograph of it if possible. The design was conceived at the relics of Blessed Herman, and the icon was executed in Boston during the Paschal period of the following year. Fr. Gerasim approved of it, and I took it to be approved also by Fr. Adrian of New Diveyevo and by Fr. Cyprian, the iconographer in Jordanville.

“Associating this icon with the dream of the Fr. Herman Brotherhood, I traveled with it across the United States when I moved to the West Coast. At that time Archbishop John had just been stationed in the San Francisco diocese. I brought it to Archbishop John’s house chapel in St. Tikhon’s Orphanage, and giving it to him I asked him to pray. He placed it in the ‘high place’ behind the

altar table,<sup>[a]</sup> saying that it would stay there and he would pray for the Brotherhood until we came to take it to the Brotherhood's future headquarters. The icon witnessed many Liturgies performed by Archbishop John.

“At the same time I gave him a little black-and-white print of Blessed Herman with the *troparion*<sup>[b]</sup> to him written underneath it. Later I saw this print framed and placed in a prominent place in Archbishop John's study, where it is hanging to this day. Maria Shakhmatova told me that she often saw Archbishop John praying before it.”

ON the night that Eugene had said “I trust you,” the new Brotherhood had at last been truly born; and the brothers reflected on how this had come about through the prayers of Archbishop John. The first step the new Brotherhood took was to ask Archbishop John's blessing upon its labors. When the Archbishop heard about the brothers' proposal for a bookstore, he was careful to make them understand that their success depended on their own effort and on God. Thus, in response to Gleb's request for his archiepiscopal approval, he simply wrote:

Dear Gleb,

Your intention is clearly good and the cause is good. You must exert all your effort for its realization. I am asking God for His almighty help. If it is pleasing to God, then it will go forward. May the Lord bless you.

With love,

✙ Archbishop John

August 28, 1963

St. Moses the Ethiopian and St. Job of Pochaev<sup>[c]</sup>

The brothers thought it significant that Archbishop John wrote this blessing on the day of St. Job of Pochaev, the patron of Orthodox missionary work through the printed word. It was also the commemoration day of St. Moses the Black, which made the brothers feel the Archbishop's blessing on future Orthodox

outreach to African Americans.

One of Archbishop John's orphans from the St. Tikhon of Zadonsk Orphanage in Shanghai, the same Vladimir Tenkevitch who had introduced Eugene to Gleb, became one of the Brotherhood's founding members. Another founder was a Serb named Anthony, a student of the St. Tikhon of Zadonsk Seminary in South Canaan, Pennsylvania.

Gleb sent news to Fr. Gerasim in Alaska about the founding of the Brotherhood. This came as a consolation to Fr. Gerasim, who, it will be remembered, had first inspired in Gleb the idea of a brotherhood in Blessed Herman's name. On March 16, 1964, Fr. Gerasim wrote back to Gleb:



Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov (1896–1993).

You are doing a good thing organizing a Brotherhood of Prepodobny Herman, Wonderworker of Alaska! May God help you! But keep in mind that Satan does not like such things; he causes evil deeds to those who glorify God's chosen righteous people. I experienced myself the same thing upon my arrival in Alaska.... I greet all the brothers. May God and His Most Pure Mother protect you.<sup>2</sup>

Together with this letter was an offering of twenty-five dollars, which Fr. Gerasim said he was sending “for the needs of the Brotherhood in the name of Elder Herman.” Knowing that Fr. Gerasim had almost no money of his own, Gleb and Eugene were touched. Eugene suggested that they open a brotherhood bank account with it, which they did. This was a symbolic act: the Fr. Herman Brotherhood began with a “widow’s mite” from Fr. Herman’s successor on his own Spruce Island.<sup>[d]</sup>

Other warm and prayerful words of support came from Gleb’s correspondent, Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov, who was then laboring to start a monastic community in England. A man of holy life, Fr. Sophrony was subsequently to have a major effect on the spiritual growth of Orthodoxy in Western Europe and to have a major influence on the canonization of his spiritual father from Mount Athos, Elder Silouan. In a letter of February 11, 1964, Fr. Sophrony wrote to the newly formed Fr. Herman Brotherhood:

I am entreating God that He bless your undertaking of the foundation of a BROTHERHOOD. Similar Brotherhoods, during difficult times for the Church and our Faith, played an extremely positive role in the past. At the beginning of the life of the Russian emigration in Europe, several Brotherhoods were formed in France; I became a member of one of them, and remain a member up to the present time. May the Brotherhood grant you not only good, like-minded spiritual friends, but may it also, in general, help you in many other ways. This occurred with me and many of my friends. Thus, may the Lord bless your beginning, and may He grant you strength for the creation of this Brotherhood, and inspiration throughout your entire life....

Please, accept this expression of my devoted brotherly love,

Archimandrite Sophrony

**E**VEN at this early stage of the Brotherhood, it was clear what form Gleb

and Eugene's partnership would naturally take. Gleb would be the one to dream up the big ideas, paint them in vivid colors, and emphasize their importance. Eugene, meanwhile, would listen attentively, absorbing it all into his analytical mind. At first he would say nothing, but later, after having carefully thought it over, he would reveal a precise plan for implementing the ideas, which would amaze Gleb with its simplicity and practicality.

Eugene did not try to implement all of Gleb's ideas, which simply would have been impossible. Rather, he prioritized them, gave them structure, and reined them in when they were too impractical. It was indeed a providential partnership, for without Gleb, Eugene would not have stepped out on his own with novel ideas; and without Eugene, Gleb's ideas would have remained just that: ideas.

Eugene was well aware of this. In a letter to his godfather Dimitry, he wrote regarding the bookstore project: "It was originally Gleb's idea, and it should be successful if we can keep his very active imagination within the realm of practical realities!"<sup>3</sup>

Gleb recalls how once, when relating some of his own recent ideas, he began to grow sad and stopped talking.

"Go on," Eugene said.

"What's the use of going on?" Gleb lamented. "It's all in the realm of dreaming."

"Why should we let external hindrances get in the way of our vision?"

"But how do we overcome those hindrances?"

"By putting two and two together," Eugene concluded.

**F**ROM the beginning, the brothers resolved that their bookstore would *not* be located inside a church, as was usually done. Gleb in particular had always hated the idea of people jingling money while services were going on — it reminded him of Christ throwing the money changers out of the temple. (In this he took after his spiritual father Fr. Adrian, who had tried to forbid the passing

of a collection plate during services.) Having an Orthodox missionary bookstore in a separate building, however, was actually a new idea at this time. As far as the brothers knew, there was then in America no other city storefront that sold exclusively Orthodox material.

In September of 1963, Eugene wrote to Gleb about the bookstore idea:

After some thought, I've decided your idea is really quite practical. Here are some of my own ideas about putting it into effect:

First, find a garage or a small shop in or near the Richmond district... for no more than \$30 a month.... It should have a fairly large window for display purposes; if there isn't one, we should make one. Then, equip it with a few tables, bookcases, etc., with of course an icon with lampada in one corner, Fr. Herman<sup>[e]</sup> on one wall, pictures of Jordanville, etc., on other walls, and a bulletin board by the door. Also a samovar, or at least a pot of hot water, in the back. Then, get a supply of books, icons, etc., from Jordanville... and whatever other Orthodox materials from other places that can be obtained with little or no immediate payment.... Several people could be responsible for opening and closing the shop, a different person each day, to divide the labor. All work would be voluntary and unpaid, all proceeds going to expansion of the activities of the "Brotherhood" — first, purchase of more books for sale, especially the Fathers;<sup>[f]</sup> second, providing the bookstore is a success, the publication of some sort of bulletin (perhaps), etc....

All that is required to begin is a small amount of cash (for rent, furniture, paint, etc.) and, most of all, at least four or five enthusiastic workers. I am quite enthusiastic already.<sup>4</sup>

In another letter Eugene wrote that he was already looking at prospective places for the bookstore and would soon write to publishers about obtaining discounts on books. "As you can see, I can be very practical when I have to be....



It is time now (if ever) to make vague dreams into concrete realities.”

At this time Eugene witnessed the activity of another Orthodox brotherhood in San Francisco, about which he wrote to Gleb:

I encountered, by the way, a group of English-speaking Orthodox young people the other night who are forming a group of their own. I don't know why I was invited, but it was a good way of finding out what life there is among other Orthodox. The answer is: NONE. Dead, absolutely. They are sincere, their intentions are good; but they simply have nothing to work from. Not only are they unprepared for spiritual meat, they are hardly even ready for milk. I'll tell you about them next time I see you.... Actually, we will not be in competition with them, since their plans do not go beyond “inter-Orthodox” understanding, and study of Orthodox “traditions” on a very elementary level; beyond that, their interest is vaguely ecumenical, not missionary. They are turned inward upon themselves and are trying to “understand” their own religion; whereas we are going out to bring to the world riches of which we are not worthy, but of whose value we are certain.<sup>5</sup>

**W**ITHIN a few weeks Eugene found a storefront that seemed ideal for their purposes. Less than a block away from the new Cathedral, which was at that time not quite completed, the storefront was on a busy street and was easily accessible. Eugene described it thus in a letter to Gleb: “The store is about 15' × 30', and about 13 feet high. It has a balcony, which will be our shipping department, and in future it can serve as a place for our printing press (!). You will like it very much I'm sure.”<sup>6</sup> The rent — eighty-five dollars per month — was more than Eugene had planned for, but when he talked it over with Gleb they decided to take the place.

On January 14/27, 1964, the feast of St. Sava the Enlightener of Serbia, Eugene made an agreement with the owner. That same day he wrote to Gleb

about what he felt to be a beneficent sign from God: “In my own Gospel reading (one chapter daily) I read today St. Luke 10—which, as you recall, was the same passage I opened at random and we both read when we were returning by train from Carmel almost exactly a year ago. ‘The Lord... sent them two by two before His face into every city and place, whither He Himself would come. Therefore said He unto them: The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth laborers into His harvest....’”



The new “Joy of All Who Sorrow” Cathedral on Geary Boulevard in San Francisco, while construction on it was being completed.

“I think the place next to the new Sobor [Cathedral] is perfect,” Eugene continued. “If we cannot succeed there, we can succeed nowhere. The location itself is probably worth at least \$50 a month in advertising.”

The following day Eugene paid the first month's rent. "Now it's too late to back out," he wrote. "Now it is time to get to work."<sup>7</sup>

Gleb was gladdened by Eugene's enthusiastic letters, especially by the phrase about getting down to work. "I am very happy inside," he wrote to Eugene.

**A**T Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, Archbishop Averky had at first been hesitant about the Brotherhood's plans, for he felt that Gleb should serve the Church as a priest as soon as possible, either in the world or in monasticism. But when Gleb now asked for a stock of books for the store, the Archbishop readily gave his consent, saying they could be paid for as they were sold. This cut down the initial expenses considerably.

Soon after they were given the key to the store, the brothers took the icon of Blessed Herman from St. Tikhon's Home. The priest for the orphanage, Fr. Leonid Upshinsky, who had become the priest closest to Eugene, went into the altar and brought forth the icon. Handing it to the brothers, he said, "This has been saturated with the prayers of Archbishop John." The brothers carried it in procession for a dozen city blocks, singing the troparion to Blessed Herman, and placed it in a prominent place in their shop.

At about this time Archbishop John advised Gleb to speak with the man in charge of church book sales, Peter Gubin, lest through misunderstanding a feeling of competition arise between the cathedral people and the Brotherhood. Gubin wholeheartedly greeted the brothers' plan for a bookstore. He showed Gleb his stock of thousands of books, some of which he displayed for sale near the entrance of the Cathedral, in a little kiosk. "Look how many books we have," he remarked, "and we can't sell them. Church people just don't buy books." Gleb replied that a missionary bookstore separate from the church would do better because it might be visited by interested passersby as well as churchgoers.

Wanting to help the brothers in any way he could, Gubin said that the church would pay the eighty-five-dollar rent for the shop, making the shop itself

into the cathedral kiosk. Despite the obvious financial advantages of this offer, Eugene thought better of it. It would, he knew, tie their enterprise to committees, board meetings, etc. “How will we be able to preserve any freedom of action?” he wrote to Gleb. “... If the bookstore is connected with the kiosk, there would be legal complications, besides which the whole thing would probably fizzle out in the end.”<sup>8</sup>

A name for the new shop still had to be decided upon. One of the other members of the Brotherhood was very keen on this, and tried to get Eugene and Gleb to consider various catchy titles. Finally Eugene objected that it was worldly to sit around thinking of a name for oneself. “It should simply be called ‘Orthodox Christian Books and Icons,’” he said. And so it was.

## *Theological Training*

*Orthodoxy is the one true Church of Christ, the only pure and genuine Christianity; and this fact places upon Orthodox believers the obligation, when speaking of the Church to others, to do so straightforwardly and without adulteration — with love, surely, but above all with love for God’s Truth.*

—From the “lay sermons” of Eugene Rose, 1965<sup>1</sup>

**W**HILE all these preparations for the store were going on, Eugene became involved in another endeavor. Archbishop John, ever working to increase apostolic activity, summoned his vicar Bishop Nektary and the rest of the local clergy in order to form a series of theological courses. The courses began meeting several times a week and were highly successful. Men and women filled St. Tikhon’s basement hall where the classes were conducted, and every lecture was followed by an inspired discussion. Archbishop John taught Liturgics, Bishop Nektary — Patristics, Fr. Spyridon and Fr. Leonid Upshinsky — Old Testament, Fr. Nicholas Dombrovsky — New Testament; and others taught Apologetics, Church History, Pastoral Theology, church singing, and even Russian literature.

Eugene attended the courses for three years. One thing that struck him early on was the other students’ lack of knowledge of the Bible. “The Russians ask such obvious questions,” he told Gleb, “as if they never read the Scriptures.”

“They don’t,” Gleb responded. “It’s not a habit for them. They follow the traditional forms of worship, which no one can deny is a good thing, but they

neglect the Scriptures.” This discovery strengthened Eugene’s conviction about the need for Orthodox missionary work — for the sake of those *in* the Church as well as those outside it.

Seeing Eugene’s willingness and his ability, Archbishop John looked for opportunities to let him do a little missionary work of his own. Once he asked Eugene, instead of hearing a presentation at St. Tikhon’s Home, to give one himself. The talk went well, but afterwards Eugene faced his first head-on challenge as a missionary. His opponent sounded like something straight out of Dostoyevsky. “My talk on Sunday,” he wrote Gleb, “provoked a very animated argument, chiefly between me and an atheist named Vadim, who set forth a complete ‘Superman’ philosophy and accused Christianity of being a failure, both because it is no longer powerful (in a worldly sense) and because every Christian isn’t a saint. Some of his arguments were half-true, but mostly he spoke straight from Satan, and I was rather discouraged at the weakness of my own words. How small and feeble we have become! But how much more must we fail to become discouraged, and trust more in Our Lord.”<sup>2</sup>

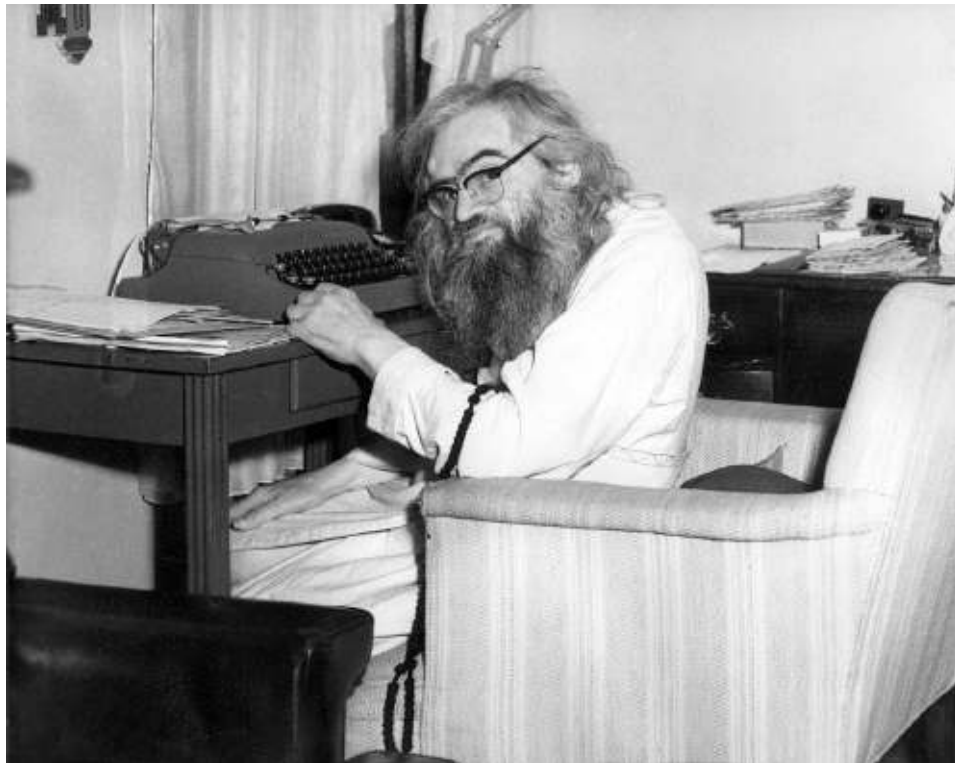
Gleb sent these heartening words in reply: “Yes, I know how one feels when one is confronted with a man deeply believing in the anti-Christian logic of ‘this world that lies in evil’ (according to St. John). I never met this Vadim, but all these people, being atheists, help us to ‘buckle-up’ spiritually. One ought not blame them; they are not born anew, as our Lord asks us to be, in order to follow Him.”

Archbishop John gave Eugene another missionary opportunity when, in 1963, he asked him to contribute articles to a local newsletter called *Pravoslavny Blagovestnik* (*Orthodox Tidings*). This small publication, begun by Archbishop Tikhon, had previously been solely in Russian, but now Archbishop John wanted at least one English article to be included in each issue. This was to serve as the Archbishop’s outreach to those who could not read Russian. He was so adamant that not a single issue be without an English article that he would call late at night or early in the morning to make sure the article had been submitted to the

press. Approving of everything Eugene wrote, he never made a correction.

It was thus in *Orthodox Tidings* that Eugene began to be published. His articles for it, which have been posthumously published in the book *Heavenly Realm*, covered a variety of topics: feast days, saints, and teachings on the spiritual life. Written in the form of brief sermons of one or two pages, they bore witness to his growth in the Orthodox Faith. Now he was writing first of all about the “Kingdom of God,” not the “Kingdom of Man.” In some passages of his “lay sermons,” however, he did bring out philosophical ideas which he had been writing about in his *magnum opus*.

Reflecting on his “lay sermons” years later, Eugene was to write: “I don’t know who if anyone read them, and looking back on them now I find them, despite the ‘feeling’ I put into them, somewhat ‘abstract,’ the product of thinking that hadn’t had too much experience as yet either of Orthodox literature or Orthodox life. Still, for me they served an important function in my understanding and expression of various Orthodox questions, and even in my Orthodox ‘development,’ and Vladika John ‘pushed’ that.”<sup>3</sup>



Archbishop John in his office in St. Tikhon's Home, where he would speak with Eugene and Gleb. San Francisco, 1966.



Archbishop John's office in St. Tikhon's Home, as it has been preserved after his repose.

**W**HEN Eugene was not making preparations for the bookstore or working at menial jobs, he sought opportunity to pursue his favorite pastime: hunting mushrooms. Scouting out those parts of San Francisco that had not been covered by concrete, especially around the city's Presidio, he was able to come a little closer to nature while living amidst the civilization in which he felt so out of place. His fondness for this activity can be gleaned from references to it in his letters. "I was planning to go mushroom hunting tomorrow," he wrote to Gleb, "but unfortunately I have to work tonight (at the Mark Hopkins Hotel,[\[a\]](#) and everyone will be drunk, I imagine), so I will have to postpone it until Saturday. I've been reading some mushroom books, and I discover that there are several other very edible and easily identifiable varieties in this area."<sup>4</sup> And in another letter: "The mushrooms are about exhausted in this area, but I have discovered a new and most delicious variety (the 'honey mushroom') that grows on the roots and trunks of trees and is quite common."<sup>5</sup>

As he had done for years, Eugene would also leave the city and hike around



the Mount Tamalpais State Park and the Muir Woods, sometimes climbing Mount Tamalpais. To Gleb he wrote: “I think I will run away from everything and go to the woods tomorrow (just for the day).”<sup>6</sup> On these outings he would study the flora and fauna, making notes in his guidebook of native trees of the San Francisco Bay region.<sup>7</sup>

Mushroom hunting and wilderness hikes, however, could hardly satisfy Eugene’s deep love for nature. He would have rejoiced to get out of the city for good, but now, with the burgeoning missionary activity, it was clear that this was where God had placed him, for the time being.

## *The Bookstore*

*If you want to see a living miracle of Blessed Father Herman of Alaska, go next door to a tiny store....*

—Archbishop John

**B**EFORE the brothers opened their store to the public, they asked Archbishop John to come and bless it. The Archbishop designated a day when he would come. “But when that day arrived,” Gleb recalls, “instead of Archbishop John there appeared in our doorway the rather peculiar figure of Fr. Spyridon, with his disheveled hair hanging in front of his face, his worn klobuk, his short cassock and huge shoes, walking in like Charlie Chaplin.

“We were at first disappointed that Archbishop John himself had not come to sanction the beginning of our missionary endeavor. Fr. Spyridon, stuttering and short of breath, announced rather sheepishly that unfortunately he had been sent in place of Archbishop John, and that he regretted this and deeply apologized for it. Evidently he had noticed an expression of disappointment on our faces. But when I turned to Eugene, I could see that he was very happy to behold such a genuine man — for there could not be found in the whole San Francisco area a humbler figure than Fr. Spyridon.

“Fr. Spyridon proceeded to serve a *Moleben*<sup>[\[a\]](#)</sup> before the Brotherhood’s icon of Fr. Herman. At the end of it he turned around and delivered a speech to the small gathering of our humble brotherhood, in a rather exalted, dramatic fashion. He took a very high pitch, and, since he was tone-deaf and his voice was cracking from the enthusiasm he so abundantly generated, the tone of the speech

was rather unusual, to say the least. From the very start his excitement evoked his asthma, and it was apparent that every breath he took in speaking was from the sheer sincerity and glorious well-wishing of a loving heart. The contents of the speech were, alas, never recorded, but the impression was overwhelming. We could not have asked for a better identification of our Brotherhood's goals, expressed in beautiful, classic Russian. He understood what we were after. No one else, before or after, so precisely identified the purpose of our mission and actually set us on the right path. We ourselves had never expressed exactly what we had in mind: it was through his mouth that it came. We were surprised to see in a Russian clergyman such a clear understanding of the need to spread Orthodoxy to the English-speaking world and to the entire apostate West.”<sup>1</sup>

ON March 27, 1964, “Orthodox Christian Books and Icons” was opened at last. Eugene began to work full time at the shop, even spending most of his nights on a cot in the back. He put all his passion into this new work — which had finally come as the answer to the desperate prayer he had once made to the Mother of God.

Gleb, who still had to work in Monterey to support his mother, could only come on the weekends to help. Living as they did in different cities, he and Eugene were concerned that a fissure might occur in the foundation they had laid. In order to achieve a unity of mind and purpose, they agreed to remember to pray every day at noon, wherever they might be. This common and simultaneous offering to God was one of the primary means of keeping the Brotherhood together in its first years.

From the beginning, the brothers established certain principles that helped them overcome the standard temptations of people who want to be productive in the spiritual life. One of these principles, acquired through the teachings of the Russian-Romanian Elder Paisius Velichkovsky, was that of *mutual obedience*. This meant that, before doing anything, Eugene and Gleb would have to ask and receive the other's blessing. To some of the other brothers who helped in the

shop, this practice was exceedingly irksome. A few of them spoke out vehemently against it, calling it stupid and a waste of time, but Eugene and Gleb learned its value.

Another principle the brothers instituted was the aforementioned concept of *holy money*. This meant acquiring funds by the sale of godly objects — spiritual literature, icons, etc.—and then putting that money *back* into godly things. They would never accept a donation connected with anything ungodly.

This was related to the next principle, that of *being suppliers*. “All people,” Gleb would say, “are divided into two categories: consumers and suppliers. And all Christians are supposed to be suppliers.” Therefore the brothers resolved not to beg for money. Before they had even opened the shop, a Russian man had asked Gleb if he was starting a new religious society. When Gleb said yes, the man remarked, “Oh, so that means there’ll be one more group passing around a collection plate!” Gleb clenched his teeth. “God forbid!” he thought. But on reflecting further, he realized that what the man said contained much truth. “Everyone does it,” he considered. “As if religious organizations are supposed to exist on donations. But we won’t!” Archbishop John firmly supported the brothers in this. The Brotherhood would be giving to the Church rather than taking from it, supporting the Church rather than being supported by it; and God would take care of those who worked for Him.

Finally, the brothers resolved not to pray for any particular person to join them. This prevented the Brotherhood from becoming a closed fraternity composed of people whom they chose. They would let God select who would come.

The brothers found that those who suffered shipwreck either were unaware of the above principles or lacked the determination to follow them. As Gleb was to observe later: “It is very difficult for people not to combine serving God with some form of egotism and self-worship. But I could see that Eugene was a priceless man who could endure the pain of dying to himself. We voluntarily ‘inflicted’ on each other principles that opposed the egotism of the old man.”

The principle of mutual obedience, which was especially painful in this regard, also proved especially effective in uniting souls in serving God rather than themselves.

**T**HE brothers advertised their store in the local Russian newspaper, and also through a small introductory brochure which was composed by Eugene and printed at Abbess Ariadna's convent. Soon they were to learn firsthand that, as Mr. Gubin's sales had indicated, the native Orthodox read very little spiritual literature. Many who came to the store were only interested in buying the *gazeta* (Russian newspaper).

This situation had long been a source of pain to Fr. Vladimir in Jordanville, who after years of persistence had succeeded in having printed several volumes of the Lives of ascetics. Both Gleb and Helen Kontzevitch worked to awaken interest in these books by writing reviews of them for inclusion in the *gazeta* itself. Later Archbishop John thanked Gleb for this.

Unlike books, devotional items were always in steady demand from the local Russians; and Eugene quickly realized that he had to have a good stock of them in order to keep the store going. Not only did he need icons of all kinds and sizes, but also incense, icon lamps, icon *rizas*<sup>[b]</sup> and *kiots*.<sup>[c]</sup> Eugene had to learn carpentry skills and to make the *kiots* himself.



Eugene in 1965.

By this time Eugene had become so fluent in the Russian language that many Russians were convinced that he was a Russian. One friend of the Brotherhood recalls trying in vain to convince a local Russian lady that Eugene was actually an American. “Anyone who can speak Russian as well as he does,” the lady insisted, “has to be a Russian!”<sup>2</sup>

It was not long after they opened the shop that the brothers encountered local prejudice from Russians who were afraid of something new and different. In a letter to Gleb, Eugene related a rather humorous incident: “A Russian lady came in this morning to look us over and tell us of the rumors about us in the Russian colony: that we are Communists with a store full of Soviet books; that we are Soviet diplomats using the store as some kind of front; that we are *American converts* (!); etc. By the time she discovered I wasn’t Russian, she was so charmed that she didn’t mind too much and even bought ten dollars worth of eggs, icons, and cards.”<sup>3</sup>

As with this lady, suspicion among the Russian community quickly dissipated. Those who came to the store were impressed by the tall,

conservatively dressed, thoughtful young gentleman they met there. Gleb recalls that some of the Russian ladies, young and old, even “melted” before Eugene — which made Eugene feel very uncomfortable.

The elderly members of the Russian community became especially fond of the brothers. In one of their periodicals they expressed their appreciation for these two young men who, they said, sacrificed their careers for the sake of “our ancient Christianity.”

As the brothers had hoped, young American spiritual seekers also began to come into the store. Bishops and clergy in the area, as well as Abbess Ariadna, would send any Americans interested in Orthodoxy to see the brothers. Other seekers, of course, would come in right off the street. These Americans were also impressed with Eugene, but in a different way. They could see he was a totally committed man who did not say a word without thinking. As they told him of their opinions or perplexities, they could see from his gaze that he was not only listening carefully, but was at the same time deducing the philosophic import of what they were saying. As one young American seeker later recalled: “He had the largest eyes of anyone I had ever known — penetrating eyes, which were at the same time very warm and calming.”<sup>4</sup> Eugene’s answers to the questions posed to him were to the point and without any intellectual affectation. For Americans born into an age where statements about truth were expected to be qualified, or where dogmatism was often characterized by naive superficiality, it was invigorating to come into contact with a man like Eugene, one who combined simple, firm belief with depth of thought.

As it turned out, however, it was a Russian rather than an American who was given to perceive just what a treasure Eugene actually was. Once, when Eugene was out and Gleb was watching the store, a Russian woman came in and spoke to Gleb in her native tongue. “You’ve got a genius here!” she said. “A real genius! And it seems no one notices it.”

Another time when Eugene was away, a white-haired Russian man and his wife came in asking for him. “I heard Eugene was working here,” the man said,

“and I wanted to see how he was. I’m his former professor, Peter Boodberg.”

“Oh!” Gleb started. “Eugene’s told me a lot about you.”

“Is he happy here?”

“I think he’s very happy,” Gleb answered. “He’s doing what he believes in most.”

Professor Boodberg nodded and his wife smiled. Eugene, it was true, had lost the prestige of the academic world, but he had found something far greater, something which Boodberg himself inwardly longed for: “rest for his soul.”[\[d\]](#)



Eugene at the baptism and chrismation of his godson Sasha, performed by Fr. Ambrose Pogodin in San Francisco.





Sasha, Eugene, Fr. Ambrose Pogodin.

“Good!” concluded the kind professor. “Eugene did the right thing!”

**E**UGENE began keeping a Chronicle of the Fr. Herman Brotherhood some months after the store opened. In one early entry he wrote: “Today a Catholic student came in, having been told our shop was the most likely place to find information on Orthodoxy. Undoubtedly, as we grow we will more and more come to be recognized as an ‘Orthodox information center’—and that is our opportunity.”<sup>5</sup>

Eugene rejoiced at every positive contact he made with a religious seeker. In another passage of the Chronicle he recorded: “A young man, bearded, came to us today — a Roman Catholic convert, now about to become a Mormon, because he finds no ‘holiness’ in the Catholic Church. Sectarian groups, such as the Mormons and the Christian Scientists, appeal to young people today who sense that Catholicism and Protestantism are lacking something essential, that they are in fact forms that no longer have a meaning. Knowing nothing of Holy

Orthodoxy — which is the reality of which Catholicism and Protestantism are pale shadows — they turn to sectarian teachings that pretend to supply the lost meaning.

“It is the more serious of today’s youth that are turning to sectarianism. Enthusiastic ‘ecumenical’ Catholics and Protestants (and Orthodox) are not, I think, very serious; they are caught up in a fashionable, ‘up-to-date’ current whose appeal is essentially superficial, not in the least spiritual. But sectarianism is not fashionable; those who turn to it do so as individuals and for motives that may be twisted and confused, but nonetheless they are striving for something genuinely spiritual. For these people, if they find out about Holy Orthodoxy, there is some hope.

“Our young visitor seemed genuinely moved to hear just a few things about Orthodoxy, perhaps enough to suggest to him that in Orthodoxy is to be found that which he sought and failed to find in Catholicism. I gave him a pamphlet on St. Seraphim. May God bless these seeds that have been planted, and water them with His grace. Now we have the means of sowing more such seeds.”<sup>6</sup>

During their years at the store, the brothers helped to bring several people into the Orthodox Church. One of these was Laurence Campbell, a young man from North Carolina, of about the same age as they. Having helped Laurence to become Orthodox, Eugene became his godfather. “He himself is a ‘sign’ to us,” Eugene wrote in his Chronicle. “—A typical modern man, skeptical, disillusioned, far from God, undergoes in contact with Holy Orthodoxy a spiritual rebirth, a literal transplantation from the soil of worldliness to the soil of Christianity and a church-oriented life. He still has far to go; his roots are not yet firm and deep in the new soil, but he is going the right way. He is a proof to us that we are on the right path — that it is not a ‘new Christianity’ of social action, ecumenism, empty ideas and false ‘love’ that God calls man to, but (as always in the past) a life of repentance, *podvig*, grace, in the Church, attested by miracles. It is this life that even today softens and converts the heart of man to God.”<sup>7</sup>

There were a few who did not approve of Eugene and Gleb’s openness to

non-Orthodox religious seekers. One Orthodox man complained to the brothers: “You’re making money on icons, but an icon is something that’s supposed to be blessed. And you’re selling them to heathens!”

One evening after a Vigil service in the Cathedral, Gleb asked Archbishop John about this. The Archbishop replied that if the brothers thought someone was buying an icon in order to desecrate it, they should not let him have it, but that otherwise there was nothing wrong with selling it, even to a “heathen.” An icon, he said, carries a message about God, and a soul can encounter God through it. With every icon they sold to someone, believer or nonbeliever, they helped infuse into that person’s life and surroundings a resistance against evil.

The brothers deliberately hung an icon of Jesus Christ over the shop door so that each visitor would receive a bit of His grace. They had a practice that, when a person would enter, they would mentally bless him while looking up at the icon; and when he would leave they would bless him with the sign of the Cross.

**B**ESIDES introducing new American people to ancient Christianity and supplying the spiritual needs of Russians, the bookstore became a center for Orthodox Christians of all ethnic backgrounds: Greek, Arabic, Serbian, Romanian, Bulgarian, etc. Having just been visited by a young Greek man “expressing his love for true Orthodoxy,” Eugene wrote in his Chronicle:

“It is God Who sends everyone to us. What is the meaning for us of this meeting?

“We must become, in some way and to some measure, a meeting place for *all* Orthodox who wish to remain faithful to the true Church, so that there can be in some fashion a *united testimony of true Orthodoxy*, and a communion of the faithful remnant of all Orthodox peoples.

“The form this communion might take seems rather indefinite as yet. It will not be ‘Pan-Orthodoxy,’ an indiscriminate mixing and Americanization of Orthodox nationalities; that is the death of Orthodoxy. An ‘American Church’ is not what is needed; for Americans are only *one* of the peoples called to witness

Orthodox Truth. Probably no formal organization at all is needed; but somehow there must be contact between the faithful remnant of all Orthodox peoples, in order to give us strength to withstand the battles and temptations that are to come.”<sup>8</sup>

## *The Orthodox Word*

*Our every word must be carefully considered, for in every word the truth is at stake.*

—Eugene Rose, October 1, 1964<sup>1</sup>

**B**Y SEPTEMBER of 1964, the brothers felt the time had come for them to pursue their plans of printing Orthodox materials. For Eugene, this feeling was further confirmed when, one Friday, the bookstore was visited by two Orthodox priests whom he had never met before. As he wrote in his Chronicle, he noticed in them a “modernist, flippant tone and (at least in the case of one of them) an appalling ignorance of and indifference to books on the spiritual life. One of them had apparently not even heard of the *Philokalia*, and the other had had it recommended to him as a ‘good book.’ If these are today’s pastors, what hope can there be for the flock?

“All the more important, therefore, to make available the voice (or just *a* voice) of true Orthodoxy to whomever will hear it. For this a magazine must be started soon.”<sup>2</sup>

After some searching for a printing press, Eugene found a simple, hand-operated one with type for two hundred dollars (all he could afford at the time), and bought it on the Feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God. “Now,” he wrote in his Chronicle, “for a while at least, our ideological fantasies must be replaced by the practical problems of getting the press into operation. We are weak, but if God is with us anything is possible.”<sup>3</sup> And in a letter to Gleb he wrote: “I’m still a little stunned. There will be nothing but work from now on.

To succeed we must be really brothers.”<sup>4</sup>

On September 30, Eugene recorded: “Today, less than twenty-four hours after our printing press arrived, Archbishop John came to our shop ‘by chance.’ When he saw the press his first thought was to bless it with holy water and prayer, which he did immediately. Thus our press is spiritually born on this day.”<sup>5</sup>

The title of the Brotherhood’s magazine was given by Archbishop John. Gleb had originally thought of calling it *The Pilgrim*, after the outstanding pre-Revolutionary Russian journal *The Russian Pilgrim (Russkiy Palomnik)*, and also after his favorite book, *The Way of a Pilgrim*. Together with Eugene, he chose five possible names for the magazine and sent the list to Archbishop John, asking him to give his blessing to the one he thought best. On September 30, 1964,<sup>[a]</sup> the same day he blessed the printing press, the Archbishop wrote back, suggesting a title that the brothers had *not* submitted:

Dear Gleb!

May the Lord bless you in the second year of the Brotherhood’s activity, and in its necessary undertakings. It would be good to call the publication you have planned “The Orthodox Word.”

I’m calling God’s blessing upon you and all members of the Brotherhood.

✝ Archbishop John

Within a few weeks Eugene and Gleb printed the first page on their new press: one of the spiritual instructions of St. Seraphim of Sarov. Their dream of starting an Orthodox journal was becoming a reality, although from a financial point of view it seemed inconceivable. “We’re dreaming about a magazine and we can’t even afford the paper!” Eugene wrote to Gleb. “Nonetheless, if we work hard God will bless us.”<sup>6</sup>

**E**UGENE and Gleb had several long discussions on the nature and format of their magazine. Although they agreed on its basic purpose — to provide English-speaking peoples with the sources of the Orthodox Faith — they differed over the manner of its presentation. Their disagreement centered on one question: whether or not to include pictures in the magazine, especially on the cover. Gleb envisioned an illustrated journal with a different picture on every cover, like the beautiful pre-Revolutionary Russian religious magazines he had seen. Eugene, who had not been exposed to these magazines, wanted just a simple, standard cover logo with no picture, as is done with most serious scholarly journals. He was familiar with some of the Orthodox theological journals of his own time, and felt that they breathed the same spirit of modern academia he had left behind. He thought the Brotherhood's magazine should have a similar outward presentation, but breathe the spirit of traditional Orthodox piety.

Eugene and Gleb's debate over this question became heated, until Gleb showed Eugene copies of the old, illustrated Russian journals that he cherished. Seeing these journals, with their paintings and photographs depicting the beauty of Holy Russia, Eugene understood how illustrations could make the spirit of Orthodox piety much more vivid to readers. He conceded that Gleb was right. For the beginning issues of their magazine, he was to print all the illustrated covers himself.

Another advantage of including illustrations was that it would make the magazine more accessible to young people. And the magazine, Eugene now reflected, could not only inspire idealistic young people who read it, but could also give them an opportunity to work for a lofty cause. In his Chronicle he wrote:

“An important question today: What can be done about Orthodox young people? Are not many of them losing faith and straying from the Church? The answer of many to this question is: dances, picnics, social gatherings. But this is a worldly answer — as though gathering people together were an end in itself,

and a short prayer or talk sufficient to make the occasion ‘religious’ and ‘Christian.’ But these things pass and are forgotten, and no one is the more Christian for them.

“What does youth want? Not many are really satisfied by the pursuit of pleasure — that is an escape; nor by lectures (though an occasional appropriate lecture might do some good). Youth is full of ideals and wishes to do something to serve these ideals. The answer for someone who wishes to work with youth and to keep them in the Church is to give them something to do, something useful and at the same time idealistic.

“Our printing press is perfect in both regards, and already we have three Russian young people who seem enthusiastic about helping with it — Petya, Alyosha, Misha. This is something small, but it is a good beginning. God will teach us what more we can do!”<sup>7</sup>

One young man used to help Eugene with printing in the afternoons after school. Twenty-five years later, this same person came back looking for Eugene, but learned that he had already died. When asked what had caused him to remember Eugene all these years, he said that it was because Eugene believed in Christianity more than anyone he had ever met, before or after.

**O**N December 29, Fr. Spyridon held a special prayer service for the new venture. As Eugene recorded: “Today Fr. Spyridon served a Moleben in our shop for the beginning of our journal, *The Orthodox Word*. In his short sermon he spoke of the need to preach the word of the true Church of Christ today, so that there may be fulfilled the infallible prophecy of Holy Scripture.... He spoke also of the importance of preaching in the English language, which is the most widely spoken in the world. Truly, our responsibility is great.”<sup>8</sup>

The brothers set up their printshop in a tiny room at the back of the store, where there was hardly enough room to turn around. There they printed the first three issues of *The Orthodox Word* on the small hand-press that Eugene had purchased. Because the press was only large enough to print a page at a time, the



brothers had to run each sheet of paper through the press four different times. Each tiny metal letter of the text was typeset separately by hand, a painstaking and laborious procedure which, in the beginning, required a full day to set up a single page. Eugene would often be typesetting throughout the day and straight into the late hours of the night, until drowsiness would overcome him. When Gleb would come on the weekends, he too would work nonstop until he would fall asleep right on the floor of the shop. On Sunday, totally exhausted, he would have to catch a bus to Monterey in order to be at work the next morning.

On March 14, 1965, the end of the first week of Great Lent, Eugene wrote in his Chronicle: “Today, after the feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, which lasted in the Cathedral next door until 3:30, Fr. Spyridon came to serve a Moleben of thanksgiving for the publication of the first issue of the magazine. What a joyous feeling one has spending the whole day in prayer! Fr. Spyridon again gave a short sermon emphasizing the importance of our work in spreading the Word of God. Yesterday we began printing the second issue. From now on there are supposed to be services in the Cathedral every day — that will be a great help and comfort for us.”

After the third issue, the brothers began looking for an electric printing press and found a suitable one. On the evening of June 28, Eugene noted, “Archbishop John gave his blessing for this important step, and gave us encouragement.” Although printing on an electric press saved some time, the whole process remained incredibly time-consuming, for they still had to set the text by hand, letter by letter. “The publication of the magazine,” Eugene wrote in a letter, “is so difficult that it is only with God’s help that we are able to put it out at all.”<sup>9</sup>

The laborious process, however, gave the magazine a quality of craftsmanship unequaled by rapid modern methods. Having never done such work before, Eugene worked hard to learn the ins and outs of their outmoded printing methods. With Gleb’s artistic input, the format of each issue, though simple, had a classical look, as in books of a bygone era. When reading the

magazine, one felt that one was holding something special, a true labor of love. Many years later, when the activity of the Brotherhood expanded and the brothers began to have their materials printed by the modern offset method, the issues lost much of this natural dignity and beauty.

With the tremendous task of putting out a magazine, Eugene no longer had time to work on *The Kingdom of Man and The Kingdom of God*. Through *The Orthodox Word*, he was now aiming to give modern man an Orthodox vision whereby he could *reach* the Kingdom of God. As Gleb observed much later, Eugene's *magnum opus* ultimately turned out to be not his unfinished work of philosophy, but *The Orthodox Word* itself, which, in the over one hundred issues he completed before he died, formed an exceedingly rich compendium of Orthodox literature.

Helen Kontzevitch praised the magazine for what she called its *présentation*<sup>[b]</sup> of Orthodoxy: the fact that it did not just include a hodgepodge of unrelated material which happened to be at hand, but that it carefully presented relevant material in a traditional context which was at the same time accessible to contemporary readers. The brothers achieved this through a blending of ancient and modern materials (including their own writings), through explanatory notes and prefaces, and not least through lots of pictures.

**F**EELING their inadequacy and inexperience as editors of an Orthodox journal, however, the brothers wanted a safeguard against making errors. "We hope Vladika John will be our permanent censor," Eugene had noted in October of 1964, only a few days after the Archbishop had given the magazine its name.<sup>10</sup> The brothers asked Archbishop John, as their hierarch, to carefully approve each issue before publication. They hoped this would also bring them into closer contact with him and thereby be a boon to their missionary endeavors. The outcome, however, was not what they expected.

When Gleb explained the contents of the first issue before printing it, Archbishop John gave his approval without hesitation and emphatically said,

“Print!” And when asked about subsequent issues, he approved before the brothers could even tell him what was in them.

Gleb was puzzled. Why didn't the Archbishop want to examine each issue, since the magazine was being published within his diocese? Gleb's consternation increased when, after the publication of the fifth issue, a reader became quite incensed at a certain article that Eugene had written. The article, in the “Orthodoxy in the Contemporary World” section, had been about Pope Paul VI's address before the United Nations, which we have recounted elsewhere. Expressing his indignation, the reader returned the issue with notes in the margins. Here was a magazine full of the treasures of the Orthodox Faith, and at the end of it one is faced with an article comparing the Pope to the Antichrist! Who did these “pipsqueak” editors think they were to make such outlandish statements about a world-recognized spiritual leader?



Archbishop John beside a picture of Archbishop Averky.

Hurt by this bitter response, the brothers told Archbishop John what had happened. As Eugene looked on, Gleb asked the Archbishop, “Why didn’t you check over this issue so we would have known before we printed it?!”

Having learned the contents of the article in question, the Archbishop looked keenly into Gleb’s eyes. “Didn’t you attend the courses at the seminary?” he asked.

“Yes,” Gleb said.

“And didn’t you complete them?”

“Yes.”

“Did you have Archbishop Averky as your instructor?”

“Yes.”

“And weren’t you taught that in times of trouble, each Christian is himself responsible for the fullness of Christianity? That each member of the Orthodox Church is responsible for the whole Church? And that today the Church has enemies and is persecuted from outside and within?”

“Yes, I was,” Gleb affirmed.

This, the Archbishop went on to tell the brothers, was why he deliberately did not look over each issue of their magazine. He wanted them to be responsible for what they printed. If they made mistakes, they would be the ones to answer for them before God, and would not be tempted to blame others. In times like these, he said, it is crucial for the preservation of Christianity that Orthodox workers be able to work for Christ without depending on others every step of the way. It is praiseworthy when they do creative work without waiting for detailed instructions.

“Besides,” the Archbishop concluded, “what you wrote in that article is in agreement with Archbishop Averky, and I happen to agree with him.”

The brothers’ doubts were overcome. Eugene smiled at the outcome, which was, after all, in keeping with his American pioneer spirit. From then on, he and Gleb took upon themselves full responsibility. Although they no longer sought for everything to be inspected prior to publication, they continued to come to Archbishop John whenever they had specific questions, and he answered them with love. For answers to theological questions which might arise, he said they should write to Archbishop Averky, with whom he had complete oneness of soul.

Thus, as the brothers’ archpastor, Archbishop John gave them a certain level of freedom, but he made them to understand the responsibility that came

with that freedom. Moreover, he made clear that their freedom must always remain within the context of obedience to the Orthodox Church and her tradition, through their taking counsel not only from him but from other elders in the Faith whom he trusted.

In a letter written several years after Archbishop John's repose, Eugene recalled how the holy hierarch had taught those who labored in the Church this principle of freedom with responsibility:

"One thing is *principles*, which remain the same; but it is human nature to attach to these principles certain purely *idealistic* preconceptions about persons, and this is what can lead to shipwreck. This is above all true of bishops, the leaders of the Church. In our days of general decline in the Church, one should not expect too much of them. While giving them all due honor, respect, and obedience, one must realistically acknowledge that (save in rare cases) they are not in a position to serve as personal guides, least of all to converts. The one outstanding exception to this general 'rule,' Vladika John, to whom we believe one *could* have entrusted oneself entirely—*made it a point precisely NOT to accept disciples, but rather to inspire and encourage independent labors within the Church*, under the conditions of growth and mutual counsel within the Orthodox tradition. On numerous occasions we ourselves went to ask his blessing for various things, for example to buy a piece of new printing equipment, and his reply was always the same: I don't know anything about printing. Judge yourself what you need, buy it if you can, and God will bless your labors. If what you do is pleasing to God, it will prosper; if not, God will place such obstacles in your way that you can't go on."<sup>11</sup>

There were other ways whereby Archbishop John taught the brothers that Christians should be responsible for themselves. He insisted, for example, on paying the cover price whenever he took a copy of *The Orthodox Word*.

"But Vladika, you're our bishop!" the brothers would object. "Take as many as you want, free!"

"No, no, no," Archbishop John would say with a smile, handing them coins

from his little pouch. “It’s *your* work, and I’m supporting it.”

## *Podvig*

*Give blood and receive the Spirit.*

—St. Longinus of Egypt (fourth century)

**W**HEN *The Orthodox Word* first came out, Eugene feared it would not be able to pay for itself. With the small number of American converts to Orthodoxy in those days, and with many cradle Orthodox reading religious material in foreign languages or not reading it at all, there was hardly a market for a journal of traditional Orthodox spirituality in English. The brothers wrote to the Jordanville monastery asking for addresses of any people who might be interested in reading such a magazine. The poor old Russian fathers there did their best: they came up with a total of thirty-seven addresses.

Reviewing the prospects, Eugene asked Gleb, “Who will be our clientele?” To this Gleb replied, “We have to create our own clientele.”

Eugene liked that answer. It was a challenge; it meant they would be starting from scratch, asking God’s help. They would have to have, as he noted in one place, a “pioneer spirit.”<sup>1</sup> If there was not yet an Orthodox convert movement in America, their magazine would help start one. In later years Eugene was to recall: “When we began *The Orthodox Word* (with twelve subscribers!) we realized that from the business side we would have to make our own market. This we managed to do, and the majority of our subscribers now actually pay us to give them what we think they should have!”<sup>2</sup>

Fr. Constantine helped out in the beginning by publishing notices of *The Orthodox Word* in the weekly Russian-language periodical he edited,



*Pravoslavnaya Rus'* (*Orthodox Russia*). He did this periodically until the twentieth issue of *The Orthodox Word* came out, commenting on the timeliness of its articles and the elegance of its appearance.

During the first year, less than five hundred copies of each issue were printed. In succeeding years the circulation increased to nearly three thousand, partly because the magazine itself did indeed help to expand the market for Orthodox literature in English.

Gleb's mother, however, was skeptical at first. To her friends she would joke: "My son translates the articles himself, typesets them himself, prints the pages himself, staples them himself, cuts them himself, and then reads them — all by himself!"

A Russian priest, Fr. N. M., told the brothers that they would never succeed in supporting themselves through missionary outreach to Americans. Later he walked into the shop seeking confirmation of his belief.

"How are you doing here?" he asked the brothers with a smile. "Having trouble making ends meet?" Gleb admitted that they were not doing too well in that regard.

The priest rubbed his hands. "I was right. I told you so!" he said. "I *knew* you wouldn't be able to succeed. It's unrealistic to try to do missionary work like this!"

As the priest left, Eugene stood for a moment looking after him. Then, slamming his fist down on the table, he shouted, "I'd rather die than fail!"

Another time, the shop was visited by a priest who worked for a Russian newspaper, Fr. A. P. He examined the brothers' operation condescendingly, no doubt thinking how much it stood in contrast to his own advanced newspaper firm. Shortly thereafter he published in the paper an article about the brothers, which read something like this: "What a labor of love!—Two intelligent young men, with college educations and theological degrees, doing such work on fifteenth-century printing equipment. Just think, this is the twentieth century — and these people are going back to Gutenberg times.... But *why?*"

Reading this, Gleb thought: He writes as if we're deliberately trying to use such primitive methods, as if we're able to afford anything else! He probably assumes that we get our money from the diocese. But that's just it — we don't *want* to be supported by the diocese!

Taking Eugene before the icon corner in the shop, Gleb told him to cross himself and then read the article. Having done so, Eugene said with a determined expression that, despite what that man had written, he wanted *podvig*.<sup>[a]</sup> “Only *podvig* justifies us and our work,” he said. “It makes us real.”

Eugene had spoken a great truth. Their Brotherhood had been founded on the principle of co-suffering for a common vision, for God. Without *podvig*, their work was in vain. How hypocritical it would be for them to publish the Lives and writings of saints who constantly took on voluntary hardships for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, if they themselves did not taste just a bit of those trials. Eugene and Gleb concurred that, without self-sacrifice, their printed word would have no spiritual power.

It is no wonder, then, that the devil tried to tempt them to give up on their *podvig*. Once, while Gleb was away working in Monterey, a man entered the store and informed Eugene that he was from the “Orthodox Christian Education Society.” The Society, he said, was highly appreciative of the Brotherhood's work in the line of Orthodox education, and wanted to help support the brothers with a donation of ten thousand dollars. In return, it asked only that the Society be advertised on the back cover of *The Orthodox Word*.

Ten thousand dollars was, of course, a considerable sum back in 1965. With it, the brothers could not only solve all their immediate financial worries, but also begin to acquire more advanced and efficient printing equipment. When Gleb came that weekend, Eugene joyfully told him all about it and asked him what he thought.

“There has to be some kind of catch to it,” Gleb said. “What did you say their name was?”

“The Orthodox Christian Education Society,” Eugene replied. What more

innocuous name could there be? But when Gleb looked into it, he found that there was indeed something fishy. The Society had been founded to promote the works of Apostolos Makrakis (†1905), a Greek writer and preacher who taught idiosyncratic doctrines which were condemned by a local bishop's council in Greece in the late nineteenth century. His ardent followers exalted him above all the Holy Fathers of the past, calling his works "the greatest books since the Bible." These were the books that the visitor had wanted to advertise in *The Orthodox Word*.

The brothers thanked God for delivering them from that temptation. They wrote a letter respectfully declining the Society's offer, and went back to setting type by hand.

Meanwhile, the newspaper article about the brothers' "backward" printing operation had a somewhat ironic sequel. Their store was visited by a Russian antique dealer, who, having read that they were using "fifteenth-century printing equipment," wanted to see for himself what valuable antiques they might possess. He was disappointed to find that they were instead using inexpensive equipment of their own century.

**A**s Eugene and Gleb continued in their common *podvig*, the other two founding members went on to other pursuits. Like Eugene and Gleb, they eventually became priest-monks: Vladimir in the Russian Church and Anthony in the Serbian Church. Thus they fulfilled the agreement that all four of them had made at a meeting of the Brotherhood on September 12, 1964: "To devote our whole lives to the service of the Holy Orthodox Apostolic Church."<sup>3</sup>

Still, it was with some sadness that Eugene and Gleb watched the other founding members go. One of them left the city suddenly, leaving behind only a short note. When Archbishop John heard of this, his only comment was "So he was *ne-tvërды* [not firm]." And Eugene, writing in his Chronicle, came to the conclusion that, "Surely, our Brotherhood is to be built on hard experience!"<sup>4</sup>

Another founder faded away gradually. "I gather that he has no interest in a

Brotherhood,” Eugene wrote to Gleb. “Which means, I suppose, that we two ‘brothers’ should work all the harder.”<sup>5</sup>

## *The Soul of an American*

*The Christian loves his fellow man because he sees in him one created in the image of God and called to perfection and eternal life in God; such love is not human but Divine, seeing in men not mere earthly mortality, but heavenly immortality.*

—Eugene Rose<sup>1</sup>

**B**EING able to devote all his waking hours to the work of God, Eugene was quietly contented. Gleb, who still had to divide his time between his secular job in Monterey and his labors for the Brotherhood in San Francisco, was not so fortunate. As Eugene noted at the time, “[Gleb] immensely enjoys printing, but I am afraid that he is in general still in a rather agitated state, and will be until he finds a settled place in life. As for myself, I have been too busy working in the store and printing (and editing) to be able to think of anything else.”<sup>2</sup>

One young Orthodox convert who visited the store several times recalls: “I can’t say that I got to know [Eugene] very well during this time. He was never particularly talkative and seemed somewhat introspective. Perhaps there was an element of shyness in him as well. But I remember that he was continually busy. There was always something going on. Whether it was tending to the demands of the bookstore, singing the daily cycle of services each morning and evening on the kliros in the adjacent Cathedral, or working on some aspect of *The Orthodox Word*, Eugene was always laboring.”

Another young visitor to the store was a Mexican American named

Anthony Arganda. With Eugene and Gleb's help Anthony was received into the Orthodox Church, and soon thereafter he became a part-time helper in the store. "Eugene exuded a quiet sobriety," Anthony recalls. "He always spoke in a measured fashion. He thought over what he would say, and would not join in a conversation if he wasn't asked something; but when he was asked a question, he would floor everyone with his encyclopedic understanding of the Faith. If you engaged him in a private conversation over tea, he would talk at length about matters of the Faith, but would never talk about himself or his background."

EUGENE'S silentness and dignified seriousness as he went about his work caused Gleb to sometimes accuse him jokingly of being a "cold fish" or a "soulless American." This accusation, although clothed in humor, was rooted in a view commonly held by Slavic peoples: that they generally have more warmth of heart and feel things more deeply than non-Slavs. Whether or not this was true as a generalization, however, it was not true in Eugene's case. In the beginning years of the Brotherhood, Gleb was given to know what greatness of soul his retiring co-laborer actually possessed.

Once Gleb, being the "deeply feeling" Russian that he was, fell into a desperate state of frustration. It was Saturday, and Gleb had been working all day with Eugene in the store, setting type. They had to maintain total concentration in this tedious labor, for if a single word was left out, whole sections would have to be reset, involving hours of additional work. An inflow of customers and visitors periodically broke their concentration, until at last they began to hope that no one would come into the shop. "Wait a minute," Gleb thought. "The sign says 'open,' and here we are praying for no customers!"

By the time they closed the shop, Gleb was at wits' end. "Why do I have to kill myself for this?" he demanded. "I have to work full time in Monterey to support my family, and on my only days off I have to come up here and work like a bought slave. Why do I have to give up everything for it, even the hope for a little happiness. I even gave up my *amours*, my girlfriends, so that I could give

myself fully to this. Now it's my turn to have a good time on the town!"

Eugene looked at Gleb with perfect composure. Having himself tasted the so-called delights of this world far more deeply than Gleb, and having already died to them, he could see that Gleb didn't know what he was talking about. "Don't be silly," he said. "There's nothing to it. There's no meaning in all the thrills the world offers. The only real happiness and satisfaction lies precisely in our suffering."

Gleb turned and left, slamming the door behind him. He ended up going to see a current "shocking," supposedly "artistic" avant-garde film, but was totally disgusted with it. Now he was mad at himself, and sorry for polluting his mind with such filth.

He arrived at Eugene's apartment four hours later, at about 11:00 p.m. There he found Eugene huddled on the floor in the corner of the room where the icons were hanging. At once he understood: Eugene had been praying the entire time for his friend to be delivered from temptation, and had finally fallen asleep from exhaustion while prostrated before the icons. Gleb marveled at the depth of brotherly love hidden within this so-called soulless American.

Gleb also learned from Eugene's compassion for the poor, for the underdog, which demonstrated the sincerity of the words on Christian charity that he had written for *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*. "Time and again," Gleb recalls, "I would see Eugene walk down the street and go out of his way to give a little money to a destitute person."

There was a certain old vagrant who would come often to the shop to meekly ask for some change, and Eugene would always give him a quarter without hesitation. This "bum" was in such miserable shape that Gleb could not help feeling repulsion whenever he saw him. Once, when the old man left with his usual quarter, Gleb chided Eugene. He pointed out that the man would keep coming to the store on his daily rounds as long as he knew Eugene had a soft spot. And here the Brotherhood was with barely enough money to keep the shop open, scrimping and saving to make ends meet! Obviously, the vagrant would

just use the money to buy more booze.

“I think we should help him out,” Eugene said. “If we don’t give, God will know better than to give to us.”

A few days later, when Gleb was working in the shop by himself, the old man returned. Seeing that Eugene was absent, and having sensed on former occasions that Gleb did not like his coming there, he decided not to ask for any money. “Good day!” he said politely, and walked out.

Instantly Gleb felt the pangs of conscience. Eugene, the “soulless American,” had taught him once more! He opened the cash box, grabbed a dollar bill, and ran out the door to intercept the man. But the man was nowhere to be seen, and Gleb was left standing there on the sidewalk, bill in his hand and tears streaming down his face.

**T**HE Brotherhood’s young helper, Anthony Arganda, remembers that Eugene was like an anchor to Gleb: “From the first time I met them, I pictured them this way: Gleb was a seagull flying about with its leg tied to an anchor, which provided a circumference in which to act. That anchor was Eugene.

“Eugene and Gleb were both serious men, united in their common devotion to the Orthodox Faith. But they were outwardly as different as can be imagined. In contrast to Eugene, Gleb was ebullient, excitable, and talkative. He was always shooting out sparks. Eugene grounded this energy, and turned it into a positive electrical force. He gave focus and stability to Gleb’s enthusiasm, and kept it on track.

“At times Gleb acted irritated when Eugene did not support one of his ideas, calling Eugene a ‘stick in the mud.’ But he said this in a playful manner, for he understood that, in order to make his ideas happen, he needed Eugene to filter and organize them. In the end, he always bowed to Eugene’s wisdom.

“With all their obvious differences in style, Eugene and Gleb worked very well together. They complemented each other, like the north and south poles of a magnet. Both of them understood and valued this dynamic. And, in the end, it



accomplished a great deal.”

## ***The Apostolic Vision of Archbishop John***

*God allowed the Russian Revolution to take place, in order that the Russian Church might become purged and purified and that the Orthodox Faith might be disseminated across the whole world.... The Church is One, but each nation has its own calling within that Oneness.*

—Archbishop John

**D**URING his time in San Francisco, Archbishop John established the Russian Orthodox Icon Society, which encouraged appreciation for the traditional style of iconography. Archbishop John was the president, later giving this position to Fr. Spyridon; and Eugene was the treasurer.

From the beginning, one of the Society's main activities was to support the work of the master iconographer of the Old Believer school, Pimen Maximovich Sofronov. For over fifty years Sofronov had been creating extraordinary, luminous works of sacred art, and Archbishop John wanted him to paint the frescoes in the new Cathedral. In 1965 the Society invited Sofronov to the city to teach courses in icon painting, and in 1966 it held a public exhibition of his works in the cathedral hall, for which Eugene and Gleb printed an illustrated brochure.

Notwithstanding the Society's modest aims, it was not long before it became embroiled in controversy. There lived in San Francisco at that time another iconographer, N. S. Zadorozhny, who said he wanted to paint the

Cathedral instead of Sofronov. A master of the realistic modern style of iconography, he promoted this style in articles he wrote for the Russian newspaper. He was strongly supported by one of the city's main priests, who disdained the traditional style and called it "Old Believerism."



Pimen Maximovich Sofronov.

Others rose in defense of the ancient way, publishing a polemic article that accused the realistic style of being decadent. Eugene and Gleb, zealots of "true and traditional Orthodoxy," belonged to the latter camp. But here again they were taught an important lesson by Archbishop John, who, although he also supported the old style and wrote an article about it, was able to go deeper than the externals. As Eugene recalled, "One member of the Society, who was very zealous for the old icon style, wanted the Archbishop to make a decree in the diocese that only old-style icons were to be allowed, or at least to make a decision that this was the officially approved position. In a way, this man's intention seemed good. Archbishop John, however, told him, 'I can pray in front of one kind of icon and I can pray in front of another kind of icon.' The important thing is that we pray, not that we pride ourselves on having good

icons.”<sup>1</sup> At another time the Archbishop pointed out that the Mother of God weeps and performs miracles through any style of icon.

**T**HANKS to Archbishop John, at the end of 1964 there occurred a major event in the Russian Church: the canonization of Fr. John of Kronstadt (†1908). The Church in the Soviet Union had not been able to canonize this late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century wonderworker because he had been an avowed monarchist, had spoken out vehemently against socialist currents, and had even prophesied the bloody Revolution. It was therefore left to the Church in the Diaspora to proclaim his proper place among the saints; and Archbishop John was one of the strongest advocates for this from among the hierarchs. Metropolitan Anastassy — prompted by a letter he received from Archbishop John’s friend from Serbia, the holy hierarch Nikolai Velimirovich — had formed a canonization committee under Archbishop John’s chairmanship. Archbishop John went to the hierarchs of other Orthodox Churches in the free world asking them to perform a joint canonization of Fr. John of Kronstadt, but for various reasons they did not feel free to do so. Undaunted, Archbishop John went forward with the preparations, composing hymns in honor of his beloved Fr. John to be sung at the canonization.

Fr. John of Kronstadt, because he was a tireless missionary, a father and feeder of the oppressed, and a worker of abundant miracles, had much in common with Archbishop John; and it was only appropriate that one of the twentieth century’s greatest saints should work for the glorification of another. Eugene also took part, writing two articles on Fr. John of Kronstadt to be printed in *Orthodox Tidings*.

On the evening before Sunday, November 1, Archbishop John celebrated the solemn canonization service. This was the first canonization of a Russian saint since the Revolution, an act of the Church in the free world that would give hope to those in the enslaved Russian homeland. To Archbishop John’s great sorrow, however, a number of people were absent from the service. It turned out

that they had organized a Halloween masquerade ball on that very night.

“After the service,” Eugene recorded, “Vladika [Archbishop John] went to the place where the ball was still in progress. He climbed the steps and entered the hall, to the absolute astonishment of the participants. The music stopped and Vladika, in complete silence, glared at the dumbfounded people, slowly and deliberately making the round of the entire hall, staff in hand. He spoke not a word, and none was necessary; the mere sight of Vladika stung the conscience of all, as was evident from the general consternation. Vladika left in silence; and the next day in church he thundered his holy indignation and his flaming zeal, calling all to the devout Christian life.”<sup>2</sup>

Eugene and Gleb, who had been at both the canonization Vigil and the Sunday morning service, found this incident very revealing. “With all their talk about Russian church schools, activities, and fund-raisers,” Gleb told Eugene, “the people don’t even care that their own Saint is now glorified. It makes you wonder whether or not all these activities are done for God.”

“And that,” Eugene responded, “only gives us more reason to go on.”

**L**ITTLE more than a week later, another major event took place in San Francisco thanks to Archbishop John: the first consecration of a bishop for the French Orthodox Church.

Archbishop John’s contact with the French Church had begun in 1957, when he was living in France as Bishop of Western Europe. It was then that he met for the first time with the Church’s founder, the talented and creative Fr. Eugraph Kovalevsky.

Of noble lineage, Fr. Eugraph had been born in Russia, from which his family had fled to France in 1920. As a young man he had had a vision of the fourth-century Gallic Saint, Radegunde, and after this he had dedicated his life to restoring France’s lost Orthodox heritage, the veneration of her ancient saints, and the usages of her ancient Church. Ordained a priest in 1937, he had researched and revived the liturgical rite that was used in France before the

Church was subjected to the See of Rome: the Gallic Rite of St. Germain of Paris. To house his growing congregation of French people in Paris, he had restored an old cathedral, dedicated it to St. Irenaeus of Lyons, and covered its walls with icons of French saints painted by his own hand.

Fr. Eugraph had always had difficulty finding hierarchs and clergyman from among the Eastern Churches who showed any interest in and sympathy to the cause of Western Orthodoxy. It was a hermit of Mount Athos, Nikon of Karoulia, who first pointed members of the French Church to Archbishop John as one of the few hierarchs capable of understanding and helping them.<sup>3</sup>

In 1958 an icon of St. Michael the Archangel located in the church of St. Irenaeus began miraculously to exude fragrant oil. Archbishop John regarded this as a sign, since St. Michael has traditionally been known as the heavenly intercessor of the land of France. In 1959 Archbishop John took the French Church, at its request, under his archpastoral protection and care. He became very active in helping the budding Church, visiting its parishes, blessing chapels, ordaining priests, teaching at the Church's theological school of Saint-Denis, and celebrating the Gallic Liturgy at the St. Irenaeus Cathedral and elsewhere. He presided over a liturgical commission charged with verifying the Orthodoxy of the ancient rite of the Gauls. "The seriousness which he brought to his task as liturgist was exceptional," members of the French Church recall. "His penetrating reflections accompanied each word, each translation. He loved Liturgy. A wise man, he did not restrict himself to the theoretical study of the proposed texts.... In the conviction that the liturgical value of a Liturgy or of an office can only be evaluated fully in its live celebration, Archbishop John, himself a fluent French speaker, insisted that he should himself celebrate each particular service, prior to according it definite approval or referring it back to the commission for further study."<sup>4</sup>



Archbishop John amidst members of the French Orthodox Church. At right, Fr. Eugraph Kovalevsky.

Archbishop John succeeded in convincing his chief hierarch in the Russian Church Abroad, Metropolitan Anastassy, of the importance of the reestablishment of local Western Churches, regenerated from ancient, indigenous Orthodox Christian roots, more ancient than those of the Russian Church herself. Desiring to give the French Church some level of autonomy, he asked that this Church be placed directly under the Metropolitan rather than under the existing Diocese of Western Europe; and the Metropolitan agreed. In an ordinance Archbishop John wrote:

The administration of said Church will be in all ways independent of that of the Diocese of Western Europe, at the head of which I have been placed. The two administrations will each have their own autonomous interior life, without admixture, united in the same Faith and in one same chief hierarch.<sup>5</sup>

Despite Metropolitan Anastassy's support of the French enterprise, other bishops in the Russian Church Abroad were not in favor of it. Archbishop John spent a considerable amount of time and energy trying to show them the necessity of supporting it in whatever way possible.

In 1962 Archbishop John was appointed to San Francisco, leaving the

Church of France without a local bishop sympathetic to its cause. The time had come, Archbishop John believed, for it to have a bishop from among its own people; and the obvious choice lay in its founder, Fr. Eugraph. On October 22, 1964, Metropolitan Anastassy declared to Fr. Eugraph that, by his consecration to the episcopate, “the Russian Church Abroad is not creating a new diocese, nor even a new ecclesiastical province. It signals that it has the honor of becoming the source of a new Church and of taking part in the renaissance of the ancient Orthodox Church of France.”

At this time, however, Metropolitan Anastassy retired due to old age, and the other hierarchs declined Archbishop John’s request to participate in Fr. Eugraph’s consecration.<sup>[a]</sup> In San Francisco, Eugene and Gleb even heard people who otherwise supported Archbishop John speak against his plans. “Archbishop John is a holy man,” it was said, “but this time he has gone too far out on a limb.” In Russian church circles, Fr. Eugraph was regarded as an eccentric, and the creation of the French Orthodox Church continued to be seen as a hazardous venture.

Archbishop John wished to consecrate Fr. Eugraph in the San Francisco Cathedral. Since his fellow Russian bishops would not assist in the service, he called in a Romanian hierarch whom he himself had consecrated in 1954, Bishop Theophil Ionescu, who gladly agreed to come to California for that purpose.

When Fr. Eugraph came to San Francisco for the consecration, Eugene and Gleb went to visit him where he was staying next to the old Cathedral. “We went a day or two before the consecration,” Gleb recalls. “He spoke to us in Russian, and from his speech I surmised that he was highly educated and from the aristocratic class.”

The services surrounding the consecration began on November 9, 1964, and took place over the course of three days. Eugene assisted Archbishop John in the altar and read the appointed Epistle verses in French.

On the first day, the Archbishop tonsured Fr. Eugraph into monasticism, giving him the name of the Russian Saint he had just canonized, St. John of



Kronstadt, and also of the most recently canonized Greek Saint, St. Nektarios of Pentapolis. He clothed him with the robe and klobuk of the former holy hierarch of San Francisco, Archbishop Tikhon, who had also valued and supported the French cause.

On the second day, the feast of St. Martin of Tours, Archbishop John celebrated the Gallic Liturgy of St. Germain together with the French clergy. In the evening a preparatory service was held, and on the following day the episcopal consecration took place.

At the gathering after the consecration, Eugene and Gleb met with the clergy and parishioners who had come from France. Eugene spoke with them in French, and again with the new Bishop, Jean-Nectaire Kovalevsky. Although he came away from these talks with some good impressions, he also found himself having concerns about the future of the French Church. Echoing the feelings of many, he later noted: “Gleb and I had several interesting talks with the French priests, and our impression was that they are in danger of going off in a dangerous direction if they do not find some very good practical guidance. The new bishop impresses me as being more a philosopher and intellectual than anything else, and some of his ideas seem a little strange to me. Certainly they have the best intentions, and possessed a very fine spirit in the less intellectual members. One must pray that they will find the guidance to travel the straight Orthodox path.”<sup>6</sup>



The consecration of Bishop Jean-Nectaire Kovalevsky, San Francisco, November 11, 1964. Left to right: Archimandrite Spyridon, Archpriest Nicholas Ponomarev, Archbishop John, Bishop Jean-Nectaire, Fr. Elias Wen, Bishop Theophil Ionescu.

In spite of the concerns that Bishop Jean-Nectaire's consecration had aroused, it was an exciting period for the church in San Francisco. The Russians there had not even heard of St. Germain, let alone the long-buried, ancient rite that he had helped compile. It was truly extraordinary to have — in this immigrant church which had never known anything but Slavonic services — such splendid services in the French language.

After leaving San Francisco and Archbishop John, Bishop Jean-Nectaire felt like an orphan. The bishop who had replaced Archbishop John in Western Europe sent notice that he denounced the consecration and refused all contact with the French Church, and other local church leaders sent similar statements. Thus, the French Church was being deprived of the very guidance and contact from other Orthodox people that, as Eugene saw, it needed in order to stay on the right path. Its only real support came from Archbishop John, who lived far away and had only a few years remaining to him. In one of his last letters to Bishop Jean-Nectaire, the holy Archbishop wrote concerning the trials that the French Church was facing: “I have foreseen these difficulties and still others to come. The greater the difficulties, the greater the success of an enterprise. An enterprise without difficulties is an enterprise without a future.”

**W**<sub>HY</sub> had Archbishop John been so adamant in supporting the French Church, in fighting for a cause which many — including Eugene — felt was fraught with dangers? As time went on, it became more clear to Eugene and Gleb what Archbishop John had perceived with his apostolic and at the same time apocalyptic vision. In later years Eugene was to write: “For us, Vladika John is the key: he has given us the right approach... inspiring and encouraging everyone, planting seeds everywhere and leaving the harvest to God and other laborers. It is for us to go (or stay) in the field and work!”<sup>7</sup>

Elsewhere Eugene wrote that Archbishop John’s approach to missionary labors “was one of the most *important* aspects of his inspiring and holy life. One might disagree with him on some specific ‘economies,’ but his basic approach was *right* and is indispensable for us today. His point was to *guide and inspire*, not to push and force. He did not *at all* leave converts without guidance; he rather knew exactly *how and when* to give the guidance, so that it would inspire and not crush the spirit.”<sup>8</sup>

On one of the Archbishop’s visits to the bookshop, Eugene asked him a question he had been pondering: “Nearly all the peoples of the earth have had

the Gospel preached to them. Does this mean that it's the end of the world, as the Scriptures say?"<sup>[b]</sup>

"No," replied the Archbishop. "The Gospel of Christ must be preached in all tongues throughout the world *in an Orthodox context*. Only then will the end come."

Many years later, when Eugene and Gleb were reading through old articles and sermons of Archbishop John, they found this same idea expressed. "When Archbishop John first came to Paris from Shanghai," Eugene noted, "instead of giving a merely polite and formal greeting to his new flock in church on the first time he saw them, he gave them real spiritual meat: the meaning of the Russian exile is to preach the Gospel over the whole earth, which must happen before the end of the world; and that means not just *any* Gospel, *any* kind of 'Christianity,' but *Orthodoxy*." <sup>9</sup>

As one member of the French Church has said, "The Archbishop possessed a particular ability, exceptionally rare, to place matters within the context of a universal conception." He knew he had to nurture and care for every small attempt — no matter how risky — to restore Western Europe to her buried Orthodox heritage. Universal Orthodoxy had returned to the West, and it had to find and cherish its spiritual roots there if it was to thrive and grow. In 1960, while serving the Liturgy of St. Germain for the first time, Archbishop John had preached to the faithful in France:

The Risen Christ sent the Apostles to preach to all nations. The Church of Christ was not founded for just one people, for any particular country; all nations are called to the Faith of the True God. According to established tradition, Lazarus, he who was raised from the dead after four days, landed in France, fleeing before the Jews who wanted to murder him. He installed himself with his sisters Martha and Mary, and preached in Provence. Trophime of Arles and others among the seventy apostles also traveled in France. Thus, since Apostolic times in Gaul — currently France — the

Orthodox Faith of Christ was preached. To this Orthodox Church belonged St. Martin of Tours, the great Cassian — founder of the Abbey of Marseille, where for many long years he gave the example of the ascetic life — as well as St. Germain of Paris, St. Genevieve, and a multitude of other saints. This is why the Orthodox Faith is not, for the French people, the Faith of a foreign people. It is her own, confessed here in France since ancient times by her ancestors; it is the Faith of her fathers.

We sincerely and warmly wish that the Orthodox Faith, firmly restored in France, will once again become the Faith of the French people as it is of the Russians, the Serbs, and the Greeks. May Orthodox France be reborn, and may the Divine benediction be upon this Orthodox France!<sup>[10](#)</sup>

As Eugene and Gleb learned, Archbishop John had sought to resurrect not only Orthodox France. While in Europe he had been just as instrumental in establishing the Orthodox Church of the Netherlands.<sup>[11](#)</sup> He had celebrated the Divine Liturgy in Dutch, just as before, while in Shanghai, he had served Chinese Liturgies.

**A**RCHBISHOP John believed that, in whatever land an Orthodox Christian found himself, it was his responsibility to venerate and pray to its national and local saints. Wherever Archbishop John had been — China, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Serbia, Tunisia — he had researched the lives of the local Orthodox saints. He had gone to the churches housing their relics, performed services in their honor, and asked the Orthodox priests there to do likewise. By the end of his life, his knowledge of saints, both Western and Eastern, was seemingly limitless.

Eugene, due to his background in Oriental studies, was especially interested in the Orthodox saints and righteous ones of China: the Martyrs of the Boxer Rebellion, Archbishop Simon of Beijing, Bishop Jonah of Manchuria,<sup>[\[c\]](#)</sup> Metropolitan Melety of Harbin, and Hieroschemamonk<sup>[\[d\]](#)</sup> Ignatius the Blind and

Schemamonk Michael, also of Harbin. When Eugene began doing research on them for an article in *The Orthodox Word*, he asked many questions of Archbishop John, who had known some of these righteous ones personally.[\[e\]](#)



The ceremony of the elevation of the crosses atop the new Joy of All Who Sorrow Cathedral in San Francisco, 1964, which was preceded by a solemn procession through the streets. Left to right: Bishop Sava, Metropolitan Philaret, Archbishop John, Bishop Nektary.

Having been a student of sanctity since childhood, Archbishop John had undoubtedly used saints' lives as formative training guides to help him reach his own level of sanctity. Now that he was an apostle, he called upon each local saint he learned about, each new brother or sister in the Body of Christ, to provide heavenly help in evangelizing new lands. As Archbishop of San Francisco he called upon all the saints of America, including the most local of all saints, the Native American Peter the Aleut. On the Feast of Theophany, 1965, in bestowing his blessing on *The Orthodox Word*, he wrote:

May the Lord bless the preaching of the Orthodox Word. Christ commanded His Disciples, *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,*

*teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.* May this preaching serve for the strengthening of true Orthodox Faith and Christian life in North America, with the help and the prayers of Blessed Father Herman of Alaska, whose sanctity was manifested on this continent, and the Aleut Martyr Peter, who suffered martyrdom in San Francisco.<sup>[12](#)</sup>

ARCHBISHOP John had an especially great devotion to Blessed Herman as a patron of the American Orthodox mission. In 1962, when Gleb had presented him with his icon, one of the first paintings of Blessed Herman depicted in a halo, the Archbishop had not hesitated to venerate and pray before it despite the absence of a formal canonization.

On the anniversary of Blessed Herman's repose in 1964, the Archbishop came to the bookstore to perform a memorial service to Blessed Herman, followed by the special glorification hymn that is reserved for monastic saints: "We glorify thee, our holy Father Herman, and we honor thy holy memory: instructor of monks, and converser with angels." As Eugene noted in his Chronicle: "Today a *Pannikhida*<sup>[\[f\]](#)</sup> was served in our bookstore by Archbishop John. In his sermon, as earlier after the Liturgy at St. Tikhon's Church, he spoke of our brotherhood and offered his congratulations on the feast day of our heavenly protector, Father Herman. At his insistence, at the conclusion of the Pannikhida 'We glorify thee' was sung, thus offering an early public recognition of what will apparently soon be a fact: the canonization of Father Herman."<sup>[13](#)</sup>

On the same day of the following year, Archbishop John made this glorification public by bringing the icon into the Cathedral, placing it on a stand for public veneration, and having the choir sing the troparion hymn to the Saint.<sup>[14](#)</sup> At the same service he expressed his hopes for America through the heavenly intercession of Blessed Herman. In his sermon he said that although Blessed Herman was not yet canonized he still worked miracles: "If you want to see a living miracle of Blessed Father Herman of Alaska, go next door to a tiny store. There a labor of love is at work — a reflection of Valaam."<sup>[15](#)</sup>



Eugene and Gleb thought it interesting that Archbishop John had compared their small lay Brotherhood with Valaam, a huge *monastic* community that had been a center of pilgrimage for all Russia. Both of them felt, as did Archbishop John, that their bookstore was only a stepping stone to something else.

**O**N the Feast of the Annunciation in 1965, Archbishop John ordained Eugene as a reader, the first clerical rank. “Thus,” wrote Eugene in his Chronicle, “one more preparation has been made for the day when our Brotherhood shall become a monastic one.”<sup>16</sup> At the same service in which he ordained Eugene a reader, Archbishop John raised Fr. Spyridon to the rank of archimandrite. Because of this, Fr. Spyridon would say to Eugene in later years, “We’ve been bound together by Archbishop John.”<sup>[g]</sup>

Eugene went on to finish his theological courses as the top student, even though all the lectures were conducted in Russian. To this day, Gleb believes that Archbishop John designed the courses especially for Eugene — in order to give a well-rounded theological outlook and education to the thirsty soul of that young American whom he had first seen humbly standing at the back of the Cathedral. When the courses had been started some years before, the prophetic intuition of the holy hierarch must have known what Eugene could do with his theological training, and what he *would* do with it.

On October 31, 1965, Archbishop John told the Fr. Herman brothers of another way they could serve the American Orthodox mission: he suggested that they prepare for English-language services at the new Cathedral by Christmas. The English-language Liturgies, he said, would be served on the side-altar of the Cathedral, which had been dedicated to the newly canonized St. John of Kronstadt. Noting that the Archbishop had made this announcement on the eve of the feast of the self-sacrificing missionary pastor St. John of Kronstadt, Eugene asked in his Chronicle: “Is there something for us to learn here about our mission in spreading Orthodoxy in English?”

In December of the same year, Archbishop John came into the bookshop



when Eugene was working there alone, and approached him with the proposal that he become an English-language priest-monk for the new Cathedral.<sup>17</sup> As the Archbishop looked at Eugene with his usual searching gaze, the latter replied that he did want to become a monk and that he did want to give Orthodoxy to his fellow Americans who were in search of the Truth — but that he did not wish to live in the world. He told the Archbishop that he and Gleb had hopes for a monastery away from the city, remote from the world and yet filled with missionary spirit and activity.

“Yes,” the Archbishop stated emphatically. “I too believe that there will be such a missionary monastery in California.”<sup>18</sup>

The brothers had heard too many accounts of Archbishop John’s clairvoyance to regard this statement as a mere product of wishful thinking. Eugene responded to it much more enthusiastically than Gleb, who hoped, if the Brotherhood did become a monastic one, that the monastery would be not in California but on Spruce Island, Alaska, with Fr. Gerasim.

On January 1, 1966, the first English-language Liturgy was celebrated at the Cathedral. For members of the Russian Church Abroad in San Francisco, this was another unheard-of novelty being introduced by Archbishop John. In his Chronicle Eugene recorded: “Archbishop John officiated, together with Fathers Spyridon, Nicholas, and John, and Deacon Nicholas. Brothers Gleb and Eugene were the whole choir and performed creditably if *not* stunningly.”



After an English language Liturgy at the new Cathedral, 1966. Left to right: Reader Gleb Podmoshensky, Vadim Wright, Reader Eugene Rose, Fr. Ambrose Pogodin, and a visiting priest.

In the middle of June, Archbishop John decreed that an English Liturgy be served in the Cathedral every other Sunday, and asked Gleb and Eugene to continue being the choir. The first of these biweekly Liturgies was served on June 19, with Archimandrite Ambrose Pogodin officiating. Though having a limited knowledge of English himself, Archbishop John was determined that the fullness of Orthodoxy be made available to Americans in their native tongue.

**I**N the meantime, the brothers had received another commission — a new responsibility coming from spiritual heirs of Optina Monastery, Ivan and Helen Kontzevitch. In June of 1965, Professor Kontzevitch lay wasting away with cancer. “You can’t die yet,” Gleb told him. “You haven’t finished the other two volumes of your Trilogy.” Kontzevitch had intended to follow *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit* with a volume on the disciples of Elder Paisius Velichkovsky and another on Optina Monastery. “Brother Gleb,” he said sadly, “they haven’t been written at all. All that exists are scattered notes.”

Gleb was incredulous. He could not imagine how God could allow this man to die when the world so badly needed what he had to pass on through his writings: the genuine spirit of Optina. In spite of Gleb's prayers, Professor Kontzevitch grew worse. Lying on his deathbed like a skeleton, he made a last request of Gleb. "Help my wife. Do whatever she asks. Encourage her to continue the work."

Following her husband's death, Helen Kontzevitch thought her life was over and began to withdraw, sinking ever closer to despair. Gleb realized he had to do something. A talented literary person like her — an embodiment of Orthodox tradition who understood the meaning of true sanctity in an age of ignorance and fakery — could not let the rest of her life go to waste. Going to her house in Berkeley, Gleb told her to pack her things. "I'm taking you to my mother's place in Monterey," he said. There he put her in his bedroom, having already covered its walls with portraits of the Optina Elders, while he himself slept in the living room. He placed her at his desk, put a ream of paper in front of her and a pen in her hand, and said, "Write!"

With Gleb's encouragement, Helen eventually produced a series of priceless works: the Lives of St. Seraphim of Sarov, New Martyr Abbess Sophia (whom she had known in Russia), her uncle Sergei Nilus, and many other righteous men and women who otherwise would have been lost to history. She and Gleb even managed to complete Professor Kontzevitch's Trilogy, publishing material for the second and third volumes together in one book, *Optina Monastery and Its Era*.<sup>19</sup> Helen lived to be ninety-six years old, outliving her husband by twenty-four years.

Gleb became the son she never had. But Helen, being such a powerful personality, did not just passively receive this gift of Providence. She felt that God had given her the task of training Gleb according to her cumulative Patristic experience. In effect, of course, this meant training Eugene as well, for her comments and suggestions were directed to the Brotherhood's common work — particularly its literary productions. In the years to come, especially after

Archbishop John's repose, Eugene came to value highly Helen's experience and wisdom, and often asked Gleb to find out her views on troubling subjects. And for her part, in Gleb's words, "she worshipped Eugene." Eugene's soft-spoken manner, careful thinking, and devotion to the purity of Orthodoxy reminded her of the image of her late husband, and she rejoiced to watch his development as an Orthodox writer.

**“As** always,” Eugene wrote in May of 1966, “Vladika Ioann is an inspiration to everyone. He always has just the right word of advice.”[20](#)

In the years since he had first met Archbishop John, Eugene had grown closer and closer to him in spirit: an unspoken rapport had grown between them. This was discerned by several people who came to the Cathedral. One of the Archbishop's Russian spiritual daughters from Shanghai, Valentina Harvey, recalls: “In November of 1965, my American husband Richard was baptized by Vladika John in San Francisco, taking the name Rostislav. Eugene was present at that time, and, since my husband did not understand Russian, Eugene acted as his interpreter, explaining to him what was going to happen in the service. This was the first time I met Eugene. I could quickly tell that Vladika was extremely fond of him. He looked at Eugene with gentle love — a special love, as if to say, ‘He is my son.’ I recognized that look from when I was growing up in Shanghai. That was how he looked at the children of his orphanage, each of whom he regarded as his own child. Later I heard from several people in the Cathedral that, indeed, Vladika really loved Eugene.”

For his part, Eugene would remain for the rest of his life — long after the holy hierarch had reposed — a true and devoted son of Vladika John.

## *The Death of a Saint*

*Tell the people: although I have died, I am alive!*

—Archbishop John, in a posthumous visitation to Maria

Shakhmatova<sup>[1](#)</sup>

**O**N June 28, 1966, Archbishop John came into the bookstore bringing the miracle-working Kursk Icon of the Mother of God, before which St. Seraphim of Sarov had once prayed and received healing. After the Archbishop had blessed the shop and printing room with the icon, he proceeded to talk to the brothers about saints of various lands. “He promised,” wrote Eugene in his Chronicle, “to give us a list of canonized Romanian saints and disciples of Paisius Velichkovsky. He mentioned having compiled (when in France) a list of Western pre-schism saints which he presented to the Holy Synod.”<sup>[\[a\]](#)</sup>

In particular, Archbishop John talked to the brothers about St. Alban (t305), the first martyr of Britain. Out of his little portfolio he pulled a short life of the Saint, together with a picture postcard of an eleventh-century cathedral, located in the town of St. Albans near London, which had been built over the site of the Saint’s martyrdom and in which his relics had been interred. The Archbishop looked up into Gleb’s eyes to see if he got the point. St. Alban, like most of the saints of Western Europe, was not in the Orthodox Calendar; and before Archbishop John had started compiling lists of these saints, Eastern Christians had not even thought of raising them from obscurity and praying to them.

After telling the brothers about St. Alban, Archbishop John reminded them that the very next day, a Wednesday, would be the feast of St. Tikhon of Kaluga.

Eugene and Gleb knew that St. Tikhon had significance for their Brotherhood, since it was from his monastery in Russia that Fr. Gerasim had come. The Archbishop said that in the evening he would serve a Vigil to St. Tikhon at the chapel in the St. Tikhon of Zadonsk Home, and in the morning he would serve the Liturgy. Again he looked searchingly into the brothers' eyes, and with a smile said he wished they would come to the services.



The St. Tikhon of Zadonsk Home in San Francisco, where Archbishop John lived and where he had his chapel. Photograph taken in 1999.

Eugene made a point to go to the evening service, but both he and Gleb failed to attend the Liturgy the following morning. It was the middle of the week, *The Orthodox Word* was behind schedule, and they were swamped with work.

The brothers were never again to see Archbishop John in their shop. Soon he made a trip to Seattle, carrying with him the Kursk Icon. On his way he stopped in Redding, California, where he visited Valentina Harvey together with her husband and mother.

Three days later, at the conclusion of a Liturgy that he celebrated in Seattle, Archbishop John spent three hours praying in the altar. He then went to his room in the parish building near the church. After a few minutes had passed, he was heard to fall. Having been placed in a chair by those who ran to help him, he breathed his last peacefully and with little evident pain.

Archbishop John had apparently foreseen his end some months in advance. In May he had told a woman whom he had known for many years, “I will die soon, at the end of June<sup>[b]</sup>... not in San Francisco, but in Seattle.” Again, on the evening before he left for Seattle, he astonished a man for whom he had just performed a Church service with the words, “You will not kiss my hand again.”<sup>2</sup>

Eugene and Gleb were informed of Archbishop John’s death in the evening, a few hours after it occurred. Immediately they remembered how he had wanted them to attend the Liturgy at the St. Tikhon Chapel; and they lamented that, in not coming, they had perhaps missed some last word of instruction for the Brotherhood.

In his Chronicle, Eugene wrote: “Tonight we were informed, just before the beginning of the All-night Vigil, of the sudden death of our beloved Vladika Ioann, in Seattle. The Brotherhood mourns the loss of its Archpastor and spiritual guide. Perhaps this is the end of the first stage of the existence of our Brotherhood. This truly righteous man was a gentle guider and inspirer of our first unsure steps, and now, weak as we are, we will be from now on ‘on our own.’ May our dear Vladika Ioann, now in the Kingdom of Heaven, be our guide still, and may we be faithful to his example of true Orthodox life and to the spiritual testament which he has left us....

“Amid the talk of the ‘testament of Vladika Ioann,’ what has our Brotherhood to offer? This seems to be clearly indicated both by our very nature and by Vladika Ioann’s instructions to us. On his last visit to us especially, he talked of nothing but saints — Romanian, English, French, Russian. Is it not therefore our duty *to remember the saints of God*, following as closely as possible Vladika’s example? I.e., to know their lives, nourish our spiritual lives



by constantly reading them, making them known to others by speaking of them and printing them — and by praying to the saints.”<sup>3</sup>

Some time later, reflecting further on Archbishop John’s testament to the Brotherhood, Eugene wrote in a letter to Gleb: “Perhaps the one thing that we have most to learn from Vladika Ioann is — he lived entirely by *trust in God*. He blessed us and even (if I may be so bold as to say it) rejoiced in our path of service to God. And he was beyond doubt clairvoyant. Can we do anything else but trust in God? God calls us to do much, and we have not much time to do it.”

**O**N the day after Archbishop John’s repose, with heavy hearts the brothers assisted in the second biweekly English Liturgy. Archbishop John had inaugurated these Liturgies just in time; and the brothers knew it was his wish that they be continued for the sake of the American mission.

That evening, Archbishop John’s body arrived in the San Francisco Cathedral, and there began a vigil that was to last for over four days. As Eugene later described it: “Every day after the morning and evening services a solemn Pannikhida was served, and the rest of the day until midnight the Gospel was read uninterruptedly by the diocesan clergy. After midnight there was a touching scene: the servers and readers of the Cathedral read the Psalter the whole night, and so the Archbishop was surrounded in death by the young people whom he loved so much, keeping a last vigil with him.” Eugene was one of those young people.

“From the first day of the vigil,” Eugene wrote, “it was apparent that this was to be no ordinary farewell to the departed, not even for a hierarch. There was a sense of being present at the unfolding of a mystery: the mystery of holiness. Those present were devoutly convinced that they had come to bury a Saint.

“In all these days there was an extraordinary outpouring of love. Everyone suddenly discovered himself an orphan, for to each the Archbishop had been the one person most near, most understanding, most loving. Hardened enemies, and



there were such, came to beg forgiveness in death of a man who had held no ill-will for them while living.”<sup>4</sup> Even his friends accused themselves for not having defended him during his hour of trial. They had seen how unjust treatment at the hands of his fellow church members had inwardly crushed him, and they felt themselves somehow responsible. Standing in the darkness along the walls of the Cathedral, they wept profusely.

The vigil was climaxed by the funeral service itself, which was held in the evening of July 7. Five hierarchs were present: Bishops Nektary, Sava, and Leonty, who had defended Archbishop John during his trial; Archbishop Averky of Jordanville; and Metropolitan Philaret Voznesensky, the newly elected chief hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad. Nearly two thousand people overflowed the large Cathedral, and their number did not diminish for six hours. Eugene and Gleb, wearing white robes and holding liturgical fans, were among the acolytes.

As Eugene wrote: “The fervor of those who attended the long service which the Church of Christ appoints at the repose of her hierarchs has probably been rarely equaled in this century; it could best be compared with the fervor that is sometimes manifested at the services of Passion Week and Pascha, and the feeling was indeed similar.”<sup>5</sup>



The funeral of Archbishop John. On the left side of the coffin is Eugene, in a white acolyte's robe. On the right side, behind the acolyte directly opposite Eugene, is Fr. Spyridon. In front of the coffin, in klobuk and mantle, is Bishop Nektary.

“The officiating bishops,” Gleb recalls, “wept so much that the tears were running down their cheeks. Their faces were all wet and shiny, reflecting the myriad of candles surrounding the coffin. Strangely, there was a feeling of quiet joy, even though the whole congregation, as with one voice, was literally heaving with waves of loud sobs.” Eugene was struck to the core of his being by the sight of Archbishop Leonty — a robust man with a large beard — sobbing uncontrollably like a child. Later this hierarch was heard to say of Archbishop John’s death: “One of the last true apostles has left this earth. *And who is there now to take his place?*”

The funeral service was followed by the kissing of the relics by all present. Eugene, Gleb, and the other acolytes had to exert all their strength, holding each other’s hands to keep people back so that the clergy could come first to bid farewell. Archbishop John’s coffin was then carried three times around the Cathedral by the orphans whom he had rescued and raised in Shanghai. The atmosphere now became especially light. “This,” wrote Eugene, “was the culminating point of these solemn days, and it was a veritable triumphal procession. It was as if one were attending, no longer the funeral of a deceased hierarch, but the uncovering of the relics of a newly proclaimed saint.”<sup>6</sup>



The funeral of Archbishop John, with officiating hierarchs (left to right) Bishop Sava, Archbishop Leonty, Metropolitan Philaret, Archbishop Averky, Bishop Nektary.



The procession with the coffin.

Gleb was the last one to touch Archbishop John's body as the coffin lid was being closed for the last time. As the lid went down, he saw the tear-drenched face of Archbishop Leonty. Their eyes met. The Archbishop shone with a radiant smile and said, "Now we have a Saint!"[\[c\]](#)

The relics of Archbishop John were interred in a small basement chapel under the altar of the Cathedral. His devoted Bishop Nektary earnestly desired to make this the holy man's final resting place, but it was learned that there was a local law against burying people within city limits. The same lawyer who had defended Archbishop John at his trial, James O'Gara, Jr., was hired to make an appeal to the city government. Within four days, in an unprecedented action, the city Board of Supervisors amended the law to permit the burial of prelates in their cathedrals, and the resting place of Archbishop John in the basement chapel became final.

On the night following Archbishop John's funeral, Gleb was blessed by Bishop Nektary to read the Psalter before Archbishop John's coffin in the basement chapel. The door was locked. He read throughout the night, with only a candle illuminating the room. As day began to dawn, in the window he saw the faces of people praying to Archbishop John for his intercession. In pleading voices they spoke to the blessed one just as they had when he was alive. One after another people came up to the window, pouring out their hearts to their fatherly protector, whispering their problems and calamities. How small seemed death in the face of this love! Archbishop John had crucified himself in this life, and this was his victory. Yes, the people would continue to speak to him, and he would answer them as he had always done. Such greatness of soul, such transcendent compassion, could not be killed with the body.

A few months after Archbishop John's repose, Eugene noted that "He has already been glorified in the hearts and prayers of those who knew him, and there is daily pilgrimage to his tomb.... From the time of the burial service not a day has passed but that some of the Archbishop's spiritual children have come to 'speak to Vladika,' to read the Psalter that is constantly open before his grave, and to seek his intercession."<sup>7</sup>

Thus began the posthumous veneration of St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, the wonderworker of the latter times.

## *The Vision of a Skete*

*For our solitary life let us choose places where there are fewer opportunities for comfort and ambition, but more for humility.*

—St. John Climacus<sup>[1](#)</sup>

**R**IGHT AFTER Archbishop John's repose, his temporary successor was Bishop Nektary, who now arranged all the activities of the diocese. He immediately asked the Fr. Herman brothers to take the editorial reins of *Orthodox Tidings*, which they were glad to do, as Abbess Ariadna would continue to be responsible for its typesetting and printing.

Bishop Nektary did a lion's share of preserving the memory of Archbishop John. Archbishop John's Sepulchre under the Cathedral became a holy shrine, where the Psalter was read daily and Divine Liturgies were performed every Saturday and Sunday, not to mention on many weekdays. Fr. Spyridon heard confessions while Fr. Mitrophan served the frequent Liturgies.

Eugene and Gleb strove to keep Archbishop John's memory alive by publishing articles about him in *The Orthodox Word*. It was Eugene who wrote the *prima vita* (first Life) of Blessed John, which would later form the basis of all subsequent biographies.<sup>[2](#)</sup>

Miracles began happening at the Sepulchre, and Eugene and Gleb strove to verify them from the mouths of witnesses with the view of publishing them. One remarkable case concerned a young Russian nurse who had suddenly gone blind in one eye. The doctors told her that her eye was "dead," and that they would have to remove it lest the inflammation spread to the other eye. She prayed



fervently for healing at Archbishop John's Sepulchre and within a few days recovered her sight. The news spread quickly; and when the brothers heard it, they asked the woman to come to their shop and tell them everything in detail.<sup>3</sup> Eugene recorded the miracle, thus making the first entry in the "Record Book of Blessed John's Intercessions" — which in succeeding years became quite voluminous.



The Sepulchre of Archbishop John, 1966. Left to right Archimandrite Mitrophan, Laurence Campbell, V. M. Naumov, Eugene Rose.



The completed Sepulchre, with icons by Pimen Sofronov.

Soon after Archbishop John's repose, Eugene went to sing in the cathedral choir. He had done this a few years earlier, but had ceased at the advice of Archbishop John. Now, due to the choir director's repeated requests (the choir always needed tenors), he felt obliged to help out. After he sang on a few occasions, however, he had a dream in which Archbishop John once more instructed him, "Do not go to the choir to sing," but stay only on the kliros. As Eugene told Gleb, he was very relieved when he had this dream. He did not like being in the choir loft which, being set apart from the other churchgoers, was often a place of frivolous conversation (and an occasional shot of vodka!) during services. By telling Eugene to be in the kliros rather than the choir, it seemed that Archbishop John was preserving and preparing him for monasticism, since all the monastic offices are read on the kliros.

**T**HE question of leaving the city was becoming more immediate in the minds of both Eugene and Gleb, and they often talked about it. The pull of the

“desert,” which they had shared during those walks along the Pacific coast, was felt by them more strongly than ever. They understood that desert monasticism had kept alive the spirit of the ancient Christian catacombs, setting the tone for the faith and practice of the whole Orthodox Church throughout the centuries. For several years now they had been forming their souls with the Lives of desert-dwellers both ancient and modern, and they longed to follow their way of life. Describing this longing some years later, Eugene wrote: “The impulse that had produced the original flight to the Egyptian desert was... the elementary Christian impulse to give up everything for God, to abandon all things and influences of this world in order the better to prepare oneself for the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>4</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Gleb’s first thought was that the Brotherhood would move to the “desert” of Blessed Herman: Spruce Island, Alaska. He knew that such would be the wish of the man who had first instilled in him the idea of the Brotherhood: Archimandrite Gerasim. As early as 1954, when Fr. Gerasim had first proposed the formation of a brotherhood in the name of Blessed Herman, he had spoken at the same time of the need to establish a skete on Spruce Island. In an article for the *Russian-American Orthodox Messenger*, Fr. Gerasim had written:

Soon it will be 120 years since the repose of Elder Herman in Alaska. He was buried on Spruce Island. It is necessary to renovate the chapel there and paint it. There is need of a lampada. It is time to light a lamp with an eternal flame on the grave of our Wonderworker. One wishes that a skete will be established there. Perhaps some monks will be found who will express the desire to come to this desert-dwelling place from their noisy cities. Perhaps there will be found some kind people who will be willing to organize a society or a brotherhood in the name of Fr. Herman of Alaska and to labor for this godly elder by finding means to fix the chapel and erect a house for guests.... It would be good to have a skete here: the place is very suitable; it



is deserted here. It is possible to build little cells in the woods and live one by one. With God's help everything is possible to achieve. In Alaska there must be a skete!... Prepodobny Herman is waiting for monks. He prophesied that they will be [living] on his New Valaam. The time is approaching for this to be achieved. That was his prophecy.<sup>5</sup>

Gleb thought back on how, when he had visited Fr. Gerasim in 1961, the latter had reiterated to him the need of "keeping the monastic lampada burning on Spruce Island." Now that the Fr. Herman Brotherhood was considering its next step, Gleb wondered if the time had come to fulfill Blessed Herman's prophecy and Fr. Gerasim's long-held wish for a small monastic community on New Valaam.

Gleb could see, however, that Eugene's heart was not in this, at least for the foreseeable future. In keeping with Archbishop John's words to him, Eugene was dreaming of a missionary monastery in California. He wanted to spread the Orthodox word of God to his fellow Americans, and on Spruce Island the resources for such work, especially as a means of livelihood, were extremely limited. Going there was out of the question until the Brotherhood had built up a secure base of operation in the California wilderness and had extra people to send forth to other fronts.

**T**HE brothers were given other alternatives besides going off into the wilderness. When Bishop Sava came to the West Coast for the funeral of Archbishop John, he again made an offer. As Eugene wrote in his Chronicle, referring to himself in the third person: "Bishop Sava (of Edmonton) attempted to interest Br. Eugene in a different path: attendance at the Seminary at Jordanville, ordination, a possible bishopric: this would enable one to 'organize' something and really get missionary activity started. He sees our bookshop and even our magazine as much effort expended with negligible results. Br. Gleb foresaw (and mentioned just a few days earlier!) such attempts to swerve us

from our path for the sake of greater efficiency and organization.”<sup>6</sup>

Bishop Nektary, too, presented another path: to join a monastic community he was planning to form at a house-chapel dedicated to the Kursk Icon of the Mother of God, located in the nearby town of Alameda. This alternative was more attractive than the previous one, since it would mean a monastic life under the direction of Bishop Nektary himself, a direct disciple of Optina Elders. There were several reasons, however, why the brothers declined. In the first place, the proposed monastery was in the middle of a city; secondly, in Eugene’s words, this choice “would have placed our mission of the printed word in a decidedly secondary position, which we viewed as dangerous;”<sup>7</sup> and lastly, the brothers felt that having a monastery that was at the same time a bishop’s residence would have necessarily entailed ties with the world. The brothers loved Bishop Nektary deeply and even came to regard him as a father, but as Eugene wrote, “Our soul was just not in the kind of monastery he wanted.”<sup>8</sup>

Not being inclined to follow the ecclesiastical paths that had been laid out for him, Eugene asked the question: “What is our path, and where does it lead? The brothers have never, in so many words, set a definite goal for themselves, but have rather felt their way from day to day, trusting in God’s Providence and the gentle guidance of Vladika Ioann, building upon daily labor and prayer (feeble as these have been) rather than plans and organization. God has so far blessed this path, and it seems clearly to be leading (bold as that is) to the formation of a monastic brotherhood and a *skete*<sup>[a]</sup> that will be a missionary center.

“To sustain such an undertaking there must be generated a *spiritual energy*. Bishop Sava’s plan would require this energy to emanate from a single organizer — such as the late Archbishop Vitaly.<sup>[b]</sup> But all of us are weak, and if the whole enterprise were to depend on *one* of us, it would surely fail. To say this is not to doubt God’s help which is given to those who fervently ask it — it is simply to look at ourselves realistically for what we are.

“But there is another way to generate spiritual energy, and it is this way that

we have, with greater or less success, been following for the past two and a half years. This is the generation of spiritual energy through brotherhood. When ‘two or three are gathered together in My name’—then *anything* becomes possible, if they have true faith and are bound together by true love. The times are late, there are no *startsi* [elders]—now perhaps it is only *brothers working together* who can accomplish something in such a large undertaking as missionary work. We are to be known as Christians, according to the Evangelist John, not by the miracles we work (for few are given this) but by the *love* we bear one another, which is expected of all.

“We *are* on the right path, but it is a difficult path and will become more difficult as more brothers come to us. Vladika Vitaly<sup>[c]</sup> made out of seven brothers over a hundred — but that is not the most difficult part. The most difficult is to make *two* from separate brothers: this we already have....

“Our next task is to find a piece of land and begin the boldest and most dangerous part of our path: the formation of a skete. May God and our heavenly patrons — Fr. Herman and Vladika Ioann — help us!”<sup>9</sup>

**T**OWARD the end of 1966, Eugene was already setting down on paper ideas about the skete. The desert life he envisioned would be rigorous, requiring much spiritual endurance, allowing little catering to personal likes and dislikes. As much as possible, the brothers had to keep the “world,” even worldly ways of thinking, out of the desert.

On August 17/30, Eugene wrote:

The next stage in the growth of our Brotherhood: a skete. To avoid extremes of climate, and to maintain contact with the ocean on which Fr. Herman lived and the coast where Russians settled and first brought Orthodoxy to California and America, land for the skete should be bought on or near the northern California coast, between Fort Ross and Garberville — slightly east from Laytonville being perhaps a likely choice, both for

remoteness and price. It should be within two hundred miles of San Francisco.

Two principles to bear in mind from the first:

1. *Independence, self-sufficiency*: We must “live off the land” as much as possible, also keeping in mind that at some not-distant date it may be necessary to be *entirely* self-sufficient. For this reason we must have *no direct connection* with the outside world with the single exception of a road, and even this must be as remote as possible. This means: no water lines from the outside (we must develop our own spring and reservoir); no sewage line (our own cesspool); no electricity from public source (our own generator); no telephone *ever*. Our only contact with the world need be the road that leads to the nearest store and post office, and to the bookstore in San Francisco — until even that connection is broken off. This is not daydreaming or escape; it is *practical*, and any other way will involve us in great danger.

2. *Simplicity*: We must have a minimum of “conveniences”; so as, again, to develop self-reliance, closeness to God’s nature (creation), and trust in God instead of devices. This means:

a. *Hot water*: Either none at all or, maximum, coils in the fireplace.

b. *Stove*: Woodstove or simply the fireplace; besides this the maximum tolerable will be a small device for heating tea.

c. *Refrigerator*: None, only a cooler in a shady place.

d. *Water faucets*: To be kept to a minimum, such as for irrigation.

e. *Lights*: Electric lights to be kept at necessary minimum, as for printshop. Electricity is to be generated for printshop and probably nothing else.

f. *Heat*: Preferably none besides stove or fireplace. The sick can sleep in front of the fireplace.

g. *Agricultural equipment*: No power machines at all if possible. Probably this won’t be a problem unless we get rather large.

In everything, of course, a *mean* must be kept. If the lack of some convenience makes a definite hardship or overburdens the brothers, it should be reconsidered. But our ideal should be fairly close to Western frontier life (for in a sense we are spiritual “new frontierists,” or just plain “frontiersmen”), with our only concessions to mechanization being the generator for electrical printing equipment (and the printshop and generator should be at a distance from the church and living quarters) and a truck or jeep for transportation and delivery (and it should not be allowed too close to the buildings or inside the stockade).

It is remarkable that Eugene, having never lived in the country before, could have been so specific and accurate in his blueprint for the skete. In future years the brothers were able to follow the above principles almost to the letter. His notes continue:

August 20/September 2, 1966

The practical problems involved in the skete are not insuperable; in fact, with prayer and hard work, two or three brothers can bring it into reality. The real problem will be the *spiritual conduct* and direction of the skete.

There are no longer any *startsi* [elders], and hardly even anyone who could function as an abbot. Hieromonk Vladimir,<sup>[d]</sup> after Vladika Ioann, has understood our Fr. Herman Brotherhood and blessed it. If it were God’s Providence that he could be our abbot, this problem would be solved.

But if we can find no abbot, it will be much more difficult for us.

November 3/16, 1966

Within six months, God willing, we will have the land for our skete. As our ideal approaches closer to reality, the practical problems begin to manifest themselves.

Of these problems one of the most important is the external

functioning of the skete: discipline, a Rule. Once the skete is established, one brother, in consultation with his brothers, will hand out obediences, so that the necessary work will be done promptly; it must be fairly distributed. *Every hour of every day will be accounted for:* the times for services, for getting up, for meals, for printing, for necessary work, for traveling, for sleep, for leisure. Those who do not do their work at the proper time must complete it during their “leisure” time, assuming that their load is fair.

Before the skete is fully established, there will be irregularities. We must trust to each brother’s determination and hard work not to let this deter us.

At the present time, the rule prevailing in our shop is: laxness, idleness, idle talk, distraction. These are inevitable, for this is the world. But while we are at the skete—*not* in the world — even for weekends at first, we must already put provisional rules into effect. For example: reading of spiritual matter during meals, a rule of no talk except necessary for work (except for maybe  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour at end of day), etc. Also: rising with or before the sun.

About these plans Eugene wrote: “God will teach us if all this is fantasy or reality.” He remembered well Archbishop John’s original blessing for the plan of the Brotherhood: “If it is pleasing to God, then it will go forward.”

## *Preparation*

*When I became a Christian I voluntarily crucified my mind, and all the crosses that I bear have been only a source of joy for me. I have lost nothing, and gained everything.*

—Eugene Rose

**I**N January of 1967, the world-renowned iconographer Pimen Sofronov came again to San Francisco at the invitation of the Russian Orthodox Icon Society, having just returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. With Bishop Nektary's blessing he painted frescoes in the Sepulchre of Archbishop John, whom he highly venerated. Later, when he took a trip home to New Jersey, he asked Eugene and Gleb to display his icons in their shop. The brothers not only covered their walls with the large images, but put them in their storefront window as well. Passersby were struck by the otherworldly presence that radiated from the transparent hues of the paintings, and were drawn most of all to an indescribably beautiful icon of the Mother of God, her robes rendered in an ethereal combination of pink and green. Many stopped to ask questions. The store became better known, and the brothers began to receive frequent telephone calls from people wishing to learn about Orthodoxy.

This was the high point of the Brotherhood's activity in San Francisco, a kind of triumph after years of struggle. It was the fulfillment of what Gleb had been dreaming about when he had first come to San Francisco and had seen Archbishop Tikhon's plans for a new Cathedral. Now the Cathedral, with its five shining gold domes, had been finished. "It is truly an inspiration," Eugene wrote,

“to see this magnificent building every morning when I come to work, or to come across a view of it suddenly while walking in the neighborhood.”<sup>1</sup> And now, next to the Cathedral, was an Orthodox missionary presence, open to anyone right off the busy city street. In the entire country, Eugene and Gleb did not know of any other representatives of Orthodox evangelism who were so visible. The store had become not just a store, but a missionary headquarters, where ancient icons and God-inspired writings presented spiritual seekers with the mystical power of original, unadulterated Christianity. As one visitor to the bookstore from those days remembers: “It was obvious to even the most casual visitor (as I was in those days) that this little store had already become a kind of informal center for like-minded men and women, both converts and Russians, who were inspired to strive for a more serious attitude toward Orthodoxy as a way of life.”<sup>2</sup>

“Our shop,” Gleb writes, “was the place people came to when there were no services in the Cathedral. We took full part in the Cathedral’s life. That is, I only on weekends because I was still in Monterey, hoping to get my ‘freedom’ from my mother to move to San Francisco.<sup>[a]</sup> Eugene was tired, for his energy all went into our true *podvig*: to hand-set, hand-print, translate and write *The Orthodox Word*, run the shop with all the increasing book stock, attend the services, and answer the constantly ringing telephone. Besides this, many people came to him who wanted to learn about Orthodoxy, and through him they were converted to the Faith.”

Eugene was taking part in the services at the Cathedral almost every day. “To be present so often at the Divine services is a grace and blessing,” he wrote. “In the Sobor<sup>[b]</sup> I often take Fr. Mitrophan’s place on the kliros, which gives me very good practice in reading and singing (often by myself). But still I have very much to learn about Church services.”<sup>3</sup>

As Eugene went deeper into the Church services, he yearned to immerse himself in the complete daily cycle of the Church’s prayer, and this only increased his longing for a wilderness skete. “When I would come Friday night



for the weekend,” Gleb recalls, “Eugene would often pull out California maps and dream aloud of getting a piece of land — his desert.... I knew the time was getting ripe.”

**E**UGENE’S writings during this period reflect the seriousness with which he was pondering the next stage of the Brotherhood. One of his memos concerns how the Brotherhood should conduct itself in San Francisco in preparation for its move:

The needs of the Fr. Herman Brotherhood if Br. Gleb is granted freedom:

1. *System*

- a. Regular times for rising, eating, working, praying.
- b. Division between the two workshops to allow maximum concentration and efficiency.

2. *Independence*

The brothers must not allow togetherness to lead to softness. Work periods must be as far as possible silent; solitary work (chiefly writing) must be allowed every day.

3. *Determination*

The brothers must do everything possible to bring their goal — a *monastic life of work apart from the world*—into reality. They must not allow themselves to be distracted by worldly influences. They must refuse all but absolutely unavoidable invitations to houses, and must not be seen at worldly entertainments. The shop must not be a place where people come to engage in pleasant conversations.

Eugene was concerned about the lack of seriousness in some of the helpers in the shop, seeing in this a potential for problems in the future, when they moved to their skete. In a letter he sent to Gleb in Monterey, he wrote:

Last night... Br. L—— gave me a *pouchenie* [teaching]: I do not talk enough, for instance to people like our new Br. E——. I received this *pouchenie* in silence, as usual, but in all honesty I think he is wrong. If anything I talk too much.

When I say this I do not think I am trying to justify myself; forgive me if I am wrong. I mentioned to you this weekend that I thought our skete was no longer a dream, but real. It is already so real to me that I can see it *failing* after we have started — for many reasons, but to begin with for *one reason*: in our shop there is much talking and little action, and this kind of talk could *destroy* us. For you and me I am not afraid. We know what we want and when we are free we will be able to work 100% for it....

Perhaps my main function in the Brotherhood will be to introduce seriousness by pointing to the work that must be done. So far our Brotherhood has been a *picnic*, with much laughing, but what happens when the sorrow and tribulation and *real work* begins? Are we ready for it? What can we do to prepare ourselves for it?

I can try to give work quotas; but I don't think any *ustav* [rule] would do much good now. We need a *single-minded seriousness* about the work before us; otherwise any little thing can deflect us from our path. What would happen, for example, if the four of us are in our skete, and R—— drives up? If we are no stronger than we are now, it would split us. Will we be strong enough to do the work, keep up the services, get up in the morning, refrain from unnecessary talk, keep all the canons, and yet keep harmony?

Do you know what we are embarking on? It's *beyond us*! And yet with a serious *ustav* and by God's grace, we can do it. Since there is no one else, you and I must do the leading; if we are strong enough, it can cover up at least some of the weakness of our brothers.

Brother, life is passing, and we shall die. Let us be even *more* resolved to bring into reality what we dream about.

You can tell me if what I see is true, or if I am simply filled with a sense of self-importance....

Pray for me, your determined but sinful brother,

Eugene<sup>4</sup>

Gleb's letters to Eugene during this time also contained thoughts on the struggles ahead:

God has not yet sent us real helpers, and we don't know if He ever will. We must first of all be *real*, and get fulfillment in what we do, and not build castles — sketes and monasteries — in the air....

Just before receiving your remarkable letter... I opened the book *Letters of Fr. Macarius of Optina*,<sup>[c]</sup> and it said to this effect: Do not hurry to put on monks' clothing until it is given to you, but rather make yourself indeed a real monk of *humility*, etc., right now not having any monastic garb. He even concludes the letter by saying, Stay where you are until God calls.

Once Gleb expressed his fear that Eugene, being an intellectual and a philosopher, might not entirely fit in rugged desert surroundings, with all the physical demands this places on one. Eugene, however, wrote back to him:

"Do not worry about my philosophical nature. When I became Christian I voluntarily crucified my mind, and all the crosses that I bear have been only a source of joy for me. I have lost nothing, and gained everything."

**T**OWARD the middle of 1967, a new ruling bishop was appointed to the Diocese of San Francisco and Western America, Archbishop Anthony Medvedev. Not to be confused with the Archbishop Anthony mentioned earlier, this one had been in Australia at the time of Archbishop John's trial and thus had had no part in that affair. He was, however, careful not to offend his brother

hierarchs who were still ill-disposed toward Archbishop John.

Archbishop Anthony's mission was to bring peace between the factions that had been created over the building of the Cathedral and the trial of Archbishop John and the parish council. To some degree, peace had already been established in San Francisco when a number of Archbishop John's enemies had begged forgiveness at his coffin. Nevertheless, tensions remained strong in many quarters. The diocese was then divided into two diocesan administrations — the Western American and the Southern Californian — and there were two Russian cadet groups and two scout groups in the same diocese.<sup>5</sup> In order to bring the faction that had opposed Archbishop John into unity with the rest of the church community, Archbishop Anthony felt obliged to check the influence of Archbishop John's venerated. He disbanded Archbishop John's "Brotherhood of Laymen"; he allowed the Divine Liturgy to be served in his Sepulchre only once a year, on the day of Archbishop John's repose; and he said the Psalter could no longer be read in the Sepulchre while services were being conducted upstairs, although it was only at such times that the Sepulchre was allowed to be open. Later, he discontinued Archbishop John's *Orthodox Tidings* and replaced it with his own periodical, *Tropinka (The Little Path)*.<sup>6</sup>

At this juncture Fr. Spyridon left his important position in San Francisco and became the second priest in the nearby town of Palo Alto, where he eventually served as an assistant to a young priest. Bishop Nektary was in no position to object to the changes being effected in San Francisco. He was now a vicar under the new Archbishop, and was given authority over only one city in the Western American Diocese: Seattle, Washington.

Archbishop Anthony's actions had nothing to do with any personal resentments against Archbishop John. He regarded Archbishop John very highly and said many good things about him. Nevertheless, as Eugene was later to write, "The people in the Archbishop John Society tell us that... they feel Vladika Anthony is *not* devoted to the memory of Vladika John and they feel he is a foreigner.... Vladika Anthony does not encourage veneration of Vladika

John because he still has many enemies and thus Vladika Anthony regards his memory as a *divisive* factor in his diocese.”<sup>7</sup> Little did anyone know that this same Archbishop Anthony would, less than thirty years later, be one of the main people responsible for Archbishop John’s canonization in San Francisco.

On coming to his new post, Archbishop Anthony was well-disposed toward Eugene and Gleb, seeing in them an asset for the diocese. At one point he made the brothers a generous offer. He told Gleb they could turn the old Cathedral into an official diocesan printshop and be in charge of it. “It will be on a big scale,” he said. Gleb repeated the offer to his brother, but Eugene said he would not be able to function well under such an arrangement.

The changes that had occurred in the San Francisco diocese made the brothers feel even more inclined to make a break with the world. They felt that now was the time — if the Brotherhood was to stay on the path on which Archbishop John had placed it — for them to embark upon a new chapter, to depart, in Eugene’s words, to “the purity of nature’s bosom — the fragrant desert.”

## *Land from Archbishop John*

*I long for scenes where man has never trod—  
For scenes where woman never smiled or wept—  
There to abide with my Creator, God,  
And sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept,  
Full of high thoughts, unborn. So let me lie,—  
The grass below; above, the vaulted sky.*

—John Clare (1864)<sup>1</sup>

**E**UGENE now began to repeat to Gleb: “Let’s get out of here. Let us live for real.” He contacted real estate agents. According to their original plan, the brothers began to look at coastal property north of San Francisco.

On one outing they went hundreds of miles north, to a place near the coastal town of Garberville, where a large and beautiful log house was nestled between rolling hills. It was cold and foggy that day, which made it difficult for the brothers to see the surrounding countryside. When they came to the cabin, they were met by an attractive middle-aged lady. She invited them inside and proceeded to show them the house, which she wanted to sell soon and was offering for a reasonable price. Everything was clean, decorated with taste and with careful attention to color combinations. One could smell the pleasant aroma of seasoned redwood and of espresso brewing on the crackling stove. Classical music was being played softly in the background. The hostess was good-natured and obviously cultured. She told the brothers how much she loved this elegant and comfortable home. When they had finished their tour and warmed

themselves with coffee, they stepped outside again into the fog.

“Wasn’t that nice?” Gleb exclaimed. “Now, that’s high society!”

“How terrible!” Eugene remarked, shaking his head.

“What do you mean?” asked Gleb.

“It’s worldly,” Eugene said. “That’s just what we want to get away from. People who buy places like that want that kind of life — beautiful, ‘chic.’ But that’s not what we’re after.”

The brothers went again to Garberville in the spring to look at another piece of land. This time they had to walk several miles along dirt roads from where the bus dropped them off. When they found the land, with the torrent of a seasonal spring rushing through a sloping meadow, they were disappointed to see a private house nearby, on the neighboring property.

“We were still exhausted from the Paschal services,” Gleb recalls, “and from the sleepless night on the bus. I took a walk while Eugene stretched out on the green grass and fell into a deep sleep. I watched him sleeping in the sunshine amidst the flowers and the rushing of the spring torrents. This picture remained fresh in my mind — a God-touched man as if dead amidst the living, waking, rapidly growing nature; dead to the world while alive.

“When he woke up, his face was gray and worn-out. I sensed then that he was not to live long. That was why, time and again, he pushed me to work, to ‘produce’: the waking work! Work that would wake people up to the reality of his newly discovered Truth which exists, lives, grows, and is tangible, accessible....

“That trip was followed by another in Laurence’s car somewhere in the vicinity of Fort Ross, and then another, further inland. We actually had no money, so the most we could do was just shop around. We could barely make the eighty-five dollar per month rent for the shop, taking into consideration all the other expenses.

“Then Eugene got a notice about a large piece of land for sale a bit further up the state, as he termed it, a few miles from the hamlet of Platina (population

sixty-four). We made plans to go see it. The following Sunday was the first anniversary of Archbishop John's repose. We received Holy Communion in the Sepulchre that day and prayed hard about the trip.

"The next day, July 3, 1967, Laurence drove us northward in his car. It turned out to be very far — as far as Red Bluff, which we reached that Monday afternoon. From there the real estate man took the three of us westward in his covered jeep. When the summer sun was at its height, along the scorched hills galloped several cowboys with their herd of cattle, which they were about to bring across the road. We stopped and waited as the friendly men waved their hats. Eugene smiled with indescribable happiness. How fitting it was, he thought, to bring Orthodoxy into the midst of these simple people, into the land of the cowboys!

"After about an hour's drive from Red Bluff, the man drove us high up some dirt road and parked on the road. We walked up a small driveway and found ourselves in a clearing of huge, beautiful oak trees on the north side of a hill. There was an unfinished hunting house: all it had was a tin roof; there were no walls and no floor. Further east there was a brand-new, nicely built outhouse with a crescent moon vent in the traditional style. That was all there was. The place had an air of dignity and grandeur. It was warm and the day was well spent. The man took us up the slope, when all of a sudden we were on the top of a beautiful hill. There was a rock plateau facing south and a stunning view, so breathtaking and peaceful that we became silent.

"‘I like this.’ Eugene said softly. Laurence, who tended to make critical comments, was somehow melting and kept his comments to himself. I went up to the real estate man, who was pointing out a lookout knoll and other places with his outstretched hand, and I asked, ‘How much will the monthly payments be, if we meet the down payment?’ (The price was fourteen thousand dollars for eighty acres, with this mountaintop in the middle of the property. This was actually only one-half of what was for sale: since we said we had no money he had divided it in half. The other, western half was way down below and had a



creek, year-round.) ‘One hundred dollars is the monthly installment!’ he answered.

“I looked at Eugene with deep regret, knowing that we could not get such money each month. As I said, we could barely get the eighty-five dollars for the store rent, besides the rent for Eugene’s house which he somehow met. Also, I had my house payments to meet in Monterey. My heart was instantly filled to the brim with sadness, for this land was our dream place.

“Eugene now had a strange expression on his face. It had become somehow dark, as though he was no longer here and had entered into the depths of his soul. I could feel, somehow I understood, that he had made his decision. This was where he wanted to die! ‘O God,’ I called out mentally for the sake of my brother, ‘let us live here!’

“The down payment was not too much. This was because the owner wanted to sell it quickly, and there was no water on the property. And it certainly was a wilderness, all around this land. To the west it bordered the National Forest. To the south, for forty miles there was not a town, house or ranch — all government land, known for bears and other wildlife. To the north and east was land owned by the rancher W. D. Snow, who left it without touching it. The smell was rich, full of pine, and a fresh breeze came from the west, where the same dirt road ran six miles down to a dead-end canyon — the Beegum Gorge. It was just beautiful land.

“I said to Eugene, ‘But what good is it if there’s no water?’ He retorted, ‘That’s the best part about it!’



View of Beegum Gorge and the Yolla Bolly Mountains.

“Then the man took us to the west, across the road and deep into a ravine. At first he showed us a spring where there had already been made a wooden box, in which water collected and then spilled out. We drank the cool, clear water. Then we climbed a ridge and went down another gorge, where we saw, tight between hills, an abandoned cabin with a huge stove. We wondered how they ever got it all in. By mules, was the answer.

“Then he took us back to the jeep. We went across the creek bottom and up the opposite hill, and saw another piece of property, also nice, but nothing like that oak grove.... In the whole area I saw a poetic image — and I scolded myself for being such a romantic.

“In Red Bluff we bade farewell to our Mr. Stroup, or whatever his name was, got into Laurence’s car, and went home across the hot, flat, wide Sacramento River Valley. I loved its breadth also. It had the feeling of the wide Russian steppes of blindingly white heat: just burnt grass, with a strong wind moving across in wavelike patterns, and the golden-pink sunset on our right. It

was time for Vespers and we began to sing the peaceful ‘Bless the Lord, O my soul’ as the sun was setting and the wide horizon was gradually changing its colors to darker hues. I sat behind and saw how Eugene’s eyes were at first wet and then slowly tears began to stream down his cheeks. We kept on singing the whole while, for we had the necessary service books, and were finished by the time it got dark. Laurence got us to the shop and went home exhausted, stomping away with ‘I’m sick and tired of giving you these futile rides. I wish you’d make up your minds about the land. Now, there’s nothing wrong with that one.’ We remained at the shop door, but instead of going in we simultaneously in silence walked down to the Sepulchre of Archbishop John and, since we had the keys, fell on his coffin and prayed in silence and utter exhaustion. There was silence in the marble crypt; only the faint sound of some crackling would from time to time break the silence.

“We both prayed not for the land, for it was obvious that that was just right for us, but for enlightenment as to what was God’s will. In silence we blessed each other. He went home, and I went to the balcony of the store where I spent my weekend nights.

“As I entered, I stopped by the door. Above the door was our icon of Christ. Without moving, just leaning on the locked glass door, I begged God to bless me. I felt God was in the store. I knew He was, because so many wonderful things happened there. But it was time to go, time to ‘progress in the Spirit,’ so to speak, yet I knew I would miss this holy spot. Behind me was the world with zooming cars, street lights, and Saturday-night people walking and loudly talking. I clearly heard them because the window above the door was open for ventilation. This sound did not bother me. Actually, nothing indeed bothered me. Deep down I was happy. I knew that there was a change in the air. I knew with my whole heart that this shop was a mystical hill which we had ascended, and now we were before a new one: the hill near Platina was before me that whole night, or whatever was left of it. It was lit with some golden hue, its foliage trembling; and I heard my favorite sound — the sound of a rushing mighty wind.

Where was I?

“That night Eugene wrote about the land in his Chronicle: ‘It has everything for inspiration — forest, isolation (two miles from anyone), views of mountains, snow in winter — but no water; perhaps the latter is the ‘proof’ that we should buy, since we do not want to live by the wisdom of this world.’<sup>2</sup>

“Early in the morning, Liturgy was served in the Cathedral. Everyone received Holy Communion, including Eugene and myself. After Liturgy Bishop Nektary for some reason went home to prepare breakfast for us, saying that he would bring it into the shop where we all would eat as in a monastery with readings [from spiritual books].

“I went down to the Sepulchre. Kneeling before the coffin and placing my head on Archbishop John’s mitre, I froze with a prayer: ‘Lord, show us the way.’ Then, without making the slightest movement, I clearly heard the loud voice of Fr. Mitrophan (who was hard of hearing) talking to Eugene as he descended the stairs and entered the Sepulchre: ‘Genya!<sup>[a]</sup> At our last parish council meeting it was decided, since you come to all the services every day anyway, to offer you the position of a Psalmist [*Psalomshchik*]<sup>[b]</sup> with the monthly pay of one hundred dollars! Do you accept this? You need money, so we shall give it to you no matter what you say.... You will have one day free — the whole day Friday.’

“I could not believe my ears! I stood up and saw two pairs of eyes looking at me. Fr. Mitrophan repeated to me word for word what he had just said, thinking that I had not heard, and then went about his business completing the divesting, etc. People surrounded him.

“‘What do you think it all means?’ Br. Eugene asked me, half whispering in a serious tone. ‘Do you think it means God wants us to have the land?’

“‘Stupe, absolute stupe! Of course! See how close is God!’ I answered in absolute happiness, about to leave. He stopped me, squeezing my arm so hard that it hurt, then looked deep into my eyes and said, ‘That means Archbishop John gives us the desert!’ He pulled me down to the coffin to thank our blessed protector, then quickly kissed Archbishop John’s mantle, mitre and staff. ‘But

keep it silent.' I totally agreed!

“‘I want to see it again,’ he said. ‘We could ask Nicholas Marr, who is now at St. Tikhon’s Home, to drive us in his car. What do you say?’

“‘When? Tomorrow?’ I asked.

“We did it. We asked Nicholas, who took us early the next morning and promised to tell no one. We reached Platina in no time, climbed up the hill and fervently prayed. The Akathist to the Theotokos was sung on top of the mountain, a prayer to Archbishop John was said, and we sprinkled all around with holy water. We saw it in the morning; it was in a different light. We scouted out where and what we should build, etc., and returned home by dark....

“Within a month the land was ours.”

## *Breaking Ground*

*Break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you.*

—Hosea 10:12

**A**T first Eugene and Gleb told no one save three of the Brotherhood's helpers about the purchase of the land in Platina. Eugene was particularly concerned that, if many people found out about this "secret" too soon, he and Gleb would encounter conflict from others who would want to take part in their wilderness venture but would not share their vision. In a letter to Gleb dated August 7, 1967, he expressed this concern:

I hate to burden you with my own fears and worries.... Sooner or later people are going to find out about our secret (and that is all right)—but what happens if they find out about it before we are ready for them? Frankly, I trust no one but you, and I would much have preferred if *no one* had known, and you and I could have gone and prepared everything by ourselves. But we have allowed ourselves to depend on others, and so already three others know....

One thing is certain: no matter how many people know, and feel themselves to be brothers, and all the rest—we must make all the decisions. This will not be pride or self-will. The whole thing will flop if there is no *leader*, and since we have none, *you and I* together must supply the leadership. The brotherhood (with other brothers) must develop later, on the foundation which *you and I* must build. If we go there [to Platina] thinking

that everyone who joins us is immediately a brother and we should make all decisions together — then we fall flat on our faces, and the whole thing falls apart because everyone will have his own selfish desires.

You and I together, with God's help, will have the sense to choose what is best for the brotherhood, and not follow merely selfish desires. But no one else has entered into our brotherhood to this extent. No one who has come to us has the faintest idea what we are after and what we will have....

We can listen to advice and suggestions from others, but *you and I* must make the decisions. *You and I* must provide the leadership and the strength — this is what God has been preparing us for during these years....

Forgive me for the excited tone — but I think you will understand the importance of it.

Pray for me.—Your brother in Christ,

Eugene

**F**OR Gleb, the main obstacle hindering the flight to the desert had been his family responsibilities. He had been taking care of his mother and sick sister for so many years, and still he was not free to go. His mother's ultimatum still stood firm: he could go off to the "desert," but only after he had settled her in a house of her own, with a view of the ocean, and had found a tall, well-to-do husband for his sister.

Gleb bought the house after years of saving his earnings, but getting the husband was not such a straightforward matter. It was through a miracle of Archbishop John that the answer came. In December of 1966 Gleb went to the Sepulchre and read the Psalter for a long time, until everyone had gone. "I looked around," he recalls, "and saw that no one would be coming. I was all alone with the blessed one! And then something deeply touched my heart and I began to weep. I fell on his mantle and covered his dear coffin. And then suddenly I realized that since he is alive with the Lord and from there he hears us

— let him help me in my various needs. And I earnestly began to pray to him for my sister, who wanted very much to get married, but because she had been sick for many years could not find a man close to her heart. Soon the service upstairs ended and they came down to close the Sepulchre, and I left. That was Sunday night. The next day in the evening my sister told me that she had met a young man and felt that they liked each other. Their wedding soon followed, then a child, and now already for several years they have lived happily together. But the remarkable part of it is that their meeting took place the very hour when I prayed to Blessed John about it.”

**I**N 1967 Gleb at last gained his “freedom,” thanks to a kind old Russian gentleman, Mr. Sergei Hodson. “Mr. Hodson’s mother Lydia died,” he recalls, “during whose last days my mother had been of great help. He heard me say that I planned to leave my job at the school and devote my time to my magazine in San Francisco. He said that he’d like to rent a room in my house — the house which, through the intercession of the Theotokos, I had bought for my mother two years earlier. Mother was all for the idea. Knowing full well that my heart was ‘on Geary Boulevard, on the balcony,’<sup>[a]</sup> as she’d joke, she agreed that I leave school. Since Mother’s financial situation would be taken care of by the gentleman’s rent, this was an unexpected joy indeed. Within a year he also died and left us some money, which also helped. I went to the bank and rewrote my portion over to my mother and sister — it was a gift to them for my freedom. They took over the house with all its mortgage. And I was about to be free.”

On the Feast of the Dormition (August 15/28), 1967, Gleb moved into the house that Eugene had rented on Clement Street in San Francisco. To this house they moved their hand-typesetting operation, since it was so distracting to typeset in the store. They would take turns, one brother managing the shop while the other stayed home typesetting. The two of them did the daily cycle of Church services in the house. From this time until his death almost exactly fifteen years later, Eugene followed the liturgical cycle nearly without interruption.



“OUR whole attention was on moving to the land in Platina,” Gleb recalls. “We visited it that winter, on February 12, 1968. There was a huge snowfall, and we had to walk up in snow up to our waists. We barely made it by nightfall, all wet. We walked three hours, but it was wonderful — silent, pure, and cut off.

“We decided to start building in the spring. Eugene learned how to drive and got a license. Philip Potowka [\[b\]](#) from Michigan moved into our house in San Francisco. We bought a truck and began planning to build in earnest, only to discover that Philip was not really into that. Neither was Laurence. Jon visited Platina once in the very beginning, but it was not his cup of tea.

“It certainly was ours. We loved it! God began to show us in mystical ways the meaning of the whole enterprise. And Archbishop John, as before, helped us in moments of doubt, weakness, and hesitancy.

“It was decided that at first I would go and stay there for a week alone, going by bus somehow; and then the following Sunday Eugene would drive me back to the bus stop and spend a week alone himself, while I would replace him as Psalmist in the Cathedral. Eugene was a bit apprehensive about letting me go, but being a man of nature he of course loved the idea.

“On my nameday, May 2/15, having received Holy Communion I took a bus to Red Bluff. From there I began to walk, since there was no bus to Platina. I started in the morning. It was hot. I walked several miles, then someone gave me a ride for just a few miles and I continued marching, carrying a suitcase. An older man, a mover, picked me up and gave me a ride all the way up to our desert home. I entertained him for a while and then I remained all alone — and the evening was nigh. I was, I must admit, not just a little bit scared, but very much so, especially when the evening westerly winds began to blow and howl on our mountain, making weird screeching noises in the branches of the dead trees. An owl hooted, and mice ran all over the place, since there were no walls in our house, just a frame building with a good tin roof and a porch.... I began to pray.

“The first feeling of the Platina desert was of something very real, and truly it was fragrant. The air was full of the strange aroma of sweet flowers and earth.

“I began to put siding outside on the west wall. The first days were spent scouting around, which I did with caution, knowing that if anything happened to me I was all alone and no one would know. However, I did walk down to the store several times, expecting a letter from Eugene.

“Then came a memorable day which I like to think was the beginning of our life in Platina. It was a gloomy, overcast day, that of St. Job of Pochaev.<sup>[c]</sup> I was especially gloomy, thinking of how much hard work we still had to do in order to move, and, once we did, how would we live? It was so impractical — moving all those presses here, etc. I also had my perpetual fears of inadequacy. I wondered whether it was all meant to be, although the whole atmosphere was such an alluring one in which to spend the rest of one’s life.

“I spent most of the day in deep fear and tears, begging God to give my stupid head some wisdom. A mere little crack of the trees, or even the chirp of birds, would be magnified into huge proportions and startle me. At night, the mice were merciless and my fearful dreams no better. I would greet the day like new life in the morning, and then run around the whole place, blessing it all over, thanking God that I was in the wilds. The winds at night were ferocious; some trees even fell to the ground with horrifying thunder.



The first cross erected on the Platina skete property. Photograph taken in the winter of 1969–70.

“At about noon I was worn out and begged God to let the day slip by as quickly as possible so I could sleep, and soon Eugene would come and rescue me! Rescue me from what? Myself? But then what was the very purpose of planning to spend the rest of our lives here? Was this not a proof that it was all only a fantasy, an unrealistic escapade doomed to failure? I was ashamed of my faintheartedness and tried to forget myself in physical work. But thoughts, like annoying flies, would whirl around me in clouds, biting at my fearful heart. Nothing seemed right, no prayer helped, no walking or running about. It was not the fact that I was alone: I never had trouble with being alone, although I never was a loner. I was experiencing the agony of the desert. The only consolation I had was the visits, quite frequent, of the wild deer which would come and watch

me with great curiosity.

“That afternoon it began to get dark and dreary; heavy gray clouds covered the sky, and mist began to creep between the trees, making the place look ominous. I turned to the Cross in my prayers, when all of a sudden I was overtaken by a shocking idea, that we did not have a cross anywhere. And I began to nail together a huge one, to be placed before our entrance.... It turned out to be larger than I had expected, and I could hardly lift it. As I barely dragged it, all exhausted, falling under its weight, rain began to fall in the total silence of the woods. All alone I was carrying my cross, which I had made myself and had put upon myself, thinking, Of what value is such heavy labor, who needs it?

“Since we had no shovel there, I had only been able to dig a very shallow hole to put the cross in. When I had dug it, I had not realized how huge the cross would be. Now I realized it as I stood with the cross before that tiny hole. What to do? In hope of unburdening myself of the weight of the cross, I pulled all my strength together, lifted the cross and placed it in the hole, thinking that at least I would see how much deeper I must dig. I had been singing the prayer to the Cross all the time I had been carrying it. As I placed it, I suddenly felt that it stood by itself. In shock I stepped away — and it stood straight, barely six inches in the hole! I was amazed and realized at once that it was a miracle, a sign to me of some sort; as if the cross was suspended in the air, or held by invisible angels. I walked away, made three prostrations, kissed the cross, put at its feet whatever rocks I could find, and walked away in awe, not knowing how to react. But that was a miracle!

“Then it began to rain, and it rained throughout the whole night, with winds howling and echoing all over the forest.

“That night I saw a dream. I saw a crowd of people walking, sort of marching in rows of ten or so. I was walking right next to Archbishop John. On the other side of me there were my friends and others, and they asked me to intercede for them to Archbishop John. I said I would. I bent down to Blessed

John in hope of talking to him on behalf of the others. I wanted to get his blessing, which he gave me, and I kissed his hand. Then he grabbed me by the hand, looked straight into my eyes, and kissed my hand in return. Amazed and embarrassed, I felt that what he had done was to thank me for erecting a cross over this wilderness. I had made the Exaltation of the Holy Cross over this once demon-filled pagan area, that Christ would dwell in it and enlighten this nation!

“When I looked in the calendar, I realized what day it was: the commemoration of the Sign of the Precious Cross over Jerusalem in A.D. 351, and also the day of St. Nilus of Sora, desert-dweller of the Russian North! It all seemed to be very significant. The day was sunny and the sky bright blue. I ran to see if my cross lay on the ground, tossed there by the ferocious winds of the previous night. But to my surprise it stood straight up, firmly! I left it at that, hoping it would stay like that until Br. Eugene would come and see for himself, for he was to come that day.

“On the calm, warm morning of Sunday, another wilderness encounter occurred. I was in a walking mood after prayer and food. My heart was full of hope and glory, that somehow everything would be all right and God would bless our venture. I walked to what is now called ‘Whispering Pines’ and glorified God with hymns and spiritual songs.<sup>[d]</sup> As I returned I saw a big rock on the road, which I picked up and carried on my shoulder in order to put it at the base of the cross. I walked quietly, thinking of St. Nilus of Sora and how he preferred to be in the total wilderness.

“All of a sudden I heard, close to my right, a rustle of the leaves. I thought it was a startled deer about to rush away. But there was no more movement, and I, not even looking in that direction, said aloud: ‘Well, why don’t you run, if you are so afraid of me?’ I looked up at the slope — and froze to the ground! Before me, only about six feet away, stood a full-grown mountain lion gazing right at me! I had to believe my eyes, for our eyes met and both of us did not dare move. He was the handsomest creature I ever saw, a hundred times better than in all pictures or in the zoos! He was the most perfect embodiment of the king of the

wilderness, the personification of the desert in which I had come to dwell! His fur was exactly that beautiful earth color with a tinge of violet; his eyes, I could clearly see, were blue. He stood higher than me on the hillock, and it would take him only a second to jump on me. He did not move; neither did I. I did not know what to do. I thought that I would hurl at him that rock which I carried on my shoulder should he jump at me, but I did not mind being ripped to pieces by this perfect being, who was in charge here — I being an intruder. I began to pray to God to bless him, to let me quietly go. I made one step forward, continuing to gaze straight into his calm eyes. It was obvious that he was curious to see me. Perhaps he had never seen a man in his life, a man who was made to rule over him and who became weak and fearful at any minute noise in the nature he was made to command. I whispered to him kindly: ‘Let me go! I’m afraid of you! I mean no harm! But I do want to live here with you rather than with the men who hurt me.’ I don’t know why I said this, begging him to accept me, as it were. I made another step forward while slowly turning my back towards the direction I had to go. He was quiet; not a single movement did he make, yet he followed me with his eyes. I made further steps backwards, not taking my eyes away from him, then gradually increased my pace until I began to run. He remained motionless, watching me in total silence. I ran home and in fear jumped into my sleeping bag and prayed. When I calmed down I said prayers of thanksgiving; but I shall never forget the beauty of that creature of God, from which came a sense of nobility, power, calm, and the grandeur of God’s works, truly marvelous! I did indeed sense the closeness of God in that meeting, perhaps because I knew I was possibly facing death. God gave me a little experience of the real desert!

“The same day, in the evening, both Eugene and Philip arrived and I went to San Francisco. When Eugene returned a week later, he told me of his experiences. We went west from our shop towards the beach in the Sea Cliff part of town, where there were expensive mansions. We would often go there to escape the crowd of the Sobor. It was late and a beautiful sunset began to hover

in the sky. I did not even have a chance to tell him of my ‘exaltation of the Cross,’ when he interrupted me and told me the following:

“When they had come to Platina, Philip had at once shown that he was not interested in the desert. He was lazy; he walked to town for a beer once a day, which of course would tire him out for the rest of the day. Eugene was often left to work alone. He put up boards to enclose the cabin, and began to prepare an area for the printshop.

“One afternoon, being exhausted from work, Eugene went inside to rest in his folding chair, while the door to the porch remained open. He either dozed off or was just resting when he saw that Archbishop John appeared on the porch, dressed in a black monastic robe. Not knowing whether this was an apparition or a dream, he, without jumping up, thought that he should take the opportunity while it was there, knowing full well that Archbishop John had died almost two years before. At that time he was very despondent, full of fears similar to mine, wondering how in the world we would ever accomplish all the moving and survive in this wilderness. He quickly asked Archbishop John several questions: 1) ‘Will you be with us?’ To this the blessed one nodded. 2) ‘Will Gleb be with me?’ Also an affirmative answer followed by a nod. 3) ‘Will we go into the wilderness to live?’ Again an affirmative answer. 4) ‘Will anyone join us (of serious help?)’ There was a negative shaking of his head to this one. And finally, 5) ‘Will we be in Platina for good?’ Again a negative sign, and he was gone! A feeling of reaffirmation followed, from which Eugene concluded that it was from God.”

Leaning on a railing before the ocean and the setting sun, Gleb now asked Eugene what his conclusion was about this incident.

“That it will be just as difficult in Platina as it has been in San Francisco,” Eugene said.

**E**UGENE and Philip returned to Platina in the second week of July and stayed for a week. The weather was unusually hot then, rising to 105–110

degrees during the first three days of their stay. Like Gleb, Eugene and Philip were kept awake at night by mice foraging for food. “Some of the creatures here are fantastic,” Eugene wrote to Gleb, “—flying ants  $\frac{5}{8}$  of an inch long! Last night Philip was attacked by some kind of flying beetle:  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches long (3” if you include the antennae) and almost as wide, and almost an inch thick, in the shape of an Egyptian scarab.”<sup>1</sup>

When the heat abated somewhat, Eugene chopped down some trees for the first time, and he and Philip set to work on the foundation of the printshop. “Last night,” Eugene wrote to the brothers in San Francisco, “I made my first concrete pier and laid down the first pier for our printing shop — over 200 lbs. in one pier. I hope it will hold up the building. Eleven to go. The building area is now cleared and staked out and it begins to look serious.”<sup>2</sup>

At the end of August Eugene went again to the land in Platina and stayed for two weeks, this time by himself. (“Br. Philip,” he noted in his Chronicle, “has lost interest in working.”)<sup>3</sup> Arriving at dusk, he found that some items had been stolen from the cabin: two sleeping bags with mattresses, and a gasoline stove and lantern. In a letter to the brothers, he commented on the theft with remarkable equanimity: “Whoever took them left everything very neat behind him. The two kerosene lamps work nicely, and I’ll try Mrs. Kontzevitch’s sun chair for sleeping tonight, so I won’t suffer too much from the loss.”<sup>4</sup>

That same evening he went to inspect the pier blocks he had made and placed in the ground during his previous visit. “As I approached them in the twilight, a creature slid away from the very center of the building area — a good sized rattlesnake. I didn’t chase him into the darkness, but ‘meditated’ for a while on the lesson: the Christian must watch every step, for he knows not what enemy hides in his path — demons, passions, and the more obvious ones. The Serbians would probably regard that as a good sign — a snake right on the spot of our first ‘church’ (though mostly printshop). But again I spoiled it. I heard the creature slithering in the darkness toward the truck and our cabin, and I had horrible visions of surprise attacks, so I got my flashlight and a shovel and found



him. He stopped and listened — he was a beauty. Big — over three feet long and several inches wide, with eight or ten segments in the rattle.... With a somewhat shaky hand I plunged the shovel into his neck — a mortal blow.... I was a little sorry to do it, but it seemed a matter of self-defense.”<sup>5</sup>

The next day, a Sunday, Eugene wrote: “Today I rested, but even so I haven’t completely put off big-city tenseness and entered into the spirit of this place.... Now it is dark, with the half-moon rising from the trees on the hill. The wind is quite vigorous and isolates one completely from the outside world.”<sup>6</sup>

On Monday Eugene finished a window and made forms for the remaining pier blocks, and on Tuesday he drove to Red Bluff to pick up more sand and cement. “I returned from town strangely depressed,” he recorded, “and trying to persuade myself that I was too exhausted to work. But necessity compelled me (I have one form for the two biggest cement piers, so I have to finish one and wait for it to dry before I can do the other — hence if I didn’t do one today, I would lose a day, and it will take several days as it is for the cement to dry enough to put logs on top). I finished 1½ piers; the other 1½ tomorrow. And at the end I was no longer exhausted, just tired. Thus will hard and necessary labor be our friend in the wilderness, forcing us to continue, whatever we may ‘feel’ like doing.

“But more important will be a regular rule of life, the good effect of which I am already observing, in a rudimentary way. In the morning I read Matins and morning prayers, then breakfast and reading of monastic instructions (Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov).<sup>[e]</sup> Then work (when I start getting up earlier, probably there will be a two-hour period at midday for rest and reading and writing.) One hour before sunset (7 p.m.) Vespers, then an evening walk and supper, writing, reading Bulgakov,<sup>[f]</sup> and evening prayers. The prime object of all this, when we are established, will be to become permeated with the grace of that path which Vladika Ioann blessed us to follow when he named our magazine *The Orthodox Word*: the services, Lives of Saints, spiritual reading, translations, all have this

aim. Since man is a *slovesnyi* creature, ‘wordly,’ this is our path to salvation.”<sup>7</sup>

Over the next three days Eugene finished making and placing the piers, which consisted of several tons of concrete. “No cars on the road for the second day,” he observed. “For all practical purposes (and maybe in fact) I’m the only person in these mountains (south and west of Platina). But there’s no feeling of loneliness at all — I’m too busy with the work and with preparing this to be a place for bearing spiritual fruit. I spend the whole time around the cabin, where the work is, and even have no interest in the rest of the land, since the time hasn’t come to use it yet. Only at dusk, after Vespers, I like to get up high and look at the mountains. It was a little hazy tonight — i.e., the view no more than thirty miles in each direction — and the moon was orange rising. And at dusk the bats swoop on you from everywhere.”<sup>8</sup>

Eugene now began to prepare logs for the base frame of the printshop. He hunted for suitable trees (preferably dead ones) on the Brotherhood’s property, chopped them down, trimmed them, transported them to the worksite, and then stripped the bark. In this way he was able to reduce the cost of lumber for the building. As he noted: “Such labor is the long and hard way, of course — typical of our way of doing things. If we had had \$500 or so extra cash it could have been done much quicker.”<sup>9</sup>

It was an arduous task for only one person. “Some of the bigger [logs] are difficult to drag down the hill,” he wrote, “and the prize one (for the front sill), which is 19 feet long and 8 inches thick, I could hardly lift even one end of, but I managed to somehow roll it down the hill, lifting it over stumps. I still have to drag it somehow the last 50 yards to the lumber pile. It must weigh 300–400 pounds.

“I find that one learns to love the land much better when one works on it, when every foot is covered with one’s sweat, than when one approaches it from a leisurely point of view.”<sup>10</sup>

On the following Sunday, Eugene set down more thoughts on life in the wilderness: “Today I got some much-needed rest, spending the time in reading

and writing and a short walk.... Besides the regular services I read an Akathist to the Mother of God after Vespers....

“For concentration and intellectual work this is a paradise. There are man-made noises, but that only reminds one that one can’t escape entirely the twentieth century and modern civilization. But in general the atmosphere inclines one to sobriety and keeps one in contact with reality. Again, of course, it comes down to a rule of life, which one can set according to any standard here; the problem will be keeping to it.”<sup>11</sup>

**E**UGENE’S next trip to Platina was in November. This time he stayed for three weeks, again by himself, save for a brief visit from the Brotherhood’s young helper, the aforementioned Anthony Arganda. After several days of solitude, he reflected: “And what do we have now in the wilderness? A little something more than we had six months ago, psychologically perhaps much more. Anthony called it a ‘refuge’; and already I can sense the passing of a watershed — from the time when it was difficult to persuade anyone to come here to help, to the time when people will start flocking (comparatively speaking, of course — for us, two or three is already a flock) to this place. But our responsibility will now be the greater to keep it a spiritual ‘refuge’—a place of prayer and labor, not recreation. Every day at least Vespers and Matins must be sung and the Lives of Saints be read — for a beginning. And there will never be an end to the labor that must be put into this place.”<sup>12</sup>

Eugene continued to work on the printshop but was unexpectedly interrupted by winter snows, which came early that year. On November 14 he wrote to the brothers in San Francisco: “I write this, not knowing when I will be able to mail it. Today I thought of going to Redding for our last heavy supplies of the year — the plywood to finish the outside. But the cold (33 degrees) and overcast sky made me hesitate. Finally at 11:30 I decided to risk the trip, but had reached no more than halfway down the hill when it began to snow. I came back, taking no chances. It was very beautiful, the quiet snowfall, light at first, then

heavier. But now, after eight hours of continuous snowfall, I'm completely snowed in! There's been probably a foot of snow, with drifts much deeper. The snow comes almost to the level of the back doorsill — that door is useless now. I beat some kind of trail... a burrow with a foot or two of snow heaped on each side, but I can't say that it will still be there tomorrow. I have enough firewood here and on the porch for another twenty-four hours at most, then I'll have to venture into the drifts no matter what. Our front porch is half-covered with snow. Fortunately my tool shed saved the other half, so at least the front entrance is clear. The temperature is 24 degrees and going down about 1 degree an hour. The roof is covered, and there's an overhang of snow and ice 6 inches thick extending 6 to 10 inches beyond the roof. I must admit I wasn't prepared for this so early. I trust there will be a thaw before the real snows begin and I can get out with the truck — right now I couldn't get to town by foot, and the truck is buried.

“Well, I guess this is for experience. So far it's cozy enough inside, but I think I'll have to sacrifice some sleep and keep the fire going tonight.

“But oh, it is beautiful! A real wilderness, white everywhere — even on our warm-weather California manzanita and sagebrush (the white looks like unseasonal blossoms on them). The pine branches are covered with snow, and the slightest wind shakes a blizzard of white into the air. Our prayer-rock at the top of the hill looks like some misplaced iceberg. A little strange at first — our California landscape in the snow; but then it fits, and I feel I've been here for years already. And one sings for joy, troparions to all the Saints, and ‘With the Saints give rest’ for our dear Vladika [Ioann], who is here too....

“I have enough food and enough work to keep me going for a week — I hope I can get out by then. God is with us. All will be fine.”<sup>13</sup>

Eugene was snowed in for the next four days. “An indescribable sight!” he exclaimed in a letter. “I am in a forest of icicles in an ice house. Every branch of every tree is laden with snow, up to a foot deep. The sky is white. The ground is

covered with a foot to 1½ feet of snow. I tramped down the path and unburied the truck — but now it's 33 degrees and everything is beginning to drip. So I think I'll get it out....<sup>14</sup>

“I can see where the moisture comes from to grow the big pines — it's rained or snowed almost every day I've been here, and there have been only two or three days with any appreciable sunshine. It's a little depressing when you're alone in it — summertime is much easier to be alone. At night there are howling coyotes.... For this place a community of four or five would be just right. God will show us.”<sup>15</sup>

After much of the snow had thawed, he reflected: “With the earth visible again, and a little of its smell in the air, one breathes a little easier. In itself, snow has little to recommend itself, apart from its beauty. Snow is death; the earth, life. But for our purposes, since we don't want things ‘pleasant,’ snow can be very valuable: it makes one more attentive to the perils of existence; it gives silence and remoteness; it transforms our Platina paradise into a real northern desert.”<sup>16</sup> On the next day the clouds finally dispersed. “Glory to God!” he rejoiced. “Blue skies and a sunny day, with visibility unlimited. I feel as glad to see the sun as I was to see the snow five days ago.”<sup>17</sup>

A few days later, on the eve of his departure, Eugene wrote to Gleb: “I think that people living in such mountains would eventually be reduced to silence, because the converse with creation is so much more intimate without words, man's mood responding to nature's... To be removed from the vanity and anxiety of the city we could hardly have picked a better place.”

In the same letter, Eugene confided that Archbishop John had once again appeared to him in the wilderness: “I saw him the other night, and he gave me some definite instructions... only not about the questions I would have liked to ask him.” In conclusion, evidently having in mind the striking changes in weather he had just experienced, Eugene again pondered over what the future might bring for the Brotherhood: “I trust in God, I ask Vladika to guide us, and I

will work with all my energy on *The Orthodox Word* and on this wilderness. What will come of it is in God's hands.... I emerge from these three weeks more certain than ever of our path, but less certain about any definite schemes. Rather like Platina in the fog — I trust in God Who has the power to dispel the clouds in an instant and reveal a panorama of Paradise.”<sup>[18](#)</sup>



At right, Esther and Frank Rose at a church social in Carmel, not long before Frank died.

## ***Deliverance Out of the World***

*Happy the man whose wish and care  
A few paternal acres bound,  
Content to breathe his native air  
In his own ground.*

*Thus let me live, unseen, unknown,  
Thus unlamented let me die;  
Steal from the world, and not a stone  
Tell where I lie.*

—Alexander Pope,  
from “Ode on Solitude”

**T**o the end of his life, Eugene’s father Frank continued to be supportive of his son’s new life and work. In 1967, while recovering in a hospital from an operation, he had written to Eugene: “I always follow your progress closely and am quite pleased with your business sense — as well as your religious fervor. I firmly believe that what you plan on, you will eventually do. Your progress, Orthodoxically, seems steady and sure.” Less than a year later, on July 19, 1968, the gentle Mr. Rose died suddenly and unexpectedly.

In Carmel, Frank had always been helpful to his neighborhood and community, offering to cut down the poison oak, repair things, etc. On the last day of his life he had gone to paint a neighbor’s house and, in the midst of this charitable work, had suffered a heart attack. His last written communication to his son, inscribed on the back of a letter from Esther, was as follows:

GENE,  
STICK TO YOUR GOALS

—POP

It was extremely difficult for Esther to live with the fact that she had not been able to say good-bye to or exchange last words with her husband. Eugene immediately went south to be with her. Eileen and Franklin were also there. Franklin took care of Esther's financial matters, but for moral support in her hour of grief Esther turned most of all to her "religious" son. Eugene's presence there was very important to her; and, as he wrote to Alison, this meant a great deal to him. It seems that some past differences were healed. At such a time it was not outward success but faith that Esther needed.

**E**ARLIER in 1968, Eugene came to know a man who was to become a valuable assistant in the Brotherhood's work, and was even to facilitate its impending move. This was Charles Anderson, a school teacher with a family of seven children who lived in the town of Willits, about 140 miles north of San Francisco.

Being devout Roman Catholics, Charles and his wife Sylvia were active in the Catholic Worker movement which had been established by Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day to care for the poor. On November 9, 1967, Sylvia gave birth to their seventh child — a boy — in a San Francisco hospital. Wanting to give thanks to God, Charles went to find a Catholic church that he had attended several times before. Although he knew San Francisco and the location of the church very well, for some reason he became lost and ended up "by chance" at a Russian Orthodox convent (the "little convent" of the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God) on Fell Street.<sup>[a]</sup> Arriving just as a nun was ringing the bells for the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, he was invited in and attended the service. Later that day, while buying some things to bring to his wife in the hospital, he ended up — once again "by chance" — near the Russian Orthodox Cathedral on



Geary Boulevard. Walking into the bookstore, he saw Eugene for the first time; but, trying to remain inconspicuous, he did not venture to talk with him then.

Little more than a month later, the family experienced a terrible trial. Their two-year-old daughter Maurin (named after Peter Maurin) was severely burned on half of her body in an accident. The doctors at the hospital in San Francisco gave the child only a fifty percent chance of living. In their distress the parents wanted to go to a church and pray, but instead of suggesting a Catholic church, Charles said to Sylvia, “Why don’t we go to that little Russian church that I went to when our son was born?”



Eugene with his sister Eileen and his brother Franklin, during his last visit to his family before leaving the world, Carmel, 1969.

Sylvia was not prepared for what she would experience at the Russian convent. As she later recalled, “The Slavonic services were incomprehensible to me, but they struck me as being totally different than anything I had experienced

in Catholic churches — including Russian/Byzantine Catholic churches where they also held services in Slavonic. As the people in the convent chapel read and sung the prayers, I felt that they were *saying what they believed*. ‘This is *real*,’ I thought, almost in spite of myself. ‘This is it!’”

Little Maurin remained in the hospital for two months, and did recover. But Charles and Sylvia, after the powerful experience in the convent chapel in their hour of extreme pain and need, were never to be the same again. They began poring over books on the Orthodox Church and discussing them late into the night. In addition to attending Catholic churches, they attended services at the “little” Russian convent whenever they could. Later they began to go to services at the Russian Cathedral.

Thus it was that, early in the year 1968, Charles again found himself at “Orthodox Christian Books and Icons,” this time with his whole family. They came when Eugene was working there with Anthony Arganda. “The Andersons were very enthusiastic,” Anthony recalls, “They asked lots of questions, and Eugene patiently answered them all. Eugene liked them very much, and after that day he took them under his wing. Most of the Orthodox converts at that time were intellectuals who had come to the Church individually. Eugene liked the idea of families — and especially big families like the Andersons — coming into the Orthodox Church together. ‘We need more people like this,’ he told me.”

Since they had been totally dedicated to the Roman Catholic Church throughout their lives, it was difficult for Charles and Sylvia to leave it and become Orthodox. After a series of clearly Providential experiences, however, they knew that God was calling them to take this step. On September 28, 1968, after having been well grounded in the Faith with Eugene and Gleb’s help, the Andersons were received into the Orthodox Church at the “little convent.” Charles decided to take the name of St. Vladimir, having been moved by the story of this Russian grand prince who had baptized his whole kingdom. As he later recalled, “When St. Vladimir sent his emissaries to find the true religion for the Russian people, the emissaries came back saying ‘We’ve found it!’ for they

had experienced ‘heaven on earth’ while attending the Orthodox services. We felt the same way.” Filled with apostolic zeal, the new Vladimir wanted to follow the example of his patron saint by bringing many of his fellow countrymen to the Orthodox Faith, having already begun with his family of nine. Eugene became the godfather of every one of them.<sup>[1](#)</sup>



Western view from atop Noble Ridge, autumn, 1977.



Eastern view from atop Noble Ridge, autumn, 1992.

**A**FTER Eugene's trip to the land in Platina in November 1968, the brothers did not visit there for several months. Eugene's experience of being snowed in had marked only the beginning of a series of an unusually severe snow storms in northern California. This, combined with the fact that the brothers had to wait to be granted a building permit from the local authorities before completing the printshop, pushed back their plans to move. On March 7, 1969, Eugene and Gleb returned to their land, only to find that they had to walk up the mountain through four feet of snow, barely reaching the cabin. "Life here will not be easy!" Eugene remarked in his Chronicle.

The two brothers went again in April, and in May they at last received the building permit. By summer they had resolved to move as soon as possible. "With God's help," Gleb writes, "the building was finished well enough to move in. Neither the walls nor the roof were on the printshop, but we decided to go nevertheless.

"At that time we were highly respected by all the clergy. Archbishop Anthony came to visit the house where we lived and where we did our



typesetting. Bishop Nektary — who had been placed by Archbishop John to take care of us, and to whom I had been handed over by Fr. Adrian as my spiritual father — still wished to open his monastery in Alameda, and still hoped we would join him. Fr. Nicholas Dombrovsky used to invite us for lunch on Sundays, hoping we'd marry two of his daughters, Alla and Tamara, who were indeed lovely young ladies. All suspected, however, that our hearts wanted to serve God through some 'inhuman' *podvig*, though no one knew that we already had land. We needed money to move, and had none, even though by this time we had printed several books, and the 1968 volume of *The Orthodox Word* was the thickest ever.... But God intervened again to help us move.

“One day Eugene came in from his early daily Liturgy and showed me ten one-hundred-dollar bills in his hand. That morning a pious Russian lady, Elizabeth (known as the ‘incense lady’ because she always bought incense from us), had just handed it to him, saying that he would need it, and that he should keep silent about it! This meant that God saw we were ready to go.<sup>[b]</sup> We began to pack our things into boxes.”

Vladimir Anderson offered to take over the store after the brothers left. “I kept it open on weekends just so that it wouldn't close,” he later recalled. Because he lived a three-hour drive from San Francisco and worked full-time as a school teacher, he took on this new responsibility at considerable sacrifice. Every Friday after school he went to San Francisco on a Greyhound bus, going home on Sunday. The bookstore's rent was paid largely with his teacher's salary.

Although the brothers' impending move had by this time been blessed by Fr. Adrian, Archbishop Averky, and Fr. Nikodim of Mount Athos, the brothers had hesitated to tell Bishop Nektary, knowing how it would hurt him. When Bishop Nektary was finally informed he was indeed very disappointed, telling the brothers that they had “spit into his soul.” The brothers explained their reasons, and he of course understood, but still it was hard for him to give up his last hope for a monastery in Alameda, which hope lay precisely in them. “We are only sad,” Eugene later wrote, “that we ourselves caused Vladika Nektary

sorrow.”<sup>2</sup>

The brothers also had a talk with Archbishop Anthony, who, as Eugene noted, “expresses approval for the moment.”<sup>3</sup>

In August of 1969 the brothers rented a large U-Haul truck and moved all their machinery into it. “When we were moving the printing press,” Gleb recalls, “Fr. Afanassy came and gave us a hint on how to do it by putting rollers under it. I looked at him and saw for the first time his exceptionally loving eyes. He was a great admirer of Archbishop John and felt that Archbishop John was among us.

“The work took such a long time. Finally, on the eve of the Dormition of the Mother of God, August 14/27, we left early in the morning, hoping to return that night for the Vigil service and to return the truck. It was exceptionally hot. The truck was huge, and I don’t know how Eugene managed it so calmly and perfectly. By early afternoon we arrived. We cut off huge branches in order for the truck to get to the platform of our printshop so we could roll out the presses. We ate, worked, and then just collapsed. I lay down on the warm platform — the floor of the future printshop — and fell into a deep sleep for many hours. When I woke up it was night. The stars and moon came out. It was dead quiet and wonderfully warm. I was so ultimately happy at that moment that I’m sure Paradise is going to be like that. There was no wind, but the air felt so fresh and wonderful. Light, transparent little clouds rolled across the moon. I walked barefoot on our hallowed ground; it felt soft and real. Eugene was fast asleep inside, and I did not want to wake him. I knew that we would neither make it back to return the truck nor to go to the Vigil in San Francisco. This *was* the Dormition vigil night — and I began to sing and weep at the same time, not knowing that years later I would lose my co-laborer also on such a Dormition night.”

In the morning the brothers chose a nice spot for an outdoor chapel, collected their service books, and held the full Matins service for the Dormition. A deer came out of the woods and sat down right next to them, looking curiously at her new neighbors who had a purpose quite different from that of the former

residents — the hunters. The brothers looked at each other with amazement, but then something yet more wonderful happened. Since they were performing the service themselves, the brothers were of course standing the whole time; but when they reached the part of Matins when the entire congregation is supposed to stand — during the singing of the Ninth Ode to the Mother of God — the deer immediately stood up! When the Ode was finished she sat down again, quietly waiting until the end of the service before wandering back into the forest. “How close is God!” the brothers thought.

Gleb went to the cabin while Eugene stayed to pray in the tranquility of his new home. A warm breeze was murmuring through the trees and long grasses, sending the dying autumn leaves to earth.

As it turned out, this mountain was called Noble Ridge: a fitting home for Eugene, whose very name meant “noble.”

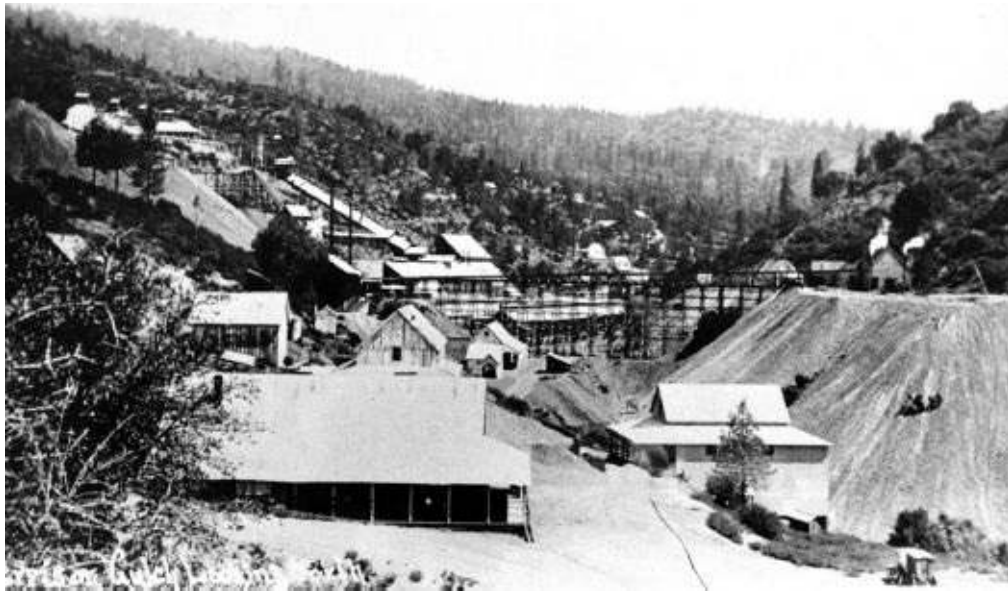
Gleb had been right about his co-laborer’s feelings for this place: Eugene felt that, like the falling leaves, he could die here. In spirit he had died to the world long before, but only here did he have the opportunity to actually live that blessed death, being alive to that which never dies. Like physical death, death to the world is a mystery to all but those who have passed through it; and thus Eugene would remain an enigma to those who knew him. But if the mystery was unfathomable to those on earth, it was known to God, Who now saw a solitary creature standing before Him, preparing himself for future union with Him. Eugene felt unworthy to have been delivered out of the world and into this “promised land.” How much less, then, did he feel worthy before the thought of God’s ultimate promise, which would be fulfilled in the future life! As he stood amidst the autumn forest that was falling asleep and preparing to awake in spring, Eugene wept in gratitude to his Creator. In Eugene, as in the sleeping nature, God was again making life more abundant through death.

On the very spot he sat, he would one day find his final resting place. There his body lies today, awaiting the General Resurrection.



# PART V





The Harrison Gulch gold-mining town in the 1890s.



“Pioneer Hotel,” Harrison Gulch, 1890s. *Photographs courtesy of the Harrison Gulch Ranger Station, U.S. Forest Service.*

## *Set in the Wild West*

*Ye shall serve God upon this mountain.*

—Exodus 3:12

**D**URING the California Gold Rush days, the mountains surrounding the skete property had been filled with mining settlements. In the 1840s and 1850s thousands of miners, many of them Chinese, came with their families to the Wild West boomtown of Weaverville, located about thirty miles to the north of where the brothers were to buy their land. From Weaverville the mining exploration moved outward, until in the 1870s the miners reached the immediate territory of the future skete. At first they did not strike gold there, but they did find a metal even more precious — platinum — and it was from this that the nearby settlement of Platina got its name. Ranchers herded cattle and sheep through the area in order to feed the hungry miners. Noble Ridge was named after one of them, a cowboy by the name of Don Noble.

In 1893 gold was discovered in the creek of Harrison Gulch, only four miles from where the skete was to be. Soon the Gulch had a boomtown of its own, with a church, two schools, a few saloons, a post office, and two stagecoaches bringing mail and supplies daily. Within ten years approximately 450 tons of gold were extracted from the mines in the area, from which the famous Hearst family originally acquired its fortune.

After the mining settlers left, Harrison Gulch remained virtually uninhabited, and the town of Platina never developed. The tiny roadside town that now bears the name of Platina is a recent development, lying about a half-

mile from the original Wild West settlement. The ruins of mines and remote cabins remain throughout the mountainous area, however. A few of them were found by Brothers Eugene and Gleb in the vicinity of the skete, along the old Noble Ridge cattle trail.

**L**ONG before the white settlers came, American Indian tribes had inhabited the area, but in the nineteenth century they had mostly been driven away. In 1852, an entire encampment of about one hundred Wintun Indians — men, women, and children — had been ruthlessly slaughtered at “Natural Bridge,” about fifteen miles from the skete.

On April 1, 1971, Eugene met a descendant of these first inhabitants of the land. Gleb writes: “Once, when we were in dire need of extending our printshop in order to spread the word of God to our neighbors, Eugene went to town to buy lumber. Hauling a load of wood on his return trip, he stopped in Platina to pick up the mail. At the post office window stood a tall, intelligent-looking man of about forty years of age, with oriental features. He spoke slowly and deliberately, with a certain refinement, and said without looking at Eugene, ‘What are you doing with all that lumber you have in the truck outside?’ Eugene said that he was bringing it for use in building a chapel. ‘This land belongs to us Indians,’ the man said, ‘and I’ll do everything I can to stop you.’

“Eugene then said to the man, ‘We’re building the house of God, Whose children we all are.’ The man acknowledged this and changed his tone. ‘Well, I hope it goes through,’ he said. ‘But I don’t like what’s going on around here.’

“‘Are you a descendant of the people who used to live here?’ Eugene asked.

“‘Yes.’

“‘What tribe are you?’

“‘Wintun.’

“‘Did your tribe have settlements all over this area?’

“‘Yes, all over!’<sup>1</sup>

“Having returned up the hill to the skete, Eugene related this encounter. He

said it perhaps foreboded troubles ahead. But then he smiled and said, 'Nevertheless, we are working for the benefit of the local Indians.'

"And indeed, the concept of Orthodoxy which was brought by Blessed Fr. Herman to the Native Americans in Alaska has to be presented to the Native Americans in southern lands as well. Eugene often stressed the need of introducing ancient Orthodoxy to our neighbors, always bringing to mind his encounter with a representative of that noble race."

One of Eugene's favorite books was *Ishi in Two Worlds: A Biography of the Last Wild Indian in North America*. Ishi was the sole survivor of the Yahi tribe, which used to live in the hill country less than eighty miles east of Platina, near Mount Lassen. Eugene often talked about Ishi, and was later to make the book required reading for the novices at the skete. Ishi's simplicity and closeness to nature perhaps reminded him of Lao Tzu in ancient China. In the words of Ishi's best friend in later years, Dr. Saxton Pope: "Ishi's soul was that of a child, his mind that of a philosopher."<sup>2</sup>

Eugene often searched the ground for arrowheads and anything else of the local inhabitants. The thought that he lived on virgin ground, on a hill that had hardly known the presence of white men, always made him long to reach out to the Indians.<sup>[a]</sup>

**E**UGENE was also very intrigued when he heard of a white man who for forty years had lived all alone in the forest several miles southwest of the skete, on a plateau near a tributary of Eagle River. According to the testimony of someone who had met him, this man had developed a language with birds by imitating their sounds. Birds would come to him, and he would spend a long time in converse with them. He never ate any meat. Those people who visited him had to be very quiet, because he did not like noise. His dwelling was difficult of access, being far from any roads; one needed a guide to find the way. More than once Eugene tried to make arrangements to go there, but he was never able to. Over the years he thought and spoke many times about this hermit,

known as the “Bird-man,” in whom he obviously saw a kindred spirit.

NOT long after the brothers moved to the Platina area, they were given another sign from God that showed He was pleased with their Orthodox missionary labors in this new frontier.

Once Eugene went down to the post office, and, as he was returning, was stopped by an elderly lady named Ann. She saw him with a stack of *Orthodox Words* and asked him what he was carrying. He showed her, saying, “We’re printing the Orthodox word of God.” She inquired how he was publishing a magazine in this remote rural place. “We have a printing press up the hill,” he said, “and a hermitage.” Amazed, Ann immediately expressed the desire to come and see what the brothers were doing. Eugene welcomed her, and she followed him up the hill along with her daughter Connie and another relative. As she entered the printshop and saw Gleb printing at the press, she exclaimed, “Why, that’s exactly what George saw in his dream!”

George, whom the brothers had not yet met, was the husband of Ann’s daughter Connie, and lived on a large parcel of land a few miles northwest of the skete. George was a Seventh-Day Adventist, and had formerly lived in the San Joaquin Valley. Sensing apocalyptic times ahead, he had wanted to buy a remote piece of land in northern California, where he could live simply and naturally, and could print a magazine warning apostates of his denomination about the consequences of abandoning the ways of the Lord. He had saved enough money and found land near Platina, but when he was just about to buy it he had seen a dream: two men dressed in black, printing on primitive presses in an atmosphere that reminded him of the time of Martin Luther. And a voice had said to him: “At the place where you plan to go, the word of God is already being printed.”

Because of this, George had hesitated to buy the land. He had inquired in the Platina area whether there was a printing business in operation, but had not been informed of one. At last he had gone ahead and moved to Platina.

Ann, seeing at the skete what George had described of his dream,

concluded, “Why, this is indeed the word of God.” George himself later came and confirmed what Ann had said about the dream. The brothers’ Orthodox community was a revelation to him. Seeing in them godly people, as he said, he became their good friend for the rest of his life.

## *Frontiersmen*

*It is not for quiet and security, my dear brothers, that we have founded a community in this place, but for a struggle and a conflict.... We have gathered together in this tranquil retreat, this spiritual camp, in order that we may wage, day after day, an unwearying contest against our passions.*

—St. Faustus of Lerins (†490)<sup>1</sup>

*At night, coyotes walk around the house howling, and snow starts in earnest. How alone we are, after all!*

—Fr. Seraphim Rose, 1972<sup>2</sup>

**T**HE early years at the skete were especially difficult for the brothers. They had only two small buildings: the one-room cabin where they slept, ate and held services, and the other structure which housed the printing equipment. The winters were at times bitterly cold. To heat their living quarters and cook food the brothers used an old wood stove which had been donated to them, but since it let out more smoke than heat and the cabin itself was uninsulated, they were seldom very warm during the cold months. In the summer, on the other hand, the area became dry, and the heat could become desert-like and oppressive.

Everything had to be brought up the mountain by truck. Since there was no water source atop the mountain, even water had to be hauled in. Often it was a major effort just to get up and down the steep, unpaved road that led nearly two miles from the main road to the skete. Winter snows of up to four feet prevented



passage to town by car, and during rains or snow thaws the dirt road became muddy, causing vehicles to get stuck. “In those days the road seemed like a rutted, muddy mess all the time,” recalls one of the early visitors.<sup>3</sup>

Even when the road was passable, the brothers were sometimes unable to drive because their cars and trucks, which they could only afford to buy already used, broke down after many arduous treks up the mountain. At such times the brothers had to hike two miles down to Platina and carry up water on their backs. They learned to wash dishes with a *very* small amount of water.



Eugene snow-shoeing on the road to the skete, 1970.

There was no plumbing. There were of course no electricity lines either, so the printing press depended on a small generator for power. Outside the printshop, the brothers used no electricity at all, according to Eugene’s original plan; for light they had candles and kerosene lamps.

“The spirit of the Platina skete in the early days was prayer, simplicity, struggle, and poverty,” Vladimir Anderson recalls. “It was very genuine. There

was no concern with ‘style,’ but a basic reality to everything — no external show. There were frequent scarcities of what the world would view as necessities, yet no grumbling, just acceptance and trying to work around it.”<sup>4</sup>

In a short history of the Brotherhood, Eugene wrote: “Even the disadvantages and inconveniences of the land which Vladika John had so marvelously given the brothers were seen to be a distinct advantage which aid a sober spiritual life: the lack of electricity and telephone lines confirm the brothers’ maximum isolation from the world; the lack of water and other conveniences of city life give an ascetic fiber to daily life which is very difficult to acquire in the artificial conditions of modern life; the very difficulties of a primitive life in the country, especially in wintertime, encourage trust in God and teach endurance in a very practical way; and the occasional impassable snows in wintertime teach one not to trust too much in one’s own powers, and inspire one with at least a taste of the true deserts in which Orthodox ascetics of the past have struggled.”<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the demands that just plain physical survival made on their time, the brothers had to earn their livelihood solely from what they printed. In one letter Eugene wrote: “So far 90% of our hand and mind labor is devoted to the sheer physical problem of printing (and chopping wood, etc.), and our translation and intellectual work is snatched fitfully between hours at the printing machines. (That’s not a complaint — it’s probably our salvation!)”<sup>6</sup> And in another letter: “Yes, we are ‘struggling’ in the mountains — much more pleasant than struggling in the city, I assure you! We don’t notice the lack of conveniences at all. If we do spend a lot of time chopping wood, that gives us valuable exercise — printing is definitely indoor, sedentary work (or rather ‘stationary’).”<sup>7</sup>

The tone for each day was set by the cycle of Church services, which were read and sung in English and Slavonic.<sup>[a]</sup> The brothers would meet for services three times a day, following the rules of prayer established in ancient times. They knew it was in this, even more than in their rugged way of life, that they

could remain in the tradition of the desert-dwellers whom they read about and loved.

The brothers were careful to maintain a prayerful atmosphere in the skete. Eugene was especially strict in this, allowing for no casual attitudes or conduct. According to monastic rules, there was to be no unnecessary talking during the day, nor even casual reclining and crossing one's legs in chairs.

The food that the brothers ate was the simplest possible. Even before they became monks they kept to a monastic diet, eating no meat except fish. During meals (all of which were had in common), one brother would read from some spiritual book while the other would eat. Part of Orthodox monastic tradition, this was done with the intent that the soul be nourished at the same time as the body. The Optina books of Sergei Nilus were thus read aloud, as well as the many Russian volumes of the Lives of the Optina Elders.

At most times, Eugene would read or listen to the spiritual writings with no comment, thinking about and mentally storing each bit of material. When Gleb would press him for a reaction, he would only say that the writings represented things as they were: the *normality* of Christian life that has since been lost. It surprised Gleb that Eugene never sought the extraordinary. Gleb himself would be gripped by accounts of visions, revelations, and appearances of Uncreated Light, but he failed to notice a similar response from Eugene. When he asked why, Eugene told him that the picture was vivid enough even without such manifestations.



Gleb and Eugene on “Split Rock,” on the eastern side of Noble Ridge, overlooking the Sacramento River Valley, 1969.

**T**HE brothers’ aim in coming to their skete was a humble one. They were not looking to create a large, illustrious, renowned monastery, knowing full well that the very austerity of their life would be a deterrent to this. They deliberately did not advertise or publicize their skete. In the beginning they were not tonsured as monks or ordained as priests, and they had no pretensions to being spiritual counselors to visitors.

The brothers did not need to be tonsured, however, to experience the trials and joys of monastic life. They had not fled to the desert with the idea that they could thereby suddenly escape the temptations of the world, for they knew from Patristic literature that, as long as worldly impressions are still in a person, the

temptations will follow him into the desert. And from their own experience they learned that these impressions are in fact magnified when one is cut off from society. In the world, impressions come and go, followed by other ones; in the silence of the desert, however, they are built up in one's mind, mounting into something seemingly real. Often the *idea* of something becomes considerably sweeter and more enticing than the reality itself.

“The first year of life in desert solitude,” Gleb writes, “was completely different from what we expected. The stillness of the natural world around us only accentuated the clamor and bustle that still raged within us. Just as every little wrinkle is noticed on a white cloth but not on a many-colored fabric, so also in regard to desert life, every trifle brought from the world makes itself felt with special power on the background of total stillness.”

Orthodox hagiography indicated to the brothers that ascetics are driven out of the desert not so much by the various obstacles with which the devil may irritate them as by their own *fear*, which the devil can intensify. According to Gleb, Eugene's greatest fault was *faintheartedness*, the inclination to grow discouraged. Eugene's quick mind, which could so readily size up the genuineness of something, could at the same time discern all the “genuine” problems and threatening forces. Over the course of years, there were occasions when everything seemed against what he cherished most, and he felt it was useless to “take arms against a sea of troubles.” At such times he would say such words as “maybe it's no use,” and Gleb would have to exhort or rebuke him.

Gleb's fears were more subjective — arising, in his view, from the fact that he had grown up without the reassuring hand of a father. He did not, like Eugene, fear that something was objectively impossible, but rather that *he himself* was incapable of it. It was his insecurity and need for reassurance that caused his emotional lamentations, of which Eugene had to listen to many over the years. At such times Eugene would calm his brother down by saying a few sensible words and not reacting emotionally himself. “Don't you feel sorry for me?!” Gleb would bewail. “Not a bit,” Eugene would say. “You're the luckiest

man in the world.”

Eugene came to refer to discouragement as a spiritual “disease” or “rash.” “Fortunately,” he wrote, “when I get the ‘rash,’ Gleb is usually over his, and vice versa, and we are able to come out of the depths of despair and get on with the necessary work.”<sup>8</sup>



Eugene in front of the skete’s truck, 1969. In the background is the printshop.

**P**ROBABLY the greatest physical difficulty that the brothers faced in the early years was that of trying to print magazines and books in a remote forest, under such primitive conditions. As if the printing itself were not enough, the brothers often found themselves out in the middle of nowhere, with a broken-down truck loaded with paper and printing supplies which they were bringing to the skete. Sometimes they had to manually haul heavy lead slugs and metal type up their hill.

In 1971, Eugene smashed and broke one of his fingers on the printing press, requiring him to go to a doctor to have it stitched. The finger later became

infected, and the injury left him permanently disfigured, but this did not bother him as much as the fact that it had cost him weeks of work — weeks that he felt he did not have to spare. “But thus,” he noted, “one learns to trust in God more than one’s own plans.”<sup>9</sup>

On another occasion Gleb too broke a finger on the press, leaving him also disfigured for life. From these injuries, together with all the physical work they did, the brothers “developed the tough hands of peasant-farmers,” as one of the early visitors to the skete recalls.<sup>10</sup>

Mechanical problems with the printing press tested the brothers’ patience to its limit. When Gleb would start his lamentations, however, Eugene would cut them off at once by saying, “You want to go back to the world.—Is that what you want?” At other times he would ask, “Do you want your reward now, or in heaven?” “In heaven, of course,” Gleb would reply. “But can’t I have a little of it now?” At this Eugene would only shake his head: “It’s now or then. Take your pick.”

Little signs from heaven came when the brothers least expected but most needed them. One of these concerned the Linotype machine that they purchased in 1970. As its keys were pressed, this machine would create molten lead type. Though much more efficient than the hand-typesetting process that the brothers had been used to, the Linotype was a mechanical nightmare that gave them much trouble. It required not only electricity from a generator but also propane gas. One day, as Eugene was typesetting on the Linotype, working with molten lead heated by the gas, the generator broke down. He spent several hours trying to fix it, while the lead was getting cold. Then, when he finally got it started, he discovered that now the Linotype refused to run! This was nothing new for him, for he often found he spent more time in trying to make the machines work than he did in actual typesetting. This time, however, he felt his patience had been exhausted. “I can’t take it anymore,” he told Gleb. “I’ve spent hours on it, and it’s just impossible.”

“It’s the devil,” Gleb said. “He’s angry and has to irritate us. Go get the



holy water.”

When Eugene returned, they took a wooden cross down from the wall and blessed the machines and the entire room with holy water. Hardly had Eugene done so when both the Linotype and the generator suddenly started up of themselves, together with the printing press.

At another time, the brothers’ truck broke down and would not move an inch. “We thanked God,” Eugene recorded, “and began carrying water a half-mile from a newly discovered spring and carrying mail, groceries, and gasoline up the hill from town on foot — very difficult, but good for us. Then, in the middle of the new *Orthodox Word*, our generator broke, and Gleb for the first time heard me fall close to despondency: ‘Maybe what we’re doing is not right, after all’—but within 24 hours Deacon Nicholas [Porshnikov] arrived [from San Francisco] with two mechanics (without knowing about our desperate plight), fixed our truck enough to take it back to San Francisco for major repairs, and left us another truck on which we took the generator to be repaired, and just now mailed the new *Orthodox Word*.” [11](#)

At other times God preserved the brothers from physical danger. A young Russian priest wrote the following account, speaking of himself in the third person:

“Once while climbing up a hill, Eugene tripped and flew over the heads of Gleb and another man. He hit his back against a large rock, bounced off the rock, and fell into the bushes. His companions gasped, thinking that he had broken his back and all his ribs. But Eugene quietly rose up, saying that he had been saved by Prepodobny Herman of Alaska. They sang the troparion [to Blessed Herman], and continued on their way.”[12](#)

ULTIMATELY the brothers understood what could be learned and gained from the annoyances, temptations, and trials they encountered. “Our many difficulties are meant to try us,” Eugene noted, “not discourage us and make us give up.”[13](#) Seeing these difficulties as being in some cases the devil’s revenge



on godly labors, Eugene wrote: “These trials sometimes just pile up on us right when we’re finishing an issue [of *The Orthodox Word*], and so we have a pretty good idea what their source is!... Last week, after our truck caught fire (!), I was about ready to sink into a rather gloomy mood; but we did get the issue out (we pushed the truck to the road and then coasted down — the postmaster asked no questions, as he’s already used to our strange arrivals, à la the Lone Ranger!) and it looks as though the damage isn’t much after all. And thus does God faithfully teach us patience and to trust in Him and not our own powers, which after all can’t do a thing!”<sup>14</sup>

“We are told by the Holy Fathers,” Eugene explained elsewhere, “that we are supposed to see in everything something for our salvation. If you can do this, you can be saved.

“In a pedestrian way, you can look at something like a printing press which does not operate. You are standing around and enjoying yourself, watching nice, clean, good pages come out printed, which gives a very nice sense of satisfaction, and you are dreaming of missionary activity, of spreading more copies around to a lot of different countries. But in a while it begins to torture you, to shoot pages right and left. The pages begin to stick and to tear each other on top. You see that all those extra copies you made are vanishing, destroying each other, and in the end you are so tense that all you can do is sort of stand there and say the Jesus Prayer as you try to make everything come out all right. Although that does not fill one with a sense of satisfaction (as would watching the nice, clean copies come out automatically), spiritually it probably does a great deal more, because it makes you tense and gives you the chance to struggle. But if instead of that you just get so discouraged that you smash the machine, then you have lost the battle. The battle is not how many copies per hour come out: the battle is what your soul is doing. If your soul can be saved while producing words that can save others, all the better; but if you are producing words that can save others and are all the time destroying your own soul, it’s not so good.”<sup>15</sup>

Eugene made comments along similar lines after he received a letter from a monk who, having a personal fortune behind him, was “dreaming of missionary activity.” “He’s ‘desperate’ for help,” Eugene wrote, “and ‘money is no object’—he’ll gladly pay to import someone from Europe to help.... Frankly, we’ve about given up looking for any fruitful activity in his direction. Apparently, after all, the surest way to bring forth fruit for Holy Orthodoxy is to find yourself in a narrow, confining, almost impossible situation, with no way out but to pray and work with sweat and tears. Too much freedom, too much money, too much opportunity, too many ideas — seem too easily scattered to the wind. We must simply thank God for all our suffering and trials — there’s just no other hope for us!”<sup>16</sup>

**D**URING the brothers’ first few years in the wilderness, their daily prayers and labor were seldom interrupted by visitors. Only those who personally knew them and were aware of the skete’s existence came there.

On September 11/24, 1969, the feast of the translation of the relics of Saints Sergius and Herman of Valaam,<sup>[b]</sup> Archbishop Anthony came and served the Divine Liturgy for the brothers. This, the skete’s first Liturgy, was held in the outdoor chapel where the brothers had performed the first service following their move to the wilderness. A tree stump served as the base of the altar table.<sup>17</sup>

Bishop Nektary visited as often as his schedule and health allowed, and also served the Liturgy. On his many visits, he spent long hours talking with the brothers, thereby strengthening them to bear the hardships and temptations they encountered. “He is always a source of great encouragement and counsel for us,” Eugene noted.<sup>18</sup>

Gleb has described the Bishop’s visits as follows: “Whenever Bishop Nektary would come, we brothers, with warmth and glee, like children anticipating treats, would run to the gates and ring the bells, as is done for the arrival of a hierarch. His welcome into the skete would be mixed with humor, interest, and a feeling of reverence. He would serve a short Moleben, bestow his

archpastoral blessing, and usually deliver a short sermon, which as a rule would include lamentations about his poor health, difficulties in the Church, and the alarming state of the world. His words and manner were marked by the virtue known as ‘humility of wisdom’ (*smirenomudrie*). And thus the tone was set for us to receive that deep spiritual life experience of which he was a bearer — experience which our souls needed.

“Bishop Nektary would tell us his reminiscences of Holy Russia and Optina, of his contact with holy people who later became New Martyrs. His stories were filled with anecdotes and parallels; and in the course of his delivery there would be many funny incidents in which he would not spare himself as an object of ridicule. Some of the things he said revealed a deep observation of life, in which I perceived Fr. Adrian’s influence on his thought and ideas. And invariably there would be extremely touching accounts, during which he and his listeners would be drenched in tears. This was not because the material was deliberately meant to evoke such feelings, but because the narrator was a normal, warm human being who loved life and valued freedom. One could see that he was a little bored with the way the world operated, that he felt pain both physical and emotional, but above all that he was striving for heaven.

“In hearing confessions, Bishop Nektary was again very similar to Fr. Adrian. He was not as thorough, energetic, and to-the-point as Fr. Adrian, but was more in the key of co-suffering with the penitent sinner.

“Because of ill health the Bishop could never stay overnight in the skete, but had to leave and if need be come back in the morning for services. When the visits of this endearing man drew to a close, his parting brought with it sincere regret from souls who loved each other. And when the bells were rung again according to the Jerusalem Typicon,[\[c\]](#) and the departing vehicles rolled down the hill with the Bishop abundantly blessing from the window, the hearts of the brothers experienced a sense of being orphaned. And yet we had a feeling of being filled, almost like after having had a tasty dinner with dessert. We had been fortified for the oncoming struggle, for facing harsh reality, having been

warmed inside in order to have a clear vision of what our life's activity was all about."

## *In the Steps of Blessed Paisius*

*Behold now, what is so good or so joyous as for brethren to dwell together in unity?*

—Psalm 132:1

**A**LTHOUGH the brothers were, in Eugene’s words, “spiritual new frontierists” in contemporary America, they knew that they were not alone and were doing something that was not new at all, but tried and tested by centuries of experience. They realized that they could never approach the way of life of the great Orthodox desert-dwellers; but by reading about them, praying to them and sharing, albeit partially, in their *podvig*, they were mystically united to them and could draw from their strength. They were brought into the company of those who had already won the battle they were now fighting.

As Gleb put it, “The *startsi*, the saints, were our guides when the night of temptations or faintheartedness would descend, and we navigated our tiny monastic enclosure by their indicators.”

In their desert striving, the brothers felt closest to the ascetics of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russia. It was to their tradition that they wished to belong, particularly to that stemming from the Blessed Elder Paisius Velichkovsky (†1794),<sup>[a]</sup> the man responsible for Russia’s most recent blossoming of sanctity. During Blessed Paisius’ time (the eighteenth century), Orthodox monasticism had largely been based on external ascetic labors; the ancient Patristic teaching on the “inward activity” of mystical life in God had been widely forgotten. As a young man Blessed Paisius had gone to Mount

Athos in quest of this teaching, and after much searching had uncovered priceless manuscripts which were not even known to the monks there. Thanks to this discovery, and to Blessed Paisius' subsequent lifelong work of translating, copying, and disseminating such Patristic writings, the anthology known as *The Philokalia* was later compiled and published in several languages.

Serving also as a guide to a brotherhood of monks, Elder Paisius left a spiritual legacy that had inestimable consequences for the Orthodox world. His disciples spread the long-neglected teachings far and wide, renewing the spiritual life of monasteries that eventually produced hundreds of saints in Romania, Russia, and Mount Athos. In Russia, Valaam Monastery was thus renewed; its famous missionary, Blessed Fr. Herman, was himself in the lineage of Blessed Paisius.<sup>[b]</sup> Optina, too, would not have been what it was without Blessed Paisius: its line of Elders had received its spiritual transmission directly from Paisius' disciples.

What was most precious to Eugene and Gleb, however, was that the lineage of holy ascetics stemming from Elder Paisius had continued right to their own times. Most of their own spiritual fathers and mothers — Fr. Adrian, Fr. Gerasim, Ivan and Helen Kontzevitch, Fr. Mitrophan, Bishop Nektary — belonged to this lineage, primarily through Optina Monastery.

Eugene was especially moved when the Life and writings of Blessed Paisius were read aloud in the refectory. He and Blessed Paisius marched to the same drum. Both had sought after the Truth with a consuming passion, and, having found it, had dedicated their lives to making it available to others. "The Life of Blessed Paisius," Eugene once wrote, "is of special value to us because it is the Life of a Holy Father of modern times, one who lived like the ancients almost in our own day.... The spiritual climate of his times was very similar to our own; many of our own temptations were his also; a number of our most pressing questions he answered for us."<sup>1</sup> For Eugene, the struggles that Blessed Paisius undertook both as a monk and as a missionary were compellingly real, alive, and down-to-earth, totally in keeping with his own experience. And

Blessed Paisius' high level of spiritual sobriety, coupled with the profound, heartrending repentance that gave birth to it, became a model for Eugene's own Christian striving.

Eugene further stated that "For Orthodox Christians in the twentieth century, there is no more important Holy Father of recent times than Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky. This is so not merely because of his holy life; not merely because, like another Saint Gregory Palamas, he defended the hesychast practice of the mental Prayer of Jesus; not only because he, through his many disciples, inspired the great monastic revival of the nineteenth century which flowered most notably in the holy Elders of Optina Monastery; but most of all because he redirected the attention of Orthodox Christians to the *sources* of Holy Orthodoxy, which are the only foundation of true Orthodox life and thought whether of the past or of the present, whether of monks or of laymen."<sup>2</sup>



A painting of Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky (1722–94) from the *arkhandarik* (guest vestibule) of St. Elias Skete, Mount Athos — the skete founded by Paisius.

Brothers Eugene and Gleb took these sources — the Divine Scriptures and the writings of the Holy Fathers — as their own protection against the spiritual hazards of living in the wilderness, against the deceptions of the devil and their own fallen reason. They had to care for their spiritual survival just as for their physical survival. As Elder Paisius himself had warned the brothers of his monastery: “If you depart from heeding and reading the Patristic books, you will fall away from the peace and love of Christ, that is, from the fulfilling of Christ’s



commandments, and there will enter into your midst rebellion, tumult and disorder, disturbance of soul, wavering and hopelessness, murmuring against and judgment of each other; and because of the increase of these, the love of many will grow cold, or rather that of almost all; and if such will be, this community will soon be dissolved, first in soul, and with time in body also.”<sup>3</sup>

**E**VEN before coming to the wilderness, the brothers had used the Life and teaching of Blessed Paisius as the main blueprint for their activity. Their whole concept of forming a skete with two or three brothers living in common had been inspired by Blessed Paisius’ experience.

As a young monk on Mount Athos, Blessed Paisius had originally lived for some time as a solitary. When his elder from Romania, Schemamonk Basil of Poiana Mărului Skete, had visited, he had counseled Paisius not to undertake solitary life prematurely:

All monastic life is divided into three kinds: the first, coenobitism; the second, called the royal or middle path, when two or three settle together and have a common property, common food and clothing, common labor and handiwork, common care for the means of existence, and, renouncing in everything their own will, are in obedience to each other in the fear of God and love; and the third kind, solitary anchoretism, which is suitable only for perfect and holy men....

It is better, living together with a brother, to acknowledge one’s own infirmity and measure, to repent and pray before the Lord and be cleansed by the daily grace of Christ, rather than to bear in oneself vainglory and self-opinion with cunning and to cover them up and maintain a solitary life, not even a trace of which, in the words of [St. John] Climacus, they are capable of seeing because of their passionateness. St. Barsanuphius the Great also says that a premature life of silence is a cause of high-mindedness.”<sup>4</sup>

The royal or middle path is also called the *skete* form of monasticism. As Blessed Paisius himself wrote, it is a yoke that is humbler and easier to bear than either coenobitic or anchoretic life:

Saint [Basil the Great] advises one to go on the royal way: that is, to have one's dwelling with one or two others, inasmuch as such a life is more appropriate for many, as not demanding such great patience as is demanded by the common life, and being a little easier. To submit in everything to one's father alone, or to the brother who lives with him also, is not so marvelous and demands less patience.<sup>5</sup>

Blessed Paisius, after hearing the counsel of the Romanian Elder Basil, had been humbled into seeing that he needed to follow the royal path. By God's Providence he was given an opportunity when a young monk like himself, Bessarion, came to him. Like Paisius, Bessarion had searched Mount Athos for an instructor, but had found none. Finally, on meeting Paisius and having a spiritual discourse with him, he thought: What more am I looking for? According to the Life of Blessed Paisius,

Bessarion immediately fell to Paisius' feet with tears and entreated our Father to accept him under obedience. The Elder, however, did not even wish to hear about being anyone's superior, himself wishing to be under authority. But Bessarion all the more fervently fell down with many tears and for three days, without leaving, he entreated him to accept him. Our Father, seeing such humility and tears of the brother, was moved and was persuaded to accept him, not as a disciple but as a friend, in order to live the middle path of two together, whoever should be granted by God to understand more in the Holy Scriptures revealing to the other the will of God, and laboring together in the doing of God's commandments and in every good thing, cutting off before each other their own will and understanding and obeying each other for what is good, having a single soul

and offering, and having everything for the support of their life in common.<sup>6</sup>

Blessed Paisius described in his own words how he had come to the royal path and in what precisely it consists:

Not finding, for many good reasons, a place where I might be in obedience, I thought of undertaking the life according to the royal path, with a single like-minded and like-souled brother, and in place of a father to have God as instructor and the teaching of the Holy Fathers, and to be in obedience to each other and to serve each other, to have a single soul and a single heart and to have everything for the upkeep of our life in common, knowing that of this path of monasticism the Holy Fathers have testified from the Holy Scripture.

God favoring this my good intent, there came to me on the Holy Mountain a brother like-minded in everything... who began to live with me as one in soul. And thus, by the grace of Christ, in part my soul found a certain consolation and much-desired rest, and I, the miserable one, was able to see at least a trace of the benefit of holy obedience, which we had toward each other for the sake of cutting off our own wills, having instead of a father and instructor the teaching of our Holy Fathers and submitting to each other in the love of God.<sup>7</sup>

This, then, had been the original source of Eugene and Gleb's practice — installed in the first years of the Brotherhood — of “mutual obedience.” Rather than having a God-bearing Elder and being in obedience to him, they had the teachings of the Holy Fathers and were in obedience to each other, cutting off before each other their own wills and understanding. In the skete even more than in the world, they would ask the other's blessing before undertaking any activity. Not only did this cut off self-will, but it also preserved the main element of common monastic life: oneness of soul.

Both before and after their move to Platina, the brothers had also taken on the ancient monastic practice of “revelation of thoughts.” As Paisius and Bessarion, in the absence of a spiritual father, had confessed their troubling thoughts to each other, so also did Eugene and Gleb. They did this in the context of their common labor, of carrying each other’s burdens, and thus it worked to preserve them in oneness of soul.

**T**HE “Rule” of the Brotherhood, which Eugene wrote in 1970 or 1971, shows how central were the principles of Blessed Paisius to the brothers’ life in common:

The St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, founded and blessed by Archbishop John Maximovitch of blessed memory, has as its aims:

1. To live a monastic life as much as possible in the tradition and spirit of the Orthodox desert-dwellers of all centuries, and in particular of those nearest to our time: the desert-dwellers of the Russian Thebaid of the north, the Blessed Elder Paisius Velichkovsky and his disciples, the Elders of Optina and Valaam Monasteries, the dwellers of the sketes and wildernesses of Sarov, Sanaxar and Briansk, and others of the same spirit; like them, to flee from the world and all worldly understanding; in mutual obedience, in deprivation, cutting off each other’s will and forcing each other on the narrow path that leads to salvation, the Brotherhood’s inner life not dependent on any organization or individual outside (in accordance with the commandment of Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky), but proceeding by mutual counsel in obedience to the eldest brother; following the best ecclesiastical traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church, and in particular those handed down to the brothers by Archbishop John Maximovitch.

2. To be constantly nourished spiritually by the Lives and Writings of the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church, particularly as handed down in the tradition of Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky and the Optina Elders; to

translate, be instructed by, and apply the teaching of these writings to daily life.

3. To make known to all who thirst for it this Patristic Orthodox teaching, most especially by the printed word, and to encourage and inspire others to base their Christian life on this foundation.

This Rule matched in every point the Life of Blessed Paisius, for, besides practicing mutual obedience and nourishing himself on the writings of the Fathers, Paisius had in his later years disseminated Patristic teachings through the printing of books in his monastery.

**B**LESSED Paisius' blueprint of monastic and spiritual life was a powerful one, having produced countless saints in various Orthodox lands throughout more than two centuries. In America it had already given rise to the phenomenon of Blessed Fr. Herman — and why, asked the Fr. Herman brothers, could it not further give rise to America's own blossoming of sanctity? Since the rest of America, including the majority of their fellow Orthodox, had not even heard of Blessed Paisius, they felt called upon to plant seeds gathered from Paisius' spiritual storehouse. In the Platina wilderness, they were just beginning to till the ground of the "Wild West," there to nurture these seeds for future blossoming.



Eugene feeding a fawn, 1970.



A deer in front of the skete printshop, 1970.

# 51

## *Nature*

*To each tiny flower, each blade of grass, the Great Artist indicated a spot where to grow! How wonderful is God's world, God's nature.*

—Archimandrite Gerasim of Alaska<sup>1</sup>

**T**HE fourth-century Holy Father St. John Chrysostom, writing of the creation account in the book of Genesis, stated that “God created everything not only for our use, but also that we, seeing the great wealth of His creations, might be astonished at the might of the Creator and might understand that all this was created with wisdom and unutterable goodness for the honor of man.”<sup>2</sup>

For Eugene, who had seen into this reality, all nature was a book of the Creator's wisdom, a testament of His love for sinful man. In a letter he wrote:

While the world relapses into anarchy and men become lower than beasts, we live in a veritable paradise where speechless creatures, our nearest neighbors, continually praise the Lord by their very existence. Three weeks ago we found a fawn lying exhausted by the side of the road. We brought it home, kept it overnight, got it to drink milk, and returned it to the hill down which we presumed it had fallen. (We would have kept it longer but discovered there's a strict law against it.) Then two days ago our mother deer who comes every day for our garbage brought her fawn for us to see — apparently the same one, and too touching a sight to describe. She's so used to us that she suckles the fawn only ten or fifteen feet away from us, and we hear their talk among themselves — rather like a sheep's bleating, only higher. Recently, too, we saw our first bear running up our hill — and

fortunately we did not take Vladika Nektary's advice to offer it sugar; it didn't seem like that kind of a bear, much too businesslike! Even our local enemy, the rattlesnake, praises the Lord — such a beautiful yellow with diamonds on his back and the bearing of a prince, albeit a sinister one! Last week we had a 15-minute battle with a huge one before we dislodged it from its squirrel-hole and beheaded it (thereby saving our squirrel family, where the *father* joins the mother in carrying the young from nest to nest). Of course, it is not our lot in this life to sit back and enjoy all this, but we are grateful to have a little corner where God's order is so evident.<sup>3</sup>

In another letter, Eugene wrote more about the squirrels:

Two ground squirrels have taken up residence around our cabin.... They come rapping on our windows for nuts, eat out of our hand and then try to take a finger along with them, try every trick to get inside the house where the mound of nuts must be (one of them succeeded in getting in by hiding on the porch and then darting in when one of us went out); I've had to rescue them from inside stovepipes on the porch, and they even try to climb into our chimney. But they are good company.<sup>4</sup>

Soon after the brothers' move, Eugene began trying to grow some of their own food. "The lack of water," he wrote, "affects primarily the garden, but we're trying 'organic gardening' with mulch and hope to get some crops with a minimum of water — there's enough in the soil for 45 inches of winter rains and snows to grow quite a bit, I think."<sup>5</sup> Eugene kept a garden for the rest of his life, using a cistern to gather rainwater. He loved to work in the earth, beholding the wonder of God's creation as new, tender shoots sprang up. One summer the brothers reaped 360 tomatoes. Fruit trees did not grow as well as vegetables on the Platina mountain, but Eugene nevertheless made an attempt to grow his favorite fruit, figs. Some visitors wondered why, when he had so many demands on his time, he put so much effort into gardening. But with a smile he would



quote an ancient Chinese proverb: “The true philosopher spends half his time with books and the other half working in the soil.”

Eugene also loved to watch the change of the seasons. In April of 1970 he wrote: “For a month we have been in the midst of spring, cool but sunny, and it is a wonder to see life reemerge.”<sup>6</sup> Almost exactly a year later he made these observations: “Real spring is later this year than last, and only a few of the smaller bushes have fully blossomed out. The leaves are just beginning to break through the buds at the top of the oaks — beautiful little pink leaves with yellow blossoms that will become acorns. The peak of spring won’t be here until early May, most likely. Last year was the first time that I’ve gone through spring in the country — a really inspiring experience!”<sup>7</sup>

From his boyhood octopus collection to his mushroom gathering and his study of native trees, we have seen Eugene’s proclivity toward being a naturalist. Now that he was in his element, he recorded with scientific precision the variations of weather, flora, and fauna. He kept detailed charts, every day recording high and low temperatures, rain and snow, whether the sky was clear or overcast, and whether the wind blew day or night. One column he reserved for specific comments. Over the span of February and March, 1972, for example, the entries ran as follows: “Ground becomes visible; small patches of snow remain; gooseberries starting to bud out; manzanita starting to bloom; first small wildflowers appear; first lizards appear; buckeye buds bursting; wild plum leaves appear....”

In his research, Eugene came upon some interesting facts about the area. In a letter he wrote: “There are some 1,500 square miles or so of almost totally uninhabited land just south of us, the ‘Yolla Bolly Wilderness Area,’<sup>[a]</sup> where even hunters and hikers are fairly rare. Up to the 1920s, according to my textbook on ‘California Trees,’ it was the least explored part of California even from the point of view of identifying flora and fauna.”<sup>8</sup>

**I**T should be added that Eugene still retained the same approach to nature

that he had once expressed on the shore of Bon Tempe Lake. He was careful not to feel *too* at home in it. It was still of this earth, which had become subject to corruption since the fall of man, and which he knew was not his true home. He even had an aversion to modern photography where nature is glamorized, with heightened colors and textures. To him this was not real, not sober. He saw it as an artificial, lifeless portrayal of something living, and above all as a manifestation of *chiliasm*—the attempt to create heaven on earth. He saw chiliasm as well in advertisements where food is made to look as luscious and tantalizing as possible, and especially where it is inanelly made to look “exciting” and “fun.”

One may well wonder at this man who, while being cautious about making an idol of nature, had a greater appreciation and fascination for it than the vast majority of people. Eugene loved nature not in and of itself, but because he saw the hand of God in it, even in its state of corruption caused by man’s sin. Having known and loved the Maker, he was touched at heart by the things He had made. “There is something mystical in this magnificent creation,” he once wrote. “Being the good creation of the All-good God, it can raise our minds to Him.”<sup>9</sup>

## *Zealots of Orthodoxy*

*Know that we must serve, not the times, but God.*

—St. Athanasius the Great<sup>1</sup>

*The Sergianist spirit of legalism and compromise with the spirit of this world is everywhere in the Orthodox Church today. But we are called to be soldiers of Christ in spite of this!*

—Fr. Seraphim Rose, 1980<sup>2</sup>

**I**N their magazine, the brothers had been upholding the purity of the Orthodox Faith and defending it against betrayal and compromise of that Faith by some of its leading representatives. As faithful members of the Russian Church Abroad, they had never ceased to take a strong stand for what they called “true Orthodoxy,” unadulterated and undiluted.

In the defense of Orthodoxy against compromise, the chief issue of the day was seen to be ecumenism. According to the understanding of the ancient Church, the word *oikouméne* (“the whole inhabited earth”) had been used to refer to the confirming of all peoples in the fullness and purity of Truth; but in the modern age this meaning had been changed into just the opposite — the watering down and glossing over of saving truths for the sake of outward unity with the non-Orthodox. To Eugene, of course, this was one more preparation for the world unity of Antichrist, about which the Holy Fathers had clearly written. Throughout history, countless confessors had died to preserve the Church free from theological error, to maintain her purity as the Ark of salvation. And now some of the leading Orthodox hierarchs, according to their “enlightened”

modern understanding, were trying to overlook these errors and were seeking ways to amalgamate with those who held them.

At this time, the most visible Orthodox ecumenist was the Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagoras I. Meeting with Pope Paul VI in the Holy Land in 1963, he began to steer a course of non-doctrinally oriented ecumenical dialogue, asserting, “Let the dogmas be placed in the storeroom,” and, “The age of Dogma has passed.”<sup>3</sup> In December of 1965, through an act of “mutual pardon” made in conjunction with Pope Paul VI, he attempted to unite the Orthodox and Roman Churches — without first requiring that the latter renounce its false doctrines. As one of his advisors in his Patriarchate later wrote: “The Schism of A.D. 1054, which has divided the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, is no longer valid. It has been erased from the history and life of the two Churches by the mutual agreement and signatures of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagoras I, and the Patriarch of the West, Pope Paul VI.”<sup>4</sup> In an address he gave a year before his death in 1972, Patriarch Athenagoras himself claimed that he and Pope Paul had “lifted the schism, both here and in Rome,” and he affirmed that “when Catholics or Protestants approach and ask to commune, I offer them the holy Chalice!”<sup>5</sup>

Since Orthodoxy has no single “infallible” head like Roman Catholicism, the Patriarch could not really accomplish this without the common consent of the Orthodox world. There were some who hailed Patriarch Athenagoras as a “prophet” of a new age, even calling for his canonization while he was still alive, but most of the Local Orthodox Churches did not go along with him. As in former eras when hierarchs betrayed the Orthodox Faith, those who truly loved that Faith remained vigilant and thereby guarded it against theological and dogmatic taint. Among the most prominent opponents of Patriarch Athenagoras’ unionist program were the chief hierarch of the Orthodox Church of Greece, Archbishop Chrysostomos; the clairvoyant and miracle-working Greek elder, Archimandrite Philotheos Zervakos (†1980);<sup>6</sup> and the renowned Serbian theologian, Archimandrite Justin Popovich (†1979).<sup>[a]</sup>

During the years 1966 to 1969, Eugene and Gleb published articles in *The Orthodox Word* showing how Patriarch Athenagoras had gone astray and calling him to return to genuine Orthodoxy.<sup>7</sup> In order to place contemporary events in historical perspective, in 1967 they also published material by and about St. Mark of Ephesus, the great confessor of Orthodoxy who in the fifteenth century had thwarted an attempt to unite the Orthodox Faith with Latin error at the false Council of Florence.<sup>8</sup>

Recalling the initial response to their articles about Patriarch Athenagoras, Eugene later wrote: “In our early issues when we began to get complaints about being so outspoken about Patriarch Athenagoras... etc., we went to Vladika John in some doubt — perhaps we really shouldn’t be so outspoken? But glory be to God, Vladika John fully supported us and blessed us to continue in the same spirit.”<sup>9</sup>

Since they lived in America, the brothers also felt obliged to publish pleas to the chief hierarch of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Archbishop Iakovos. Calling Patriarch Athenagoras “the spiritual father of the renaissance of Orthodoxy,”<sup>10</sup> Archbishop Iakovos closely followed his policies, participating in various ecumenical events and services.

**B**EING the philosopher that he was, Eugene was not satisfied to merely know about the errors of modern ecumenism, to know that they were foreign to the consciousness of the true Church of Christ. He wanted to go deeper, to discern *why* people like Patriarch Athenagoras and Archbishop Iakovos believed as they did, what caused this obvious reorientation of the traditional view of the “One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.” The statements of these hierarchs themselves gave him a clue.

We have seen how Eugene felt about the “New Christianity,” the scarcely disguised humanism and worldly idealism of contemporary Roman popes. One can imagine, then, how it disturbed him to witness hierarchs of his own Orthodox Church following the lead of these popes, espousing the very same

fashionable ideas. Behind these ideas, Eugene saw what in the early 1960s he had identified as the first corollary of Nihilism: the concept of the inauguration of a “new age,” a new kind of time.

In a letter of 1970, Eugene wrote to a priest who had offered to compose an article on the ideas of Patriarch Athenagoras and Archbishop Iakovos:

Several years ago I myself began an investigation into what might be called the “basic philosophy of the twentieth century.” This exists now partly in unfinished manuscript, partly in my mind; but I pursued the question far enough, I think, to discover that there *is*, after all, such a basic philosophy in spite of all the anarchy of modern thought. And once I had grasped the essence of this philosophy (which, I believe, was expressed most clearly by Nietzsche and by a character of Dostoyevsky in the phrase: ‘God is dead, therefore man becomes God and everything is possible’—the heart of modern nihilism, anarchism, and anti-Christianity) everything else fell into place, and modern philosophers, writers, artists, etc., became understandable as more or less clearly, more or less directly, expressing this “philosophy.”

And so it was that the other day, as I was reading Archbishop Iakovos’ article in the July–August *Orthodox Observer*: “A New Epoch?” I suddenly felt that I had found an insight into the “essence of Iakovism.” Is not, indeed, the basic heresy *chiliasm*? What else, indeed, could justify such immense changes and monstrous perversions in Orthodoxy except the concept that we are entering entirely new historical circumstances, an entirely new *kind* of time, in which the concepts of the past are no longer relevant, but we must be guided by the voices of the new time? Does not Fr. [Nicon] Patrinos, in past issues of the *Orthodox Observer*, justify Patriarch Athenagoras — not as theologian, not as traditionalist, but precisely as *prophet*, as one whose heresies cannot be condemned because he already lives in the “new time,” ahead of his own times? Patriarch

Athenagoras himself has been quoted as speaking of the coming of the “Third Age of the Holy Spirit” — a clearly chiliastic idea which has its chief recent champion in N. Berdyaev, and can be traced back directly to Joachim of Fiore, and indirectly to the Montanists. The whole idea of a “new age,” of course, penetrates every fiber of the last two centuries with their preoccupation with “progress,” and is *the* key idea of the very concept of Revolution (from French to Bolshevik), is the central idea of modern occultism (visible on the popular level in today’s talk of the “age of Aquarius,” the astrological post-Christian age), and has owed its spread probably chiefly to Freemasonry (there’s a Scottish Rite publication in America called “New Age”). (I regret to say that the whole philosophy is also present in the American dollar bill with its Masonic heritage, with its “novus ordo seclorum” and its unfinished pyramid, awaiting the thirteenth stone on top!)[b] In Christian terms, it is the philosophy of Antichrist, the one who will turn the world upside down and “change the times and seasons.”... And the whole concept of ecumenism is, of course, permeated with this heresy and the “refounding of the Church.”[c]

The recent “thought” of Constantinople (to give it a dignified name!) is full either of outright identification of the Kingdom of Heaven with the “new epoch” (the wolf lying down with the lamb) or of emphasis on an entirely new kind of time and/or Christianity that makes previous Christian standards obsolete:[d] new morality, new religion, springtime of Christianity, refounding the Church, the need no longer to pray for crops or weather because *Man* controls these now,[e] etc.

How appropriate, too, for the chiliast cause that we live (since 1917) in the ‘post-Constantinian age’;[f] for it was at the beginning of that age, i.e., at the time of the golden age of the Fathers, that the heresy of chiliasm was crushed....[g] And indeed, together with the Revolutions that have toppled the Constantinian era, we have seen a reform of Christianity that does away with the Church as an instrument of God’s grace for men’s eternal salvation

and replaces it with the “social gospel.” Archbishop Iakovos’ article has not one word about salvation, but is concerned only for the “world.”<sup>[11](#)</sup>

**A**s an editor and missionary, Eugene felt he had to address another kind of compromise by Orthodox leaders: that of capitulation to godless Communist regimes. This had become an issue as early as 1927, when Metropolitan Sergius Stragorodsky of Nizhni-Novgorod, the then acting Locum Tenens of the Patriarchal Throne of Moscow, was released from several months of incarceration in a Soviet prison. On July 29, succumbing to pressure from the Communist authorities, he issued a “Declaration” of the loyalty of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Soviet government. This Declaration was published in the official Soviet newspaper *Izvestiya*, together with an interview with Metropolitan Sergius in which he affirmed that he and his Synod would “submit to all the rulings of the Soviet Power with full sincerity.”<sup>[12](#)</sup> At the same time, in accordance with a promise he had given to the authorities, Metropolitan Sergius demanded of the Russian clergy abroad their signatures of loyalty to the Soviet regime.

Metropolitan Sergius instituted this policy of total capitulation at a time when the Communists — following Vladimir Lenin’s words “Marxism is mercilessly hostile to all religion”<sup>[13](#)</sup> — had begun an assault on the Church unprecedented even in pagan Roman times. In 1927, the same year that Metropolitan Sergius issued his Declaration of loyalty, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin told a group of American visitors: “We carry on antireligious propaganda and will carry on propaganda against religious prejudices.... The party cannot be neutral with respect to religion.... Have we pressed the reactionary clergy? Yes, we have. The only unfortunate thing is that they have not yet been completely eliminated.”<sup>[14](#)</sup>

When many of Metropolitan Sergius’ fellow hierarchs refused to go along with his policy, they were labeled “political criminals” and were sent to Soviet death-camps. Metropolitan Sergius’ defenders claimed that his policy saved the



Church from being liquidated altogether, since the Russian Church had to capitulate to the Soviet regime in order to possess a legal existence within the state. Eugene's mentor Archbishop John Maximovitch, however, disagreed with this view. In an article that Eugene translated and published in *The Orthodox Word*, Archbishop John wrote: "The Declaration of Metropolitan Sergius brought no benefit to the Church. The persecutions not only did not cease, but they even increased. To the other accusations which the Soviet regime made against clergy and laymen was added yet one more — not recognizing the Declaration. At the same time churches without number were closed throughout Russia. Within a few years almost all churches were destroyed or put to various other uses. Whole provinces remained without a single church. Concentration camps and places of forced labor held thousands of clergy, a significant part of which never regained freedom, being executed there or dying from excessive labors and deprivations. Even the children of priests and all believing laymen were persecuted."<sup>15</sup>

In the years following his Declaration, Metropolitan Sergius continued to be — either willingly or unwillingly — a mouthpiece of the Soviet State. In 1930, when protests were heard in the West against the persecution of Christians in the U.S.S.R., the Metropolitan came out with public statements that there was no persecution at all against believers; that information in the Western press about such persecution was a malicious invention of the enemies of the Soviet regime; that clergymen and believers were tried and punished not for faith but exclusively for counter-revolutionary activity; and that while churches were sometimes closed, this was done according to the wishes of the population.<sup>16</sup> In 1942, after the majority of priests and almost all the bishops (with the exception of a small number who collaborated with the authorities) had gone to martyrdom in the camps, Metropolitan Sergius once again issued statements that religious persecution in the U.S.S.R. was only an "illusion."<sup>17</sup>

Metropolitan Sergius was elected Patriarch of Moscow in 1943 and reposed in 1944. Since all opposition to his policy of capitulation had been

systematically removed by the Soviet regime, it remained the unchallenged policy of the Church administration in Russia during subsequent decades. Many believers, both in Russia and abroad, looked on it as a kind of betrayal. They came to refer to it as “Sergianism”: a term which denoted selling out faithfulness to Christ for the sake of preserving the external church organization, or, more generally, for the sake of any earthly advantage.

**T**HE Church administration in Russia followed Metropolitan Sergius’ policy out of compulsion; and, as Archbishop John wrote, “for those in Russia who were undergoing terrible sufferings there might be conditions that would mitigate their moral capitulation to the cruel regime — just as the church canons at the time of the persecutions mitigated the penances of those who renounced Christ after terrible sufferings.”<sup>18</sup> What concerned Eugene, however, was that in 1969–70 a similar moral capitulation was also to be seen in the free West, where there were no mitigating circumstances as in suffering Russia. This new — and in Eugene’s view totally unjustifiable — compromise arose out of negotiations between one of the Russian Churches in America, the American Metropolia, and the Soviet-dominated Patriarchate of Moscow. In an action which Eugene and his fellow members of the Russian Church Abroad called a “coup,” the Metropolia arranged to become an “autocephalous” or independent Church under Moscow sponsorship. Again, this was contemporaneous with renewed persecution of the Church in Russia. The hierarch who helped arrange the autocephaly was Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad, a man notorious in the West for his public denial of religious persecution in the U.S.S.R.

“The American Metropolia doubtless fell into this trap out of naïveté,” wrote Eugene in 1970, “and already its hierarchs are demonstrating that its so-called independence conceals a subtle form of psychological dependence.” Eugene read newspaper articles which showed that Metropolia clergy and bishops had begun to apologize, not only for the Soviet domination of the church organization, but even for the Soviet system itself. One priest, he wrote, “admits

some Soviet bishops are Soviet agents, that the whole autocephaly follows political trends set forth by the Soviet government; Bishop ——— is quoted as saying that he found the Soviet people to be happy and well dressed, and if some complain about the Government, well, so do Americans!”<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere Eugene quoted the same bishop as saying, “As Americans we have to reassess our ideas of life in the Soviet Union.” Such statements, Eugene wrote, “reveal the ‘autocephaly’ as an important tool for Moscow in politically ‘neutralizing’ public opinion in the West.”<sup>20</sup>

Asserting that it was far worse to capitulate to a nihilist state in freedom than under compulsion, Eugene wrote to a priest of the Metropolia:

You will find in our midst great sympathy and pity for all but the leading hierarchs of Moscow — and even for some of them you will find fellow-feeling owing to the inhuman circumstances under which they have been forced to betray Orthodoxy.... But this fellow-feeling cannot allow us who are free to... place ourselves in the same trap she [the Moscow Patriarchate] was *forced* into! And this the Metropolia has done.... With every fiber of our being and every feeling of our soul we are repulsed by this *free* act of betrayal.... Do you not grasp the immensity of your spiritual bondage?<sup>21</sup>

In another place, Eugene asked:

Is “stepping out onto the world Orthodox scene” really so important to the Metropolia that it must do it at the expense of the suffering Russian Orthodox faithful? To give one small example: Metropolitan Nikodim is the Metropolia’s great “benefactor,” and no one can doubt that his success with the Metropolia has strengthened his position with the Moscow Patriarchate. On the other hand, the layman Boris Talantov in the USSR has openly called Metropolitan Nikodim a betrayer of the Church, a liar, and an agent of world anti-Christianity, for which statements (among others) he was imprisoned by the Soviets; Metropolitan Nikodim tells the West that he was

in prison for “anti-governmental activities.” On January 4 of this year Boris Talantov died in prison, undoubtedly the victim of Metropolitan Nikodim (among others). Can the Metropolia feel itself to be on the side of this confessor? I don’t see how it can.<sup>[22](#)</sup>

In articles he wrote for *The Orthodox Word*, Eugene indicated the self-contradictions of the Metropolia’s position. To provide background for the whole subject, the brothers published rare documents of the early days of the Catacomb Church in Russia, written by bishops and priests who had protested against Metropolitan Sergius’ Declaration. But Eugene wanted to go beyond the mere political issue of “Sergianism.” Again he had to go deeper, to understand *why* people succumbed to it, both in Russia and in the West. In a letter to a young convert, he addressed this question by first comparing the Turkish and the Communist Yokes:

The Turks persecuted the Church and, when possible, used it for political purposes. But their worst intention did not go beyond making Christians slaves and, in some cases, forcibly converting them to Islam. The Christian thus might be a slave or a martyr, but on the spiritual side he was free; the Turkish Yoke was *external*.<sup>[\[h\]](#)</sup>

But with the Soviets, the aim is much deeper: ultimately, to destroy the Church entirely, using the Church’s hierarchs themselves (when possible) as the agents of this scheme; and, on the way to this end, getting the Church to defend Communism abroad and to preach a ‘Communist Christianity’ that prepares the way ideologically for the coming triumph of world Communism, not only as a universal political regime, but as an ideological and pseudo-religious tyranny as well. In order to appreciate this one has to realize what Communism is: not merely a power-mad political regime, but an ideological-religious system whose aim is to overthrow and supplant all other systems, most of all Christianity. Communism is actually a very

powerful *heresy* whose central thesis, if I'm not mistaken, is chiliasm or millennialism: history is to reach its culmination in an indefinite state of earthly blessedness, a perfected mankind living in perfect peace and harmony. Examine the printed sermons of the Moscow hierarchs: again and again one finds the same theme of the coming of the "Kingdom of God on earth" through the spread of Communism. This is outright heresy, or perhaps something even worse: the turning aside of the Church from its very purpose — the saving of souls for eternal life — and giving them over to the devil's kingdom, promising a false blessedness on earth and condemning them to everlasting damnation.

The whole of modern Western Christianity is permeated already with this worldly, basically chiliastic orientation, and the more "liberal," more worldly Orthodox Churches (such as the Metropolia) have been infected from this source; and probably the reason why most people in the Metropolia so easily accepted the autocephaly is because inwardly they do not grasp what is happening....

Just the other day I read an astute comment on the iconoclastic crisis of the seventh and the eighth centuries. Before the Seventh Ecumenical Council the Orthodox Church did not have any explicit "doctrine on icons," and so one could argue that the Iconoclasts were not heretics at all, and the dispute was one over the secondary issue of "rite" or "practice." Nonetheless, the Church (in the person of Her champions, the leading icon-venerators) *felt* She was fighting a heresy, something destructive to the Church Herself; and after Her champions had suffered and died for this Orthodox sensitivity, and Her theologians had finally managed to put down explicitly [in writing] the doctrine She already knew in Her heart — then the cause of Orthodoxy triumphed at the Seventh Ecumenical Council, and the Iconoclasts were clearly singled out as heretics.

I suspect that the very same thing, only much vaster and more complicated, is happening today: that those who *feel* Orthodoxy (through

living its life of grace and being exposed to and raised on its basic treasures — lives of saints, Patristic writings, etc.) are battling together against an enemy, a heresy, that has not yet been fully defined or manifested. Separate aspects or manifestations of it (chiliasm, social Gospel, renovationism, ecumenism) may be identified and fought, but the battle is largely instinctive as yet, and those who do not *feel* Orthodoxy in their heart and bones (e.g., those who are brought up on “Concern” and “Young Life”<sup>[i]</sup> instead of lives of saints!) do not really know what you’re talking about and they can’t understand how you can become so excited over something which no council has ever identified as a heresy. In the testimony of the Catacomb bishops of the late 1920s one finds again and again that the GPU agents asked them first of all whether they were for or against Metropolitan Sergius, and if they were against, then these agents demonstrated that Sergius had “violated neither dogmas or canons.” Thus, either atheist torturers are “defending the Church” — or else there is something dreadfully wrong, and the Church is up against an extremely formidable enemy. As it turns out, however, there are several dogmatic and canonical grounds on which Metropolitan Sergius was wrong; but first of all the Orthodox soul *sensed* that he was on the wrong side.<sup>23</sup>

**I**N the face of the spiritually destructive forces working against the Orthodox Faith, Eugene felt that he had to bring more people into the fold of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, which he saw as one of the last holdouts against compromise; and he wrote many letters and articles toward this end. Here he could work together with other young zealots who had already joined this Church. Among these was Archimandrite Panteleimon, a Greek-American priest-monk who was the same age as the brothers. Gleb had known him since 1960. At that time Fr. Panteleimon had been trying to establish a monastery in Boston, Massachusetts, together with his friends from seminary, but the Greek

Archdiocese of America had not allowed him to do so. Later, when Eugene and Gleb were living in San Francisco, Gleb suggested that Fr. Panteleimon join the Russian Church Abroad, but Fr. Panteleimon objected that this Church was unrecognized because of its refusal to be under the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate. To this Gleb responded that one has to understand the nature of Communism in order to understand the existence of the Russian Church Abroad. Fr. Panteleimon, being Greek, was familiar with the Turkish persecution of the Greek Church, and thought that this was basically the same as the persecution of religion under Communism.

Gleb turned to Eugene as one better qualified to explain the spiritual and philosophical basis of Communism and how its yoke was different from that of the Turks. “Fr. Panteleimon is a good man,” Gleb said. “And he’s enthusiastic about the same thing we are — the transplanting of Orthodox monasticism in America — just what American converts need. You should help him.”

Eugene gladly consented. In the course of their correspondence, Fr. Panteleimon was convinced of the soundness of Eugene’s views. He thanked him, saying that he would be joining the Russian Church Abroad, where he would find a stronger confession of the Faith and less opposition to his monastic endeavors. By 1970 his monastery of the Holy Transfiguration in Boston was a renowned spiritual center, attracting American converts to the Orthodox Faith, and publishing classic Orthodox texts and Church services in English.

**E**UGENE was to learn through bitter experience, however, that the deceptions of the times were not so simple or clear-cut that they could be overcome by just “joining the Russian Church Abroad.” “The agony of suffering Orthodoxy in our days,” he was to write, “cannot always be solved by a change of jurisdictions.”<sup>24</sup> He was to learn that a peculiar kind of liberalism could be found within the most conservative churches, and that the spirit of Sergianism could be found within the most anti-Communist ones. In a letter of 1972 he wrote about one of the leading bishops of his own Russian Church Abroad: “So

far his basic attitudes as revealed in English are ‘correct’—but there are certain things in which he has not yet revealed himself (which are evident in his Russian publications). But first of all there is lacking in his ‘correctness’ a certain spark, a certain indefinable Orthodox ‘fragrance’ which may be, when the time comes, the only thing that will enable us to discern and cling to Orthodoxy. It is this ‘spark,’ and not correctness, which draws the converts, and when we sense its absence in Vladika ——— we become uneasy. (‘Sergianism’ also seems to be bound up with the loss of this spark.)”<sup>25</sup>

In his later years Eugene would put it this way: “The heart of Sergianism is bound up with the common problem of all the Orthodox Churches today — the losing of the savor of Orthodoxy, taking the Church for granted, taking the ‘organization’ for the Body of Christ, trusting that Grace and the Mysteries are somehow ‘automatic.’ Logic and reasonable behavior are not going to get us over these rocks; much suffering and experience are required, and few will understand.”<sup>26</sup>



## *The Apogee of the Brotherhood*

*Possessed by life's darkness, unexpectedly our minds have received illumination, O holy Father Herman. Wherefore, on thine intercession before God we place our hope.*

—Service to St. Herman of Alaska, stichera for Small Vespers

**I**T'S mysterious," Gleb writes, "how one can unexpectedly encounter a Saint who died over a hundred years ago and then be swept into his life. One becomes a part of his life; sometimes one even hears and sees him, for he is alive."

Gleb recalls that fateful day in 1961 when the story of Blessed Herman of Alaska unexpectedly opened a host of new possibilities to him — possibilities that were to alter his life and Eugene's forever:

"It was early in the spring, during Great Lent, near the end of my last year of seminary. Having some free time on Sunday after Liturgy, I thought that I would take this long-awaited opportunity to walk in the fields and woods around Holy Trinity Monastery, and to finally read a booklet I had bought from a Russian book peddler on the Feast of Pentecost of the previous summer. This time-worn little booklet, *Fr. Herman: A Missionary to America*, was the original Life of Fr. Herman published by Valaam Monastery in 1894.<sup>1</sup> At that time, apart from having seen his picture, I knew nothing about Fr. Herman. In 1961 he had been largely forgotten in the Orthodox world. The Church had published no Life of him in English, and even among Russians he wasn't talked about. Only the native Aleuts in Alaska held dear his memory, treasured his sayings, and revered him as a saint.

“On that day, as I read the Life of Blessed Herman, ‘unexpectedly my mind received illumination,’ for I realized for the first time that *here*, on this very land I was standing on, in faraway Alaska, was buried a treasure, a piece of Holy Russia, the righteous missionary to America — Fr. Herman.

“The day was glorious. The sky was a bit overcast, but the fields and dales through which I roamed were filled with the new life of springtime. Patches of snow were melting all around, torrents of water rushed below, and crocuses were blooming. And as nature was awakening to the fullness of life, so too was I. Through the pages of this booklet, I was about to receive new life. My heart was filled with inspiration, for I had just received an indication as to why we were in America. It was to tap that spring, that life-giving spring which was hidden in Alaska, covered by stones. All I had to do was lift those stones and dig; the spring would gush forth, melting the ice and snow of contemporary life.”

At that moment Gleb conceived the idea of making a pilgrimage to Spruce Island to unearth the “buried treasure,” to pray at Blessed Herman’s grave, and to receive from him an indication of his life’s path. It has already been related how the Fr. Herman Brotherhood had been conceived at the holy Elder’s grave, and how, only a few weeks later, Gleb had been led by Blessed Herman to meet Eugene. Eugene had also “unexpectedly received illumination” from Blessed Herman: Gleb’s slide show on “Holy Places in America,” through which Eugene had discovered the Alaskan Elder for the first time, had been a revelation to him, one which helped to bring him, an American, into the Orthodox Church.

Through Blessed Herman, both these young men had had their life’s calling revealed. Now it was their task to carry out the wish that Gleb had expressed at the blessed one’s grave: to reveal, in turn, his holiness to the world, so that he would be counted among the saints and become a source of strength to Orthodox America. In the very first issue of *The Orthodox Word*, they printed the first Life of him written in English, *Father Herman: Alaska’s Saint*. Gleb had found this Life unexpectedly in the Harvard Library. A bibliographical rarity, it had been written by an early historian of the Pacific Northwest, F. A. Golder, who had

published it in the 1920s in small quantities as a little Christmas gift to be sent to his friends. Golder had visited Valaam Monastery while doing research in Russia in 1914, and had put down in his notes the monastery version of Fr. Herman's life. Although not a member of the Orthodox Church, this honest historian had written with evident sympathy toward the Elder, calling him a saint long before he was formally proclaimed one.

When presenting Golder's work in *The Orthodox Word*, the brothers made some corrections and annotations and followed it with accounts of miracles of Blessed Herman which they had compiled. One of these miracles had been recorded by Gleb on his way from Alaska to California, just before his first meeting with Eugene. On Spruce Island, Fr. Gerasim had told him of an Aleut woman named Alexandra Chichineva, who in the year 1907 had been healed of a painful crippling disease (tubercular hip) at the grave of Blessed Herman. Later she had sent her crutches to the Spruce Island chapel as a witness to the miracle. Since Fr. Gerasim said she was now living in Seattle, Gleb attempted to locate her when passing through that city. After a difficult search (she had since married and changed her name), he finally arrived at her apartment late at night. "I entered her dwelling place," he recalls, "and was at once struck with Blessed Herman's presence. She was half Aleut, about sixty years of age, very frail; and she spoke with great feeling. She told me she had feared that the miracle which had taken place would never get published since all had forgotten Blessed Herman. With tears and in full detail, she dictated to me her tender story.... Before me sat a wonderful Christian believing soul. She wept from happiness that someone had cared enough for Blessed Herman to bother to find her, and she expressed her unworthiness and thankfulness. She also told me that years ago Fr. Gerasim had sent her some dried flowers from Spruce Island, and that these flowers occasionally broke forth in fragrance, especially before an important event in her life, as if Blessed Herman was giving her a sign of his closeness. She also showed me her leg, which remained shorter than the other due to the sickness in her childhood.

“Upon arriving home, I typed out her story and translated it into Russian, sending her both versions to verify and sign if all was correct, which she did. Within a few years she reposed in the Lord. Her sister sent me a photograph of her taken on Spruce Island a few years after the miracle had taken place there, stating: ‘She never used her crutches from the day she received the healing at Fr. Herman’s chapel. She led a normal life and was even able to dance.’”<sup>2</sup>

In 1968, not long before their move to the mountains, the brothers published F. A. Golder’s *Life of Blessed Herman*, together with accounts of sixteen miracles, in book form. This, the Brotherhood’s first book, was also the first book on Blessed Herman to appear in English (or in Russian since the previous century). The brothers’ clear intent in publishing it was to draw attention to his sanctity and thus prepare the way for his formal glorification. In the introduction they made a strong case for his canonization, pointing out that in Russia before the Revolution he had been placed on the list of great Russian ascetics and candidates for sainthood.

**H**AVING fulfilled this duty to their patron, Eugene and Gleb still had another commission from Blessed Herman, one which they believed he had given them several years before.

On Blessed Herman’s day back in 1963, a few months after Archbishop John had blessed the foundation of the Brotherhood, Helen Kontzevitch had given Gleb a Russian manuscript, begging that the Brotherhood help her publish it. It was the work of her late uncle, Sergei Nilus. Unable to have it printed in the Soviet Union, Nilus had asked her to have it published in the free West, and she had solemnly vowed to do so. Now, having had the manuscript turned down by church publishers and being without a way to do it herself, she had turned to the Fr. Herman Brotherhood as her last resort.

Gleb saw spiritual significance in the fact that Helen had given him the book on the commemoration day of Blessed Herman. “The book she’s got,” he immediately wrote to Eugene, “deals with his [Sergei Nilus’] last impressions of

Optina's spiritual life, and is the second volume of a book published in 1916: *On the Bank of God's River*, meaning the river on which Optina is situated. It is a matter of vital importance to have this book printed *soon!* I think that this is a push of Fr. Herman himself!!! Why should she talk to me about that? She's afraid she'll die and there will be no one to see to it that it's published. Now we have a definite job to perform!"

The book the Brotherhood had been given was vastly significant to Russia and the world; within its pages were previously withheld prophecies of St. Seraphim of Sarov from his "Conversation with N. A. Motovilov." When Sergei Nilus had discovered the "Conversation" a few years before St. Seraphim's canonization in 1903, the Russian church censor had omitted these prophecies, considering that their publication might cause skeptics to hinder the Saints' glorification. According to the notes of Motovilov that Nilus discovered, St. Seraphim had said that after his repose his relics would not remain in Sarov, that after a period of time he would resurrect and go from Sarov Monastery to the Diveyevo Convent he had founded, that a multitude of people would assemble, that he would uncover four relics in Diveyevo, and that after uncovering them he himself would lie down in their midst.

Right after St. Seraphim's canonization in 1903, the Abbess of Diveyevo, Maria, repeated the Saint's prophecies to Sergei Nilus: "Just as the procession with the cross now went from Diveyevo to Sarov, so will it go from Sarov to Diveyevo: 'And there will be so many people,' as spake our God-pleaser, St. Seraphim, 'as there are ears in a field. That will be a miracle of miracles, a wonder of wonders.'" <sup>3</sup>

Nilus had died without seeing these prophecies, which he called the "Great Diveyevo Mystery," revealed in print.

In 1969 the Brotherhood was finally able to publish Nilus' *On the Bank of God's River, Volume II*, its first book in the Russian language. Although the brothers could only afford to print four hundred copies of it, the "mustard seed" grew, and the report of the prophecies somehow began to spread throughout

Russia. By the time Russia was freed from Communist tyranny twenty-three years later, it became apparent that St. Seraphim's prophecies were known everywhere.

In 1991 the Saint's relics were revealed and carried in procession to Diveyevo, with over a million people assembled. Many people believe that this was the "resurrection" that the Saint had prophesied to Motovilov. And indeed, it was somehow linked with the resurrection of Holy Russia that the Saint prophesied elsewhere — for within months after the procession with his relics to Diveyevo, the totalitarian atheist regime in Russia fell.<sup>4</sup>

In the years that followed, the relics of three foundresses of Diveyevo — Abbess Alexandra, Schemanun Martha, and Nun Elena Manturova — were uncovered and placed in the Diveyevo church of the Nativity; and on December 9/22, 2000, these three righteous women were canonized in Diveyevo by the Russian Orthodox Church. Thus another of St. Seraphim's prophecies was partially fulfilled. It remains unknown whose will be the fourth relics which, according to St. Seraphim, will be uncovered.<sup>5</sup>

The "Great Diveyevo Mystery," which Sergei Nilus feared would remain hidden under a bushel, has now been published by the Church in Russia in millions of freely distributed copies. But the greatest wonder is that this mystery, which Nilus discovered nearly a century ago, is now unfolding into reality.

**I**T was soon after *On the Bank of God's River, Volume II* came out that the brothers moved to the wilderness. A few months later, on Sunday, October 12, 1969, they went to scout out new terrain at Eugene's request, hiking far down into the gorge below their mountain. Late in the day they turned back, only to realize they did not know where they were. They kept climbing higher in an attempt to orient themselves, but to no avail. It was rapidly growing darker and colder. They knew that if they did not find their way, certainly no one would find *them* in this remote area.

Eventually, however, the brothers found their way to the dirt road leading

over the ridge. Utterly exhausted, covered with scratches from walking cross-country through thorny shrubs, they followed the road back to the skete. Some days later they received news: Fr. Gerasim had died in Alaska. The brothers realized that his death had occurred on the very day that they had been lost in the gorge. How appropriate, they thought, that they had at that moment been alone in the heart of the rugged wilderness, tasting a bit of what Fr. Gerasim had endured throughout thirty-five years of heroic desert-dwelling. But how sad it was, Gleb felt, that they had not been able to fulfill Fr. Gerasim's dream of a monastery on Spruce Island while Fr. Gerasim had still been alive to see it!

**L**ESS than a year later another dream of Fr. Gerasim, for which he had long waited and prayed, was fulfilled at last: Blessed Herman was canonized by the universal Orthodox Church. This event came as the culmination of the labors of the Fr. Herman Brotherhood, the fulfillment of the original purpose of its existence.

Work toward the canonization of St. Herman had begun as early as 1939, during a brief period (1935–46) when the American Metropolia and the Russian Church Abroad were working together in America under the presidency of Metropolitan Theophilus Pashkovsky.<sup>[a]</sup> Metropolitan Theophilus had entrusted a committee of three bishops with the task of investigating Fr. Herman's life and miracles: Archbishop Tikhon of San Francisco (Church Abroad), who was appointed chairman; Bishop Alexey of the Aleutians and Alaska (Metropolia); and Bishop Leonty (the future Metropolitan of the Metropolia). This effort was hindered by the Second World War, and by the subsequent split of the two Russian Churches in America.<sup>6</sup>

Later, when Archbishop John Maximovitch became Archbishop Tikhon's successor in the San Francisco cathedra, he too had taken an active interest in the canonization. In August of 1963, when bestowing his blessing on the Brotherhood, he had told Eugene and Gleb, "Soon we shall canonize Fr. Herman." The following year, while preparing to canonize Fr. John of

Kronstadt, he had personally gone to one of the elder hierarchs of the Metropolia, Archbishop John Shahovskoy,<sup>[b]</sup> and had sought to come to an agreement with him. The Russian Church Abroad, he proposed, would canonize Fr. John of Kronstadt, and the Metropolia, since the Russian churches in Alaska were under its charge, would canonize Fr. Herman. Each Church would accept the other's canonization, and that way both Churches would have both Saints as intercessors.<sup>7</sup> This idea did not come to pass at that time, and Archbishop John Maximovitch did not live to see Blessed Herman's canonization.

In 1970, however, the Archbishop's prediction was fulfilled. The Metropolia, having recently changed its name to the Orthodox Church in America, made the decision to canonize Fr. Herman in Kodiak, Alaska, on July 27/August 9; and the Russian Church Abroad, in a decision that Eugene called "far-sighted,"<sup>8</sup> agreed to give its "Amen" to this by performing a simultaneous canonization in the San Francisco Cathedral.<sup>[c]</sup>

Brothers Eugene and Gleb began to fast and pray in order to write a service to Blessed Herman to be used at the canonization service in San Francisco. "It's interesting," Gleb says: "just as I had unexpectedly discovered the Life of Fr. Herman on that spring day, and had unexpectedly discovered the first Life of him in English at the Harvard Library, so also we unexpectedly came out with a service. Somehow it was finished quickly. We sang the service as we wrote it, since the words had to fit the melodic lines. We wrote two versions, Slavonic and English. Eugene would compose verses in English and I would translate them into Slavonic, and vice versa."

The brothers sent the service to a liturgical committee of the Russian Church Abroad, where the hymnographer Bishop Alypy<sup>[d]</sup> edited it and added some verses of his own. The Slavonic version was published at Jordanville and the English at Platina, first in *The Orthodox Word* and then as a separate booklet.<sup>9</sup> "This being really the first 'American' service, we've tried to make it a model in every way," Eugene noted.<sup>10</sup>

Less than a month before the canonization — on Blessed Fr. Herman's



nameday, the feast of Saints Sergius and Herman of Valaam (June 29/July 11)—Bishop Nektary came to the Platina skete just before dawn and served the Divine Liturgy. “This,” Eugene wrote, “was the beginning of daily *Litias*<sup>[e]</sup> for the repose of the about-to-be-glorified Saint.”<sup>11</sup> In connection with what was about to take place, Bishop Nektary told the brothers what his Elder had taught him about the intercessions of the saints: “When I was in Optina with Elder Nektary, the Elder, in giving me as a cell rule of prayer the ‘Optina Five-hundred’<sup>[f]</sup> by prayer-rope, said: ‘Just think, what a great thing is prayer to the saints! When you merely say, “All ye saints, pray to God for us,” at that moment in the Kingdom of Heaven all, all, all the saints who are at God’s Throne bow low simultaneously before the Lord and all together cry out: *Lord, have mercy.*’”

When Bishop Nektary told the brothers this, it made sense to them how everything had happened unexpectedly in connection with Blessed Herman, how they had so suddenly and easily composed their first service, and how they were already on the eve of the canonization.

“On the feast day of St. Seraphim (July 19/August 1),” Eugene recorded, “Vladika Anthony [of San Francisco] made a surprise visit to us not long after dawn (together with Deacon Nicholas, who brought a beautiful small cupola he had made for our printshop), and served the third Liturgy in our outdoor chapel, followed by a Pannikhida for Fr. Herman and the first reading of the Ukase [Decree] of Metropolitan Philaret<sup>[g]</sup> which will be in our new *Orthodox Word*.<sup>12</sup>

“The next week we expected Bishop Laurus,<sup>[h]</sup> Gleb’s onetime instructor at the seminary, to visit us, and we hastily finished a small kellion [monastic cell] we had begun some months ago — a lean-to, 8 × 8 ft., at the back door of our living cabin. He arrived Wednesday but stayed only a few hours and went right back. Thursday afternoon we left for San Francisco, and on Friday evening [July 25/August 7] the chief services began. But first we received an appropriate tongue-lashing (good for humility!) from Vladika Anthony for the ‘eighteen bishops’ we had predicted<sup>[i]</sup> — we had this printed in the Russian press also. Alas, our information was not too reliable, and no more than twelve or so had

really been expected, and several of these were unable to come owing to last-minute illness, urgent business, and the like, and only five attended after all, making the celebrations more modest but no less solemn for all that. Later Vladika Anthony thought he had been a little harsh on us and touchingly consoled us by telling us that with Patriarch Tikhon, Metropolitan Innocent,<sup>[i]</sup> and the reposed bishops of San Francisco and Alaska there would indeed be at least eighteen bishops spiritually present!

“And indeed, for all these bishops and for everyone else connected with Father Herman, commemoration was made at the requiem services of Friday night and Saturday morning. We were especially pleased to hear the list of names end each time with Archimandrite Gerasim of Spruce Island (who was also mentioned in Vladika Anthony’s sermon on Saturday morning), since he suffered so much in his own lifetime from the local Alaska clergy, and from the other side was criticized by some of our Synodal people for what they thought was his failure to take a definite stand after 1946.<sup>[k]</sup> But now, when the whole Church was gathered to canonize his beloved Father Herman, Fr. Gerasim too was there where he belonged. Fr. Panteleimon of Boston arrived for the Friday evening service, bringing with him relics of several saints, which were put out for veneration.... In the afternoon Fr. Vladimir of Jordanville arrived, bringing a relic of St. Herman (a tooth which Fr. Gerasim had given him years before), which was placed in the icon Fr. Cyprian<sup>[l]</sup> painted together with another relic — a piece of Fr. Herman’s coffin which Fr. Gerasim had given Bishop Andrew of New Diveyevo.”<sup>13</sup> <sup>[m]</sup>

**I**N the services surrounding the canonization, there was an incredible outpouring of grace. So radiant was the occasion — the first glorification of an Orthodox saint of America and actually of the whole Western Hemisphere — that it was compared to the awesome celebration at the canonization of St. Seraphim sixty-seven years earlier in Russia. In a special canonization issue of *The Orthodox Word*, Gleb and Eugene wrote:

“The great Paschal Saint, Seraphim of Sarov, who greeted everyone in every season with the Easter greeting, ‘Christ is risen!’ and sang Paschal hymns on the night of his repose in mid-winter, prophesied the glorious feast of his own canonization when he said: ‘My Joy, what joy there will be when they will sing Pascha in the midst of summer.’ And the thousands who attended his canonization on July 19/August 1, 1903, from Tsar Nicholas II on down, testified to the extraordinary Paschal elevation of the mid-summer solemnity. And St. Seraphim prophesied yet more: that shortly after this joyous feast there would come a long time of troubles, when the whole of Russia would be deluged with blood and the Russian people would undergo the most terrible sufferings, when many Russians would be scattered throughout the face of the earth.... And now, in the midst of this prophesied time of troubles and banishment, the Orthodox Russian faithful... has known for a second time such a ‘Pascha in the midst of summer’ at the canonization of the contemporary of St. Seraphim, St. Herman of Alaska, in San Francisco.... None of the faithful had come prepared to experience such a miraculous event as this. But already after the services of Saturday night, and certainly after the Sunday services, there was only one way in which those present could describe what they had felt: ‘It was like having Pascha all over again!’”<sup>14</sup>

Brothers Eugene and Gleb brought boxes full of copies of the service to be distributed during the canonization. The Brotherhood’s icon of St. Herman rested on top of Archbishop John’s coffin during all the services: the same icon before which the holy hierarch had once prayed in anticipation of this day.

At the canonization Vigil on Saturday night, some 1,500 people were in attendance. Eugene and Gleb stood on the kliros singing the verses that they had written. After the final Pannikhida was served for Fr. Herman at 6:00 p.m., Eugene recorded, “the long-awaited service to our newly-glorified Saint began. After the choir sang three *stichera*<sup>[n]</sup> of the Resurrection, the kliros choir of seminarians and clergy began — loud and clear — the stichera to St. Herman: ‘Leap up, ye waters of Valaam.’ Up to the last minute, Vladika Anthony hadn’t

decided how much should be sung in English, and he finally decided to begin with the final two stichera on ‘Lord, I have cried.’ But rather than the three or four feeble voices he perhaps expected, there was a veritable crowd of enthusiastic young English-singers, and he blessed us to add the ‘Glory’ [verse] in English too, which we did, slowly and solemnly. Here, as throughout the service, all the ‘special melodies’ were followed strictly, whether in Slavonic or English.

“At the Litia<sup>[o]</sup> there was a procession around the outside of the Cathedral, and the first commemoration was made of ‘St. Herman, Wonderworker of Alaska.’ Before the Polyeleos, Vladika Anthony gave an inspired sermon which set the tone for the entire celebration:

“‘As in every feature of St. Seraphim, who greeted everyone with the Paschal greeting, so in the features and especially in the repose of St. Herman there was manifested something Paschal.

“‘You all know how in the night of the Resurrection before the Matins the book of the Acts of the Apostles is read, and how then everyone lights candles, and the procession goes forth.... Elder Herman, sensing the approach of death, commanded candles to be lit and the Acts to be read, but having been mysteriously informed, he bade the candles be extinguished. In a week again at Herman’s command candles were lit, his disciple read the book of the Acts, and the Elder reposed in the fragrance of sanctity.

“‘And now we have come to the moment long postponed, but now already upon us, of the Saint’s glorification. By this there opens for us a new window into the Kingdom of Heaven, through which we breathe the air of eternity.’”<sup>15</sup>

At this point, Eugene recorded, the Archbishop did something unexpected which heightened the Paschal feeling of the canonization: “Vladika Anthony — who earlier, for seemingly obscure reasons, had instructed all clergy to bring white Paschal vestments for the canonization — now ordered all in the Cathedral to hold burning candles to greet the newly-glorified Saint as at the Pascha service.”<sup>16</sup>

The throng of faithful now appeared with lighted candles. The Royal Doors were opened, and the Cathedral became radiant with light. Archimandrite Cyprian of Jordanville later described the climactic moments that followed: “The Metropolitan [Philaret] and his hierarch concelebrants emerged from the Altar, followed by Protopresbyters,<sup>[p]</sup> Archimandrites, Hegumens [Abbots], Priests, Deacons, Subdeacons, and a multitude of servers of all ages. Surrounding them were the faithful with lighted candles, up to the very ambo. In the center, on an analogion adorned with flowers amidst a multitude of burning candles, veiled by a white covering and bound with a ribbon, was the image of St. Herman with a particle of his relics and coffin, toward which the attention of all was directed. After the final Alleluia of the Polyeleos the Metropolitan descended from the Cathedra and, making a wide sign of the Cross on himself, untied the ribbon and took off the covering. At this moment there resounded, there thundered forth from the clergy, ‘We glorify thee, our holy Father Herman....’ A repeated *Magnification* resounded from above, as if from the very dome, wherein is depicted the Lord God of Sabaoth upon the Cherubim and Seraphim. And then from the kliros a loud ‘We glorify’ in English.<sup>[q]</sup> And while this chant resounded back and forth, four deacons censed the Saint’s Icon, filling the church with fragrant incense.”<sup>17</sup>

During this triumphant part of the service, Gleb went briefly into the altar to be alone with St. Herman. “I opened the door of the left side altar,” he recalls, “and looked up at the fresco of St. Herman on the wall, which had been painted at our request. As I began to pray, all of a sudden I felt that here was my ‘daddy,’ that I was an orphan and that St. Herman was going to take care of me, just as he had taken care of the poor Aleut orphans on Spruce Island.

“I thought back to the first monastic tonsure I’d ever seen — in Jordanville in 1954. The new monk had been given the name Herman, after the co-founder of Old Valaam. At the time I had thought: ‘That’s what I want.’ And now, standing before St. Herman, I begged him, ‘Make it happen. Accept me as a monk. This is your day, your hour.’

“Eugene came quietly into the sanctuary with me. ‘I’ve made a decision,’ I whispered. ‘I’m going to ask to be made a monk. But it’s my decision — I don’t want to push you into anything.’

“‘I also want to be a monk,’ Eugene said.

“We came out of the altar, returned to the kliros, and began to read the canon to the Saint. I read the verses in Slavonic, and Eugene read the alternate verses in English. Bishop Nektary came and stood behind us, placing his hands on our shoulders. I turned and saw that his head was uncovered and that his whole face was drenched in tears. Coming closer, he whispered to us, ‘What a moment! What a wonderful, blissful moment in your life! This is the apogee, the apogee of your Brotherhood. It’s through your hands, you worked so hard for this. You’ve made an offering to glorify your Batiushka Herman, and God has crowned it. You wrote the service to him, and now you even read it at his canonization. How fortunate you are! And now, just think, through him a window opens into heaven. When you pray, ‘All saints, pray to God for me,’ he joins the saintly choir in bowing down before the Throne of God Himself, as Elder Nektary said. He says a prayer for you, and God hears.”

**T**HE next morning two Divine Liturgies were served. The first was celebrated by Archpriest Nicholas Dombrovsky, at which the brothers sang on the kliros; and the second, a Hierarchical Liturgy, was celebrated by Metropolitan Philaret with five deacons, thirty-two priests, and four hierarchs. The number of faithful increased from the night before, and the large Cathedral was filled to overflowing. “The Liturgy,” Eugene wrote, “proceeded slowly and solemnly. At the Entrance with the Gospel, the icon with relics was carried around the altar table — but not by the two oldest priests, who lifted it up at first, but by Archimandrites Panteleimon and Cyprian, as representing the monastic clergy at this monastic celebration. Vladika Anthony insisted on this understanding of the celebration and enforced it throughout. Before Holy Communion — in which it seemed the whole church participated — the

seminarians sang stichera in Slavonic and English.”<sup>18</sup>



Eugene at the canonization of St. Herman, leading the procession through the front doors of the Cathedral.

After the Liturgies a Moleben to St. Herman was served, beginning with a procession around the Cathedral. Wearing a white acolyte's robe and carrying a large, shining cross, Eugene led the procession out the front doors and into the sun-drenched summer air. Others followed him with church banners and icons; and then came the Saint's icon and relics, borne in a special frame by the twelve eldest presbyters. Behind the icon walked the hierarchs and servers, then monks, nuns, and the rest of the faithful. With the deacons swinging smoking censers and all the people singing, the procession instantly attracted the attention of busy Geary Boulevard. Descending in order to make the circuit of the Cathedral, the



people passed at midpoint the Sepulchre of Archbishop John and the Brotherhood's icon. At the four sides of the Cathedral litanies were pronounced by the deacons and holy water was sprinkled in all directions.



Eugene during the procession around the Cathedral.

After the procession, the hymn “Many years” was sung for the assembled hierarchs and faithful; for Archimandrite Panteleimon of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Boston and Archimandrite Panteleimon of Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville (the founders of the two monasteries), whose nameday this was; and for the Brotherhood, now of St. Herman. At this point Metropolitan Philaret presented to the Brotherhood an award known as a *Gramota*, which was read aloud in the Cathedral. In this document the Church formally expressed gratitude to the Brotherhood<sup>[r]</sup> and pointed to its future path. More clearly than the brothers could have expected, it indicated that desert-dwelling could exist side



by side with missionary work, as St. Herman himself had demonstrated in his life on Spruce Island. Eugene was especially happy because the Gramota vindicated the Brotherhood's existence in the wilderness. The text read in part:



Hierarchs following the icon with relics of St. Herman during the procession. *Bottom:* Bishops Laurus and Nektary; *middle:* Archbishops Vitaly of Canada and Anthony of San Francisco (with the cross); *above them:* Metropolitan Philaret with some of the servers; *top right:* Gleb Podmoshensky.

Now when the glorification of our Holy and God-bearing Father Herman of Alaska has been accomplished — an event which the simple Aleuts have felt in advance long ago, which lovers of monks have long awaited, which compilers of the biographies of ascetics have prepared for, and which hierarchs have now proclaimed — may your good Brotherhood rejoice in purity and humbleness in the joy of the Lord.

You have zealously acquainted the reader of your publications with the image of the Elder who sanctified the islands by his labors — at first Valaam Island, then Kodiak, and above all Spruce Island, where until the

end of his days he prayed for those to whom he was a nurse and a father in America — St. Herman.

In that same western part of North America, where amidst severe conditions the contemporaries and compatriots of the Saint lived, you have created a corner of prayerful ascetic labor.

In lively contact with Americans thirsting for instruction, you have been and, we hope, will be a missionary brotherhood. Prayerfully wishing the Brotherhood to grow and bring forth fruit with ever greater increase, the Synod of Bishops thus calls down upon you God's blessing....

President of the Synod of Bishops  
Metropolitan Philaret

After the presentation of the Gramota, everyone descended the steps into the dining hall, where a monastic-style *trapeza*<sup>[s]</sup> meal was to be partaken of in silence and the Life of St. Herman was to be read aloud by Archbishop Anthony. “Fr. Vladimir was summoning me,” Gleb recalls, “because Eugene and I were supposed to sit with him in the corner. Then, all of a sudden, my friend Fr. Panteleimon put a piece of paper in my hand. ‘As I was walking down the steps,’ he told me, ‘I saw this piece of paper lying on the ground. I picked it up, and looking at it I knew it was a message for you.’ I sat down. Fr. Vladimir looked at me significantly, sensing in his spirit the meaning of this moment. The paper was a page ripped out from a Russian magazine of 1936, with a painting of St. Herman sitting alone in the woods next to his half-earthen dwelling and a big cross.<sup>[t]</sup> On the back of the page was a letter from Fr. Gerasim in which he described his plans to restore St. Herman's monastic skete on Spruce Island, and how he was building a cabin and chapel on the site where St. Herman had had his little dwelling, and where he had died. It was very heartrending how Fr. Gerasim, in absolute poverty, with the poor Aleut fishermen helping him, had built this little cell. In his letter, which I then read for the first time, he had written:

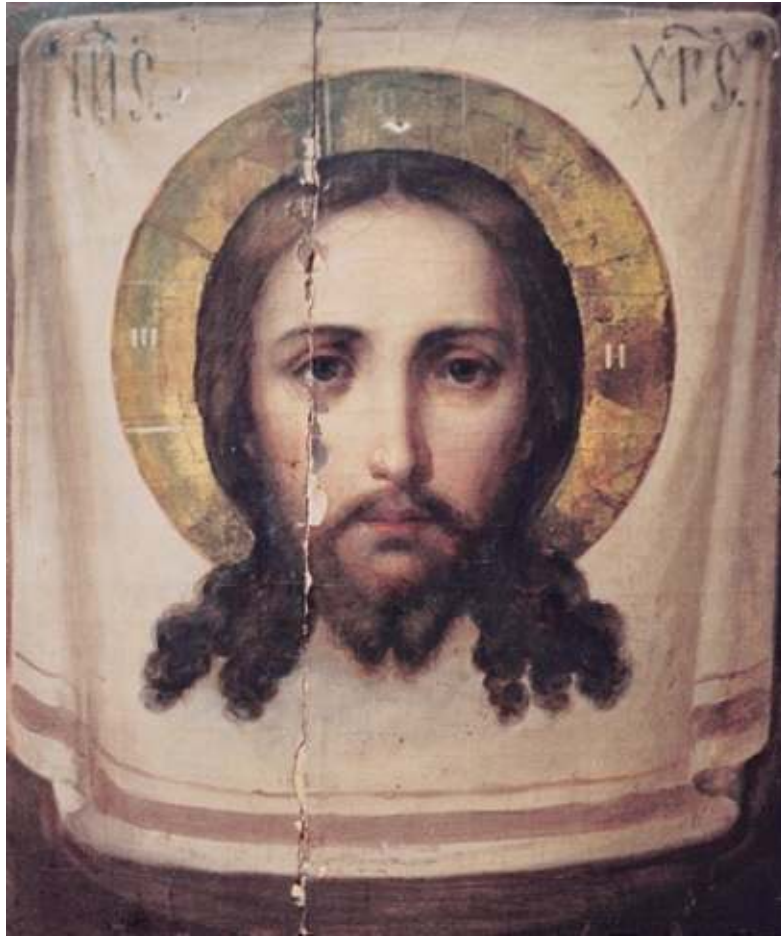
The chapel on the spot where Fr. Herman died is not yet completed. Its size is 14 × 12 feet. It is wooden and its inside is covered with plywood. It has two windows. Everything should be simple there, just as was the humble cell of Fr. Herman. But I will turn it into a Greek “Paraklis”: that is, a small chapel without an iconostasis, only a curtain. I will see what can be done. But I am limitlessly happy that my wish has come true, that a chapel has already been erected on the spot where for a whole forty years a bright candle burned, where lived a great righteous man who prayed for the sinful world — Fr. Herman. I want so much to resurrect that which is dear and akin to me, that which is holy, here in our land, when in my native land everything is destroyed. One wishes so much to see this dear skete, a skete that would be filled with prayer near the grave of the holy elder. A skete... O Lord, help!

“Having read this, I looked at Eugene. It was clear to me that, on this day of St. Herman’s canonization, having just fulfilled our original purpose, we had been given another mission from the Saint himself: to one day build a skete on Spruce Island.”

**W**HAT Bishop Nektary had called the “apogee” of the Brotherhood was to make way for its next stage. St. Herman, having brought the brothers together and established them in the desert-missionary life that he himself had led, was now to answer their prayers and make them monks like himself. Unlike the Gramota, however, this was no award for their labors, but rather a cross to be borne in thankfulness to God. St. Herman, as a Valaam monk in the northern wilds of the New World, had known many trials and tribulations. If the brothers were truly to follow in his monastic footsteps, they would also have to share in his monastic struggles, just as had his successor on Spruce Island, Archimandrite Gerasim.

Having noted that the Gramota had spoken of the creation of “a corner of

prayerful ascetic labor” in the Platina wilderness, Eugene wrote in a letter shortly after the canonization: “Indeed... God willing, we will both be tonsured monks here, and then our real life’s labor will begin!”<sup>19</sup>



Valaam Icon of Christ the Saviour “Not Made by Hands,” a blessing to the St. Herman Brotherhood from Mother Maria Stakhovich and, through her, from Elder Michael of Valaam.



Hieroschemamonk Michael of Valaam (1877–1962), not long before he reposed in Pskov Caves Monastery. On the back of this photograph Mother Maria Stakhovich wrote to Gleb and Eugene, dedicating it for the day of their tonsure: “May God’s blessing, and the blessing of the meek and quiet Elder Michael, be upon your holy work.” New Diveyevo, September 1969.

## *Tonsure*

*You wish to be a monk: this means to leave the old and make yourself new. Yesterday you were in the image of the world; but now you have put on a different one; and thus think differently, speak differently, look differently, walk differently, act differently: and everything will be new.*

—Blessed Abbot Nazarius of Valaam<sup>1</sup>

SINCE the time the brothers had moved to the mountains, lovers of monasticism had heard about their life and showed their love and concern. One of these was Mother Maria Stakhovich, an elderly nun from New Diveyevo Convent. Mother Maria had been tonsured by the last great elder of Valaam Monastery, Hieroschemamonk Michael the Blind, who had left Valaam when it had been closed by the Soviets in 1940. As early as 1959, when Elder Michael had been living in the Pskov Caves Monastery in Russia, Mother Maria had written to him with the request that he pray for Gleb's monastic intentions. Fr. Michael had died in 1962, but through this contact the Brotherhood's monastic life had already been foreshadowed by a Valaam Elder's prayers. Years later, soon after the brothers moved to Platina, Mother Maria sent them a beautiful icon of Christ, painted at Valaam, which Elder Michael had given her. She desired that their monastic tonsure take place before this icon, so that they would thereby become Valaam monks in spirit. She also sent them a biography she had written of her Elder Michael, along with some other relics from Valaam. She regarded the brothers' life in Platina as a continuation of the life of Valaam, and

told them that, in becoming Valaam monks, they had a duty to pray for Old Valaam's reopening and resurrection.

**W**ITH the canonization of St. Herman, the brothers felt the time had come to be in the company of the Valaam monk who was their patron. They saw their tonsure into monasticism as an offering to the new Saint, a commitment to further realize his monastic hopes for America.

According to Orthodox custom, the brothers were required to receive a blessing from their parents before being tonsured. Both Mrs. Rose and Mrs. Podmoshensky, reconciled to the fact that their sons had truly chosen their life's path, now gave their consent without hesitation. (Privately, Esther had even been known to boast to relatives: "My son bought a mountaintop!")

Gleb wrote to Archbishop Anthony of San Francisco, asking him, as the ruling bishop, to come to their skete and tonsure them. In the letter he quoted from the Life of St. Sergius of Radonezh, in which the Saint asked a spiritual elder, Abbot Mitrophan, for the tonsure: "Father, have mercy, and give me the tonsure of a monk. From childhood have I desired this fervently, but my parents' needs withheld me. Now I am free from all this, and I thirst for the monastic desert life as the hart thirsts for the springs of living water."<sup>2</sup>

Soon after receiving Gleb's letter, Archbishop Anthony came to the skete to discuss the tonsure. "I was a little disturbed," Eugene wrote later, "that Vladika took Gleb aside to speak with him privately on these matters (undoubtedly because he is Russian and thus easier to communicate with), because in everything we have done we have always acted together and in absolute unanimity, doing nothing without the other's blessing."<sup>3</sup>

The Archbishop and Gleb had their talk in the small library. "We're not looking to build up a big, established monastery," Gleb said. "Can we remain doing what we are already doing, only as tonsured monks?"

"Yes," replied the Archbishop, "that could be done. I am not against having a monastery in my Diocese."<sup>4</sup>

“But I just said that we don’t want a diocesan monastery.”

The skete model that Gleb was trying to present to him, of a few simple monks laboring in the wilderness, without a priest, had its precedents in the northern forests of Russia in the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and before that in the Egyptian desert. The Archbishop’s standard, on the other hand, was the one that had prevailed in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russia, up until the Russian Revolution. To him, monks — even just two of them — meant an established diocesan monastery; and a monastery meant having priest-monks, new monks who would join, and a stream of pilgrims who would come for confession, Holy Communion, and spiritual counsel. Eventually the Archbishop’s conception would become a reality at the Platina skete; but the brothers felt they were not ready for that yet.

Continuing his conversation with Gleb in the library, the Archbishop asked what the Brotherhood would now be called. Gleb replied that it would remain being called a Brotherhood.

“But now you will be a monastic community,” the Archbishop observed. “You will have to have a name for this place.”

Gleb suggested that it be called a *pustin*: a Russian word which literally means “desert” but is often translated into English as “hermitage.” This was the name given to such secluded Russian monastic communities as Sarov and Optina. The Archbishop was satisfied with the suggestion, considering that it would be passed by the Synod of Bishops.

A month after St. Herman’s canonization, Archbishop Anthony again came to the skete and took Gleb aside to speak privately with him. After this meeting the brothers began to be concerned about the Archbishop’s ideas and plans for the skete. As Eugene wrote in a letter:<sup>[a]</sup> “We were aware that Vladika Anthony was to be, purely formally and temporarily, our ‘Abbot’ for the sake of tonsuring us, and that then or soon he was to appoint one of us to this position, as he had promised. This also we did not especially welcome, but we understood that once a ‘monastery’ was organized (which we had not asked for; we only asked



Vladika to tonsure us, being afraid of too grandiose ideas) some kind of ‘Abbot’ was of course required, although our principle of mutual counsel would continue as before. Then, shortly before our tonsure, Vladika shocked us by inquiring whether we would consider moving away to some place with water and conveniences for the sake of those who would join us; and we were hard pressed to get Vladika to see that there was no one in sight who was about to join us, and that in any case it would not be water and conveniences that would attract like-minded people, not to mention the fact that it was due to the evident help of Vladika John, after our fervent prayer to him, that we obtained this land.

“We were so concerned over Vladika Anthony’s seemingly unrealistic plans for us that we immediately wrote him a letter explaining our position more fully (we sent a copy of this letter to Bishop Laurus).”<sup>5</sup>

In reply to the brothers’ letter, Archbishop Anthony wrote:

Your letter explains well your intentions, but I already understood them approximately. If I suggested to you to check on the possibility of finding water *before the tonsure*, I did not at all intend, nor do I intend, to apply some kind of archiepiscopal PRESSURE in connection with this. It’s just that Fr. Nicholas<sup>[b]</sup> reminded me that you had not yet tried to drill, that the “locals” say that it’s hard to find water there, and that in any case you had already had conversations about looking for water. You yourselves had told me that you would like to give your monastic vows at the place in which you intend to live. Therefore it would not be harmful to check for water ahead of time (since it is still an important factor for life — even monastic life)... BUT you are reminding me about a factor of a higher order, that is, a spiritual one: the blessing of Vladika John. Of course, the blessing of Vladika John has, first of all, indicated and continues to indicate the direction of your activity! But you have reverently felt his indication in your choice of location as well. In that case: let it be according to the prayers of Vladika and according to your faith: Amen.

Concerning your disposition and your present and future activity, you will find in me a well-wisher, for it is just such activity that we need.<sup>6</sup>

After reading these words from the Archbishop, the brothers were reassured. “We had complete trust in Vladika Anthony,” Eugene wrote, “and thought that he did understand us.”<sup>7</sup>

**F**OLLOWING ten days of rain, the day of the tonsure, October 14/27, 1970, was calm and sunny. Just before dawn, Bishop Nektary arrived along with Fr. Spyridon. Bishop Nektary looked deeply troubled. As Eugene wrote later, “Just before the service and our tonsure (as if a final temptation of the devil to dissuade us at the last moment from this decisive step) Vladika Nektary informed us that at the Synod and everywhere else everyone was talking about us, and report had it that we would be ordained priests within the week, would soon rise in the clergy ranks, and ‘you won’t be here very long!’ etc., etc.”<sup>8</sup> The brothers were incredulous at this news, and resolved to go through with the tonsure regardless.

Within half an hour Archbishop Anthony arrived with Protodeacon Nicholas Porshnikov. The Archbishop performed the service of tonsure in the skete church, dedicated to St. Herman of Alaska, which Deacon Nicholas had undertaken to build on his own initiative. Since at that time the church was only half-built, the service took place under the open sky. A dozen people attended, including Vladimir Anderson and several others whom the brothers had known while working in their bookshop.

When the brothers came forward to the front of the church to be tonsured, Fr. Spyridon covered Gleb with his own monastic mantle, and Bishop Nektary covered Eugene with his. Thus Fr. Spyridon and Bishop Nektary became the brothers’ “elders from the mantle,” a term used to denote one’s “godparents” in monasticism. Henceforth they would be mystically bound to the new monks as their spiritual fathers, responsible before God for their souls.

“We cannot doubt,” wrote Eugene about the tonsure, “that God’s blessing led us to this decisive act of our lives, truly a second baptism.”<sup>9</sup> The brothers took their vows before the Valaam icon of the Saviour, as Mother Maria had wished.

In becoming monks, the brothers received new names: Gleb was named Fr. Herman, becoming the first monk to be called after the newly canonized St. Herman of Alaska; and Eugene was given the name Fr. Seraphim, after St. Seraphim of Sarov. Again, in the lives of the brothers, these two Saints showed themselves to be closely linked in heaven.<sup>[c]</sup>

“After the tonsure,” the new monk Seraphim recorded, “Vladika Anthony announced the opening (by Synodal Ukase) of the St. Herman of Alaska Hermitage, with himself as Abbot for the time being. His title was proclaimed by the deacon during several *ektenias*,<sup>[d]</sup> which made us, despite ourselves, a little uneasy.”<sup>10</sup>

The Archbishop then performed a small consecration of the skete church. This was followed by a procession of everyone around the church, with the new monks walking in their black robes, cowls, and mantles. Bishop Nektary was jubilant then, forgetting his previous concerns. Because the monastery had no bells to ring for the procession, one of the pilgrims took in hand a cooking pot and struck it with a ladle. Like a child Bishop Nektary joined in, and began clanging two cooking-pot lids together. As he did so he joyfully began to sing a children’s ditty from Old Russia, suited to the occasion: “Our Regiment Has Been Increased!”

The Matins service was then served. During the meal afterward, Fr. Herman read from the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* by St. John Climacus while Fr. Seraphim served everyone.

Later, when the meal was finished and the guests had dispersed, the two bishops, the two new monks, and Fr. Spyridon were left at the table. It was at this time, as Fr. Seraphim wrote in his Chronicle, that “the first trial came to the new monks.”<sup>11</sup> Bishop Nektary’s warning to them right before their tonsure had

not been entirely off the mark. As Fr. Seraphim later recalled in a letter: “Vladika Anthony announced, in the presence of Vladika Nektary and our Starets,<sup>[e]</sup> Fr. Spyridon, that both of us were to be ordained hieromonks<sup>[f]</sup> within five days. This caused astonishment to both of us, as we thought that Vladika had informed us that this question would not be raised for some time. In our present state of overwork and with no place to serve Liturgy during the winter (our church is not even half finished), the question was impractical in any case, and such a rapid and radical change of our status we felt to be a threat to what we already had. Our urgent plea to be allowed to establish ourselves in the monastic life finally dissuaded Vladika, although he was greatly displeased and announced that he felt personally offended, but that our ‘disobedience’ might be spiritually beneficial for us. Vladika Nektary comforted us after this incident, and indeed came to our defense in front of Vladika.”<sup>12</sup>



Monks Seraphim and Herman in front of the skete church right after their tonsure, October 14/27, 1970.

Fr. Spyridon also came to the defense of the new monks. Giving them a smile of reassurance, he said the wisest thing possible under the circumstances: “If you can’t do it, you can’t do it.”

One reason that the Archbishop gave for wanting to immediately ordain the monks to the priesthood was that they needed to receive Holy Communion every Sunday. Bishop Nektary argued against this, pointing out that the desert-dwellers of past centuries often went for long periods of time without seeing a priest.

Ultimately it was Fr. Spyridon who resolved the problem. “I will come and give them Holy Communion,” he humbly interjected.

Fr. Seraphim later described how the conversation ended: “When Vladika Anthony could not persuade us to accept priesthood immediately, he shook his

head and said, ‘But what am I going to say at the Synod?’—meaning obviously that he had already informed the Synod of his plans for us, which did not in the least correspond with our own ideas. To this Vladika Nektary very sensibly told him, ‘Just tell the Synod the way it is; there should be no problem in that!’<sup>13</sup>

The clergy then left the table, leaving the two monks to themselves. “What are we going to do?” Fr. Herman asked Fr. Seraphim.

“They are old... they try to do their best,” replied Fr. Seraphim with a wise compassion that made Fr. Herman feel more at peace. “... And I’m deeply happy that we’ve died to the world.”

**W**HEN the other visitors left that afternoon, the fathers found themselves feeling rather despondent over the confrontation that had occurred. Fr. Seraphim collapsed from exhaustion, while Fr. Herman went to what was called the “North Nook” of the printing building. In the North Nook’s icon corner was a picture of Blessed Abbot Nazarius of Sarov and Valaam. Praying before it, Fr. Herman suddenly realized that he and Fr. Seraphim had been tonsured on Abbot Nazarius’ nameday.<sup>[g]</sup> And how appropriate this was, too, since Abbot Nazarius had been the spiritual father of both their patrons: St. Herman of Alaska and St. Seraphim of Sarov.

Shortly thereafter Fr. Herman asked Fr. Seraphim to drive down the hill to get the mail. In their post-office box was a letter from Vladimir Tenkevitch, the orphan of Archbishop John who had brought Eugene and Gleb together. Vladimir was already a priest-monk, and for some time had served Divine Liturgy in a convent in Greece. In his letter to the fathers, he wrote that he was going to stay for awhile in San Francisco and wanted to come to serve Liturgy at the St. Herman Hermitage. As it later turned out, Fr. Vladimir was unable to carry out his wish; but his offer came as a great consolation to the fathers at the time, on the very day that they had been told they needed a priest to serve Liturgy. It showed that God was with them.

Right after they became monks the fathers felt an inward change that

indicated to them that there was truly something sacramental in the rite of tonsure. As Fr. Herman described it, he now felt a little flame, as it were, burning in his heart. He asked Fr. Seraphim and found that he experienced the same thing. This flame of love, zeal, and inspiration turned out to be very valuable and in fact indispensable as they endured the heavy troubles that are given to monks in this life.

Bishop Nektary, who had spent the night in Redding, came to the hermitage the next morning to serve Liturgy for the monks. As Fr. Seraphim noted in his Chronicle, Bishop Nektary “heard the first monastic confession of the new fathers, gave them Holy Communion, and spent several hours afterward in conversation about his memories of Optina Monastery.”<sup>14</sup> Partly due to their connection with Optina through Bishop Nektary, the fathers began to follow the Optina rule of private prayers. This practice, done each day in addition to the regular cycle of services, included the “Optina Five-hundred” rule of Jesus Prayers and other prayers, and the reading of one chapter of the Gospels and two chapters of the Epistles.

**S**OON after his tonsure, Fr. Seraphim wrote a detailed explanation as to why he and Fr. Herman had declined ordination to the priesthood at that time: “The fathers did not perhaps make clear to the Archbishop the basic reason for their refusal: that this [i.e., immediate ordination] would not be in accordance with the idea and rule that is to govern the hermitage and could harm or destroy its integrity, not only by a too-rapid advancement in the Church hierarchy, before the fathers have even in the slightest rooted themselves in the monastic life and rule, but also because it would already present to the outside world a premature appearance of readiness to serve the Orthodox population as a spiritual center for them, equipped with hieromonks, confessors, and Divine Liturgy which they could attend. On the contrary, in the beginning most importantly of all the fathers should become well rooted and established in the rule of life which is to govern the future course of the hermitage, to the total



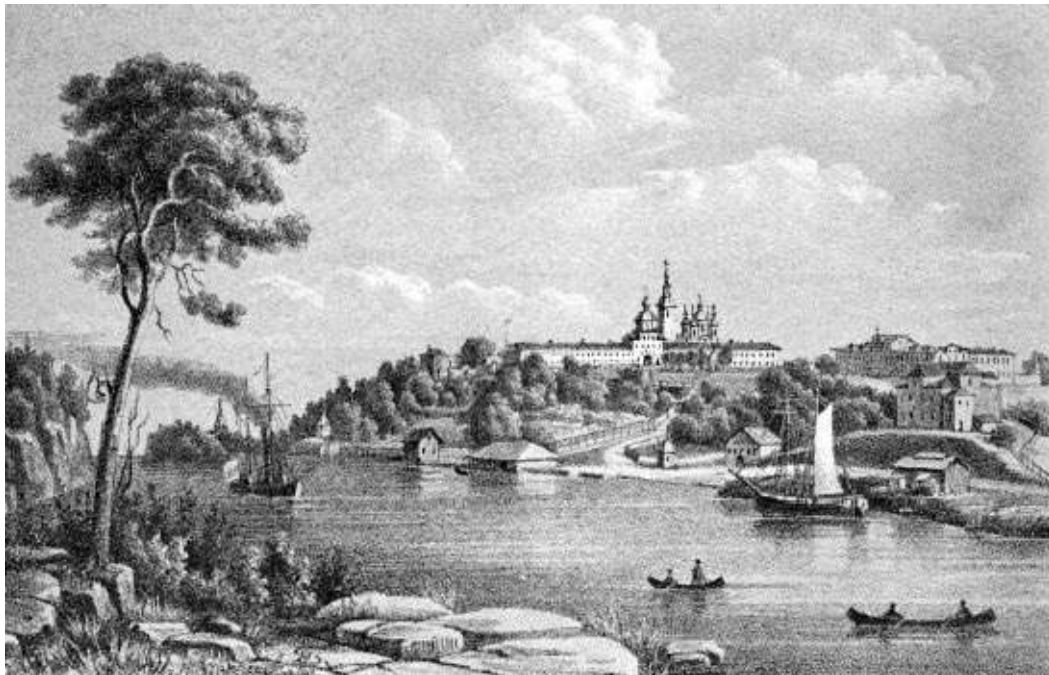
exclusion of any idea of serving the outside world (apart from the mission of the printed word). This other kind of vision: to be a spiritual center and place of pilgrimage, especially for Orthodox Americans, will be given by God — if it is pleasing to Him — in His own time and when it can be spiritually natural and real, and not a presumption as it would be at the present time. The fathers have always gone only one step at a time, trusting in God and the prayer of Vladika John and St. Herman to guide their steps and open His will to them. The fathers do not wish to trust only their own feelings or to disobey their Archbishop, to whom they gave their vows, but they are firmly convinced that for the good of the monastery the priesthood should at present be refused as premature.”<sup>15</sup>

Several months later, Fr. Seraphim wrote to a friend of the Brotherhood: “By the way, so you will know: we aren’t really trying to persuade anyone to join us. We didn’t come here to ‘establish a monastery,’ but to save our souls and print *The Orthodox Word*. If others are crazy enough to join us, perhaps God will bless a real monastery here; and if He blesses it, then He will give the means of nourishing it, both physically and spiritually.... If a monastery here is God-pleasing, then it will ‘build itself,’ or so we believe.”<sup>16</sup>

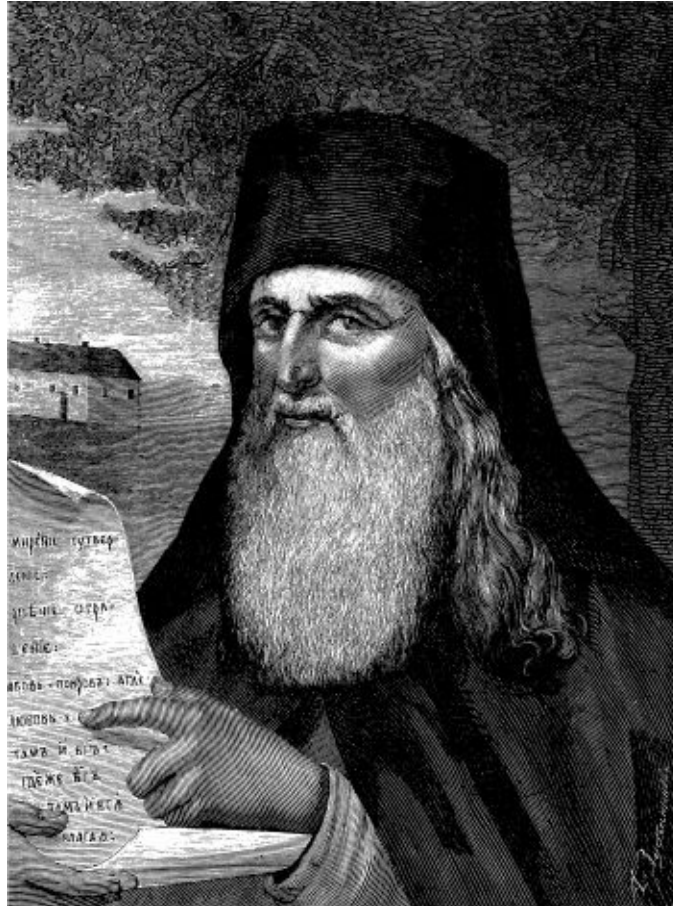
Although the fathers were not looking for and did not need monastic candidates, they realized that neither could they turn them away. “We are quite aware,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “that the monastic life is not supposed to be easy, and also that we must be prepared to accept responsibilities that we would frankly rather avoid — for our very status as a missionary monastery is an open invitation to American truth-seekers and would-be monks to come and disturb our blessed peace and quiet, even if only to find out how unworthy we are. Whether God will bless a larger or smaller missionary community here, or whether we will remain two ‘crazy monks in the forest,’ we are prepared to accept anything that God sends us in the furtherance of the cause which Vladika John blessed and which brought us here: the mission of the Orthodox printed word, especially in English.”<sup>17</sup>



**T**HE fathers were already seeing the fulfillment of what Archbishop John had said in 1965, when he had expressed his belief that there would one day be a missionary monastery in California. Regarding another of the holy man's prophecies, Fr. Seraphim wrote in his Chronicle: "On several occasions, Archbishop John called our Fr. Herman Brotherhood 'a reflection of Valaam,' which outwardly seemed absurd because of the modest and worldly aspect of our bookshop, but which we interpreted as referring to our patron, Fr. Herman. Now, however, when Fr. Herman has been canonized, when there is already a St. Herman of Alaska Hermitage, when one of the brothers bears the name of the new saint from Valaam, when the tonsure of the first two monks occurred on the nameday of Abbot Nazarius of Valaam, when the chief icon on the iconostasis of our new church is an icon of the Saviour from Valaam, when the brethren have received other holy objects from Valaam and now have been given the opportunity and responsibility to compile a Valaam Patericon<sup>[h]</sup> — these words can only be a prophecy for us, so magnificently fulfilled even in our unworthiness. Glory to our God!"<sup>18</sup>



Old Valaam Monastery in Russia. 1864 engraving showing the church built by Abbot Nazarius.



Abbot Nazarius of Valaam (1735–1809).

Fr. Seraphim regarded Archbishop John’s statements about a “missionary monastery in California” and “a reflection of Valaam” as part of the holy man’s testament to the Brotherhood. In a letter he wrote: “Our spiritual orientation is: devotion to St. Herman and discipleship to Vladika John and faithfulness to his testament and tradition to us, which includes in some degree being a ‘reflection of Valaam.’... As slaves of Christ we cannot offer to God and His Church great spirituality, wisdom, organization, or *podvigs*; but we can offer our absolute determination and strenuous effort to be faithful to the testament of Vladika John to us to forge a community which in some way preserves his spirit, helping, encouraging and strengthening each other in our weaknesses and falls, and being open and honest with each other.”<sup>19</sup>

Fr. Seraphim’s letters and Chronicle entries throughout the years are filled

with references to “praying to Vladika John” and “trusting in Vladika John’s prayers.” There can be no doubt that Fr. Seraphim was constantly doing just that. Although Archbishop John was in the other world, Fr. Seraphim continued to be his disciple, entrusting both himself and his new monastic community to the holy hierarch’s spiritual care and the power of his supplications before God. As Fr. Seraphim affirmed in a letter not long after his tonsure: “We are the disciples of Vladika John, who blessed and inspired our work from the very beginning and, we firmly believe, is with us now in spirit; it is to his blessing, in fact, that we ascribe entirely whatever success we have had so far.”<sup>[20](#)</sup>

## *Conflict and Reconciliation*

*You have to endure, to labor, unto the shedding of blood. You must become exhausted under the light blows (comparatively speaking) of the petty turmoils of life. By means of these unavoidable conflicts, the Lord is educating you to endure greater sorrows which will come in due time, both to you and to others who will expect comfort and strength from you. Sorrows are the lot of the monastic life, its integral part, from the beginning to the end.*

—Archimandrite Laurence of the Iveron-Valdai Monastery, Russia<sup>1</sup>

*If someone offends you, endure it. The enemy teaches you to take revenge, but Christ says from on high, “Forgive.”*

—St. Barsanuphius of Optina<sup>2</sup>

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM wrote to his mother in Carmel about his tonsure and received this reply:

Dear Eugene:

... So you have taken the big step to become a Monk. It wasn't any big surprise, as you've considered it for some time. I'm sure you're old enough to know what you want out of life and what your greatest contribution should be. After your Retreat was declared officially it would only be reasonable that those that lived there should have some official status. Many things I don't understand as a Christian that seem strange and unnecessary — regarding food, uniform — can't see how you can wear a

robe while working — get caught in things and then the cleaning problems — seems you can wear ordinary clothes for work as no one sees you up there and the Lord will understand. I wish you well and may the Lord bless you both in this big step....

What about my cabin? One woman shouldn't hurt too much....

Well, my boy, you'll always be "Oogie" to me and I hope your contribution to the world won't go by unnoticed and that you'll get some financial help so going won't be too rough — my best to Gleb, too.

Love,  
Mother

**I**N spite of Esther's kind wishes, the going was indeed going to get rough for her son. Such is the lot of monks, who must invariably be perfected for the Kingdom of Heaven through trials and tribulations. Before his tonsure, Fr. Seraphim had known this theoretically, but now he was to learn it through hard experience. His first trial as a monk had come not through such things as financial problems, but through something far more painful: difficulties with his ruling bishop. And the trial was not yet over.

On Christmas day in 1970,[\[a\]](#) after Fathers Herman and Seraphim attended the Divine Liturgy at the San Francisco Cathedral, Archbishop Anthony had a meeting with them: at first only with Fr. Herman, and then with both of them. The fathers found this meeting extremely painful; and, as shall be seen, the Archbishop was later to regret it deeply. As Fr. Seraphim recorded in his letters, the Archbishop made demands on the fathers which they considered impractical and unreasonable (e.g., not to write letters to anyone or invite anyone to come to the hermitage without his blessing), and he did so in a manner they felt was abusive.

Shortly after this meeting, Fr. Seraphim wrote: "Perhaps we know nothing of monasticism, but we nonetheless firmly believe that in the Church of Christ a legitimate chastisement from one's ecclesiastical superiors should be carried out

in mutual trust and end in a peaceful state for all concerned. I myself was on several occasions chastised by Vladika John and always felt the rightness of the chastisement and benefitted from it. But for over a week now we are completely upset and almost despair over our very future.”<sup>3</sup>

For several nights after their meeting with the Archbishop, the fathers could not sleep. They were, in Fr. Seraphim’s words, “really frightened.”<sup>4</sup> Rather than trust his and Fr. Herman’s own thoughts on the matter, Fr. Seraphim wrote to other people in the Church whose counsel he valued. Among these were Bishop Laurus (Fr. Herman’s friend from his Jordanville days) and Archimandrite Panteleimon of the monastery in Boston.<sup>5</sup>

With the coming of Great Lent, with its long services and strict fasting, the fathers still felt unsettled. As Fr. Seraphim recorded: “We were very much troubled — but, completely unexpectedly, Vladika Nektary came with the Kursk Icon,<sup>[b]</sup> and our trouble was turned to joy, and the certain realization that *God is with us!*... Vladika Nektary served a Moleben, gave us Holy Communion from the Reserved Gifts (we were in the midst of Vespers and hadn’t eaten yet), and let us carry the Icon over the mountain. God’s blessings to us just never cease!”<sup>6</sup> This occurred on the nameday of Fr. Gerasim, which made the fathers take it as another sign of the closeness of their Alaskan benefactor.

Soon the fathers received an encouraging letter from Bishop Laurus in response to Fr. Seraphim’s long letter to him. “The fact that sorrows come to you testifies to the fact that you are doing a work of God,” Bishop Laurus wrote. “... I think that you should be patient, undertake no dramatic moves, but by your conduct and by your ‘line’ show that this (the behavior and decree of Vladika Anthony) goes against your soul and is not suitable to you.”<sup>7</sup>

For his part, Bishop Nektary continued to stand behind the fathers. “We had a good long talk with Vladika Nektary about all this,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “and, while he said he would not ‘advise’ us, if it were he that was involved he would simply disobey those directives which he felt to be destructive to the idea by which we live, and thus if there were going to be a complaint at the Synod it



would have to come first from Vladika Anthony himself.”<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere Fr. Seraphim wrote: “Vladika Nektary has comforted us greatly in our trials, and [he] tells us: ‘Above all else, guard the blessing of Vladika John!’”<sup>9</sup>

**D**URING the years that followed, the fathers continued to heed the advice of Bishops Nektary and Laurus: to remain patiently on the path Archbishop John had set them on, and to not do anything rash. Moreover, they avoided making public their difficulties with Archbishop Anthony. They only talked or wrote to seven trusted people<sup>[c]</sup> about these difficulties — people to whom they felt they could turn for advice and support — and these they told to keep the information to themselves.

On February 20/March 5, 1974, the fathers had another tense encounter with Archbishop Anthony. As Fr. Seraphim wrote in a letter: “On Tuesday morning Vladika Anthony himself paid us a surprise visit, together with our Starets, Fr. Spyridon, and Deacon Nicholas Porshnikov. Glory be to God, we received Holy Communion, for which we are grateful to Vladika. But afterwards we had a talk — which revealed, despite our almost tearful entreaty, that he does not understand not only us, but *any* of the young idealistic priests or monks, and talks a totally different language, fitting everything into a set ‘Synodal’ pattern.”<sup>10</sup>

As can be seen from these words, Fr. Seraphim did not consider this meeting to be in any way positive or productive at the time. Unexpectedly, however, it was soon to have a positive outcome. During the meeting Fr. Herman had told Archbishop Anthony for the first time how much he and Fr. Seraphim had been hurt during their encounter with him at Christmastime three years earlier. Going home, the Archbishop pondered the visit he had just had with the fathers, and also the previous incident of which he had just been reminded. The very next day he wrote the fathers a moving letter of heartfelt apology. It is clear from this letter that the Archbishop had not been aware of how his behavior had affected the monks. Here we quote the letter in full:

February 21 (March 6), 1974

CHRIST IS AMIDST US!

Dear in the Lord Fr. Herman and Fr. Seraphim,

I painfully suffered over that which mutually upset and confused us yesterday. But there was benefit for me. I gradually recalled (although I did not recall all the circumstances) that Fr. Herman was *absolutely right*, since there was such an unfortunate incident at St. Tikhon's Home when I, alas, severely raised my voice at him. I am extremely ashamed of this. I bow to the ground and beg you to forgive me for that incident as well as for my unfairness yesterday: that I accused Fr. Herman yet again....

It seems to me, and I would like to hope, that it is not in my character (?) to fall upon people with shouting but, alas, there have been such cases, albeit isolated ones.... And it is according to my deeds that I am now exposed!

I do not believe that there have been any other such incidents with Fr. Herman (??), and I hope that, by the mercy of God, there must not be in the future.

In addition, although this time I did not intend to categorically insist upon anything but wanted to express my opinion on questions that affected me, Fr. Herman was right, wishing to have the support of his fellow brother Fr. Seraphim in the conversation, and it would have been more correct, simple, and inoffensive to speak with both. If I had not argued about this, it is possible that all this trouble would not have occurred; but thanks to what happened I have now recalled that incident that has so painfully remained in Fr. Herman's memory, and may this restrain me from anything like it henceforth.

I know, dear brothers and fathers, how difficult and filled with sorrows your monastic life is, and I know that your path is a special one, and the work that you are setting in motion is holy and extremely necessary.



I had wanted, after the first week of the Great Fast, spent with the parishioners of the Cathedral, to be consoled as well by simple prayerful contact with you in the monastery-skete surroundings, which have been dear to me since my youth. And I was consoled during the first part of the day; but later that day of the *light-creating Fast* was darkened due to my fault. But may the following ones not be darkened. I know that this must not be in accordance with your hearts, either.

And therefore I repeatedly, sincerely beg Christian forgiveness of all of you. Please speak about this to Br. Laurence as well.

I ask your holy prayers and call down upon you God's all-powerful blessing.

With love in Christ,  
Your ✙ Archbishop Anthony<sup>11</sup>

It is said that the sign of a true Christian is not an absence of mistakes and failings (for no one can claim that), but rather the ability to get up after one falls, to acknowledge one's guilt, to repent and make amends. In Archbishop Anthony this sign was evident. When he realized he had committed an error, he knew how to humble himself, making every effort to restore peace and concord. In him was fulfilled the commandment of the Saviour: *If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift* (Matt. 5:23–24). After Archbishop Anthony reposed in the Lord,<sup>[d]</sup> this ability to humble himself in seeking reconciliation was remembered by many as one of his most prominent virtues. As one of his spiritual sons has written: "There were cases when Vladika would make a prostration on the street, asking someone's forgiveness. Even before children he made full prostrations, sometimes coming to their homes expressly to ask forgiveness if he thought that he was in some way at fault."<sup>12</sup>

With Archbishop Anthony's letter of apology, the Platina fathers were able

to witness this noble trait of their archpastor in a direct way. But for Fr. Seraphim, the real breakthrough in the Brotherhood's reconciliation with the Archbishop occurred on December 4/17 of the same year — the Feast of St. Barbara and St. John Damascene — when Archbishop Anthony came once again to the hermitage to serve the Divine Liturgy. In his Chronicle Fr. Seraphim recorded:

“Archbishop Anthony and Bishop Nektary visit... and serve Divine Liturgy at 8:00 a.m., after being stuck in the mud at the last bend before the skete. All five brothers receive confession from Bishop Nektary, and all but one receive Holy Communion.

“At the end of Liturgy Archbishop Anthony gave a brief sermon, mentioning first of all that St. Barbara is especially prayed to for a good death, at peace with everyone and prepared for it, and (with tears) he said that after his last visit, nine months before, at which there had been some disagreement with us, he was not sure he would see us again in this life, and so he is happy for this opportunity once again to beg mutual forgiveness and have peace among ourselves. Then he described the three-fold *podvig* of St. John Damascene, which he waged in his quiet monastic retreat: as composer of Church hymns, theologian, and defender of the Faith; and he called on us to imitate and take inspiration from the Saint, so as ourselves to become composers or interpreters of Church hymns, to become reflectors (*muisliteli*) of Church dogmas if not theologians (‘and perhaps theologians too’), and defenders of the Faith against the contemporary heresies.

“All were very uplifted by this feast day, the most joyful of Archbishop Anthony's visits to us, and the Brotherhood's whole situation and future seemed somehow easier. As if in answer and thanks to the Brotherhood's recent cooperation in printing about Elder Theodosius of Karoulia [Mount Athos], Archbishop Anthony presented as a blessing... the epitrachelion<sup>[e]</sup> of the Elder.

“Archbishop Anthony spent most of his time (outside the church)... typing a letter to the San Francisco *Russian Life* newspaper protesting a blasphemous

novel it was printing. On seeing the icon of Archbishop John in church, he crossed himself and kissed it, as it were giving us the same approval for our veneration of him as the Patriarch of Constantinople once gave St. Symeon the New Theologian for the veneration of his Elder Symeon. He knows that our veneration of Vladika John is not received well everywhere, and so we were very happy that he kissed our icon of Vladika John with reverence.<sup>13</sup> Archbishop Anthony also brought us his photograph of Bishop Nestor of San Francisco (which he inherited from Archbishop Tikhon), and at trapeza Fr. Herman related the little-known account of his righteous death.”



Archbishop Anthony of San Francisco (1908–2000) at the St. Herman Hermitage with Fr. Seraphim, Fr. Herman, and a young pilgrim, ca. 1979.

**T**HERE can be no doubt that Fr. Seraphim forgave Archbishop Anthony from his heart. It is a noteworthy fact that, after Archbishop Anthony’s visit of reconciliation to the hermitage in December of 1974, Fr. Seraphim’s comments about him in his personal letters and Chronicle entries changed markedly, becoming strictly positive in tone. He came to value Archbishop Anthony over the years, seeing in him an important ally in dealing with problems affecting the

Church. Preserving a proper relationship of obedience to his Archbishop, he asked his blessing when undertaking new activities, and he almost always found him supportive.

In the end, Fr. Seraphim saw the Brotherhood's early conflicts with its Archbishop for what they were: monastic trials and temptations. Rather than being defeated by these trials, he had persevered through them, learned and grown from them. Overcoming disillusionment through fervent prayer, patience, and faith, he came to trust the Providence of God in everything. By arriving at a true state of peace with his ruling hierarch, he did more than mend a personal disagreement: he did his part in preserving the unity of the Church, allowing Christ to heal a wounded part of His Body.

## *Looking Upward*

*Having been filled with the desire for immutable glory, let us purify the eyes of the mind of earthly pollutions.*

—St. Gregory Palamas

**C**LEARLY, Fr. Seraphim was no conformist; but neither was he a rebel, for above all he wanted to do God’s work, not his own. He had no personal axe to grind. After the Brotherhood’s reconciliation with its ruling bishop at the end of 1974, Fr. Seraphim made a special point of counseling others to respect and honor legitimate ecclesiastical authority. Thus, in April of 1976 he wrote to a woman who had invited a priest to come and serve in her community without the Archbishop’s approval:

I hope that you are aware that you are now living in the diocese of Vladika Anthony, and that when it is a question of priests and parishes it is his will that is done and must be respected. One may disagree with bishops, and in extreme need even “fight” with them; but one is never to usurp their rights or try to “arrange” things without them, as though they were mere figureheads. One should be in fear and trembling before bishops, and never free or familiar. I fear that some of our “American Orthodoxy” in the Synod is doing just that — organizing psychological-spiritual dioceses of their own, and treating bishops as figureheads who “don’t understand.” God gave them to us, and if there are sometimes difficulties, that also is for our benefit and salvation, and we must approach them with spiritual means.<sup>[1](#)</sup>

In another letter of 1976, written to an Orthodox convert in England who had been barred from receiving Holy Communion due to his harsh criticisms of local clergymen, Fr. Seraphim wrote:

You, of course, are now in a very bad position: both by being identified as a “rebel” against your own Archbishop and clergy, and much more by being cut off from the very Mysteries of the Church. In such a situation, nothing that you can say or do will have any good effect as regards the issues involved; whatever you say, it will be the words of a “rebel,” which may be disregarded. Therefore, it is quite essential for you to remove this label from yourself. This can be done in a very simple way which does not involve acceptance of opinions repugnant to you. We urge you to put aside, for the present, all thoughts of “right and wrong,” “just or unjust,” and first put right the *spiritual* side — that is, do what is necessary to be restored to Holy Communion.

We *strongly* urge you to do what your Archbishop asks of you: namely, to write a letter to each of the clergymen to whom you are accused of being disrespectful, begging their forgiveness for any crudeness, disrespect, or improper words or actions you may have shown to them. This is important both because it is in obedience to your Archbishop (to whose judgment you should be respectful even when you think it is unjust or wrong), and even more because it is a *spiritual* approach to the question, which in itself does not involve the question of who is right and who wrong regarding the issues. Your Archbishop has asked you to “ask forgiveness and be at peace” and “to have reverence and respect” to the clergy — but he does not actually tell you what opinions you are to have. This is the proper course even supposing that you are “right” in every respect, for the unjust sufferings of wrongs is of great spiritual benefit; but it should be easy enough in any case to accuse yourself of crudeness, wrong tone, etc., which creep into all of us even when we are defending the truth.<sup>2</sup>

FATHER SERAPHIM himself had managed to restore peace with his Archbishop and remain in obedience to the Church by keeping his sights set above, heavenward. Although he did at first react to the Archbishop's actions with shock and frustration, his striving to see things spiritually enabled him to rise above this reaction and find otherworldly consolation and enlightenment in Christ.

As Fr. Seraphim strove to look upward amidst mundane difficulties, he counseled others in the Church to do the same. To one dedicated Russian priest who was being pulled down by his flock and the organizational mentality in his parish, Fr. Seraphim wrote:

One feels sorry for the Orthodox flock and wants to be as condescending as possible to their weaknesses — but first of all one must *lead* them, tell them what is right and what is expected of them, always pulling them up higher, giving them the idea that they are Orthodox *not* because they were born that way or belong to an Orthodox “organization” but only *if they are struggling to be faithful to the Church's teaching*. Orthodox shepherds today more than ever must beware of placing their hope in the “organization,” but rather must be constantly looking upward to the Chief Shepherd Christ, to the heavenly world of God's Truth and His Saints, from which alone comes the inspiration to keep guiding the flock rightly. The shepherd cannot be just a fulfiller of *treby*<sup>[a]</sup> for people who are “automatically” Orthodox because they belong to the organization; but he must be *warning* them that *they can lose the savor of Orthodoxy* if they are not looking upward and struggling. Bishop Theophan the Recluse already foresaw this losing of the savor of Orthodoxy and was terribly upset that no one around him seemed to see this — that it was already happening in the nineteenth century, and how much more today!

We ourselves are blessed to have a quiet life and no “parish problems,” and therefore we cherish all the more this ideal. If we had to live

in San Francisco and adjust to the parish life there, I fear we should become terribly discouraged. But here we have the wilderness to inspire us, and as we look around us we can freely think of the cave-dwellers and the magnificent freedom which is the true Orthodox life (within the framework of self-renunciation). It is much more difficult in the world to do this — and that is why we wish you to be constantly *living in the heavenly world*, and only secondarily to be “living the life of your flock.”<sup>3</sup>

In later years Fr. Seraphim would recall how Archbishop John had taught him to be always looking to the heavenly realm. “It is obvious,” he said, “that Archbishop John was constantly in a different world. He himself, I recall, once gave a sermon on the spiritual life, the mystical life, in which he said: ‘All of our sanctity is based upon having one’s feet straight on the ground, and, while being on the earth, constantly having the mind lifted upward.’ He would come from time to time to our shop next to the Cathedral, and would always have something new and inspiring to say. He would come with a little portfolio and would open it up and say, ‘Look! Here is a picture of St. Alban and here is his Life!’ He had found it somewhere. He was collecting these things which were very inspiring and had nothing to do with everyday business or the administration of the diocese. In fact, some said he was a bad administrator, but I don’t know. I doubt it, because I know that whenever anyone wrote him a letter, that person always got a reply back in the language he wrote it in, within a very short time; therefore, when it came to things like that, he was very, very careful. But the first thing he was careful about was being constantly in the other world, constantly inspired and constantly living by that. The opposite of this is to make even the Church into some kind of business, to be looking at only the administrative side or the economic side or the lower, worldly side. If you do that long enough, you will lose the spark, you will lose the higher side. Archbishop John gave us the example of constantly looking up, constantly thinking of the higher things. In the end, the deeper you get into this, the more



you see that there is nothing else possible. If you are an Orthodox Christian, you can do this and have people call you crazy or say that you are a little bit touched, or something like that; but still you have your own life — you lead it and you get to heaven.”<sup>4</sup>

# PART VI





Archimandrite Spyridon with Fr. Seraphim in front of the hermitage refectory, 1974.

## *Archbishop John's Sotainnik*

*Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves.*

—Matthew 10:16

**O**F all the people I have known,” writes Fr. Herman, “the one closest in spirit to Blessed Archbishop John was his humble friend, Archimandrite Spyridon. Between them lay a kinship which was perhaps externally discernible but which, internally and spiritually, will always remain a mystery, inaccessible to the public eye. And even if we were to discover the key to the nature of their bond, we would still not fully fathom it. That bond is known in church language by a special term: *sotainnik*, which could be rendered as ‘sharer of the monastic mystery,’ or simply as ‘co-mystic.’

“Much has already been published about Blessed John’s ‘foolishness-for-Christ,’ behind which he hid his mystical gifts: about how he, having been touched by Divinity, did not care what others thought of him, how he looked and acted in ways ‘socially unacceptable,’ how to some he appeared ‘touched in the head’ while actually seeing deeper into reality than anyone around him, how he had much more rapport with naive children than with sophisticated adults, how he unquestionably had the gift of clairvoyance. All these qualities he had in common with his *sotainnik*, Fr. Spyridon.”<sup>1</sup>

True to the promise he had made to the fathers at their tonsure, Fr. Spyridon came to the hermitage to hear their confessions and give them Holy Communion, as often as his poor health and his responsibilities in Palo Alto permitted him. “Most often,” Fr. Herman recalls, “he would go by himself on

these missions, taking the bus and carrying his chalices and archimandrite's mitre in a Macy's shopping bag. We would pick him up at the Greyhound bus terminal, where he sometimes waited for us for a long time, silently sitting with his childlike smile, oblivious of the raging world of sin that swirled around him. In his hand he would carry a long, worn prayer rope which had once belonged to Archbishop John and which he would have constantly in use.



Fr. Spyridon, in archimandrite's mantle, in front of the printshop of the St. Herman Hermitage, 1971.

“In the end, Fr. Spyridon would come to us two or three times a year, and would stay for as much as a week. He would serve Divine Liturgy and give talks. His sermons were short and to the point, and always amazed us by bringing out unfamiliar and obscure aspects of the Gospels, hagiography, or

tradition. His favorite subjects were the Holy Land, the Royal Family, Serbian saints, and Georgian saints. He loved to talk about the latter because his sister's patron saint was Georgian, and his father had lived in Georgia. We cherished being able to tap his immense store of knowledge.

“Fr. Spyridon loved monasticism and was surprisingly knowledgeable concerning various monastic practices, which indicated to us that he was a true monk who always felt he was in a monastery and only in the world on a temporary leave of absence. From the very first time he visited us he hung his archimandrite's mantle in our church. He never took it away from our monastery, apparently to make us feel that he belonged to us. He did the same with his worn-out mitre.”

Fr. Spyridon's prayers for the St. Herman Brotherhood were once witnessed by a young man at the Russian Scout camp where Fr. Spyridon served as father-confessor. “I remember a most beautiful incident,” writes this young man. “We were on a hike. Through the trees, I noticed a figure sitting on a folding stool. I recognized him as my most dear Fr. Spyridon. In his hand was an icon of St. Herman. He was constantly blessing himself with the sign of the Cross, staring at the icon without distraction.... Reflecting on this incident, I later felt, after having come to know the founders of the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood and their spiritual relation to the late Fr. Spyridon, that the Brotherhood had succeeded in bringing forth spiritual fruit precisely by the prayers of the holy monk Fr. Spyridon and others like him.”<sup>2</sup>

**G**IVEN the almost “wacky” image that Fr. Spyridon presented to the world, it is not surprising that most people never dreamed he was in reality such a sensitive and profound man, a visionary who, like Archbishop John, was not without the gift of clairvoyance. Still, no matter how well he managed to conceal this gift, it was noticed by several people. “Our Brotherhood,” writes Fr. Herman, “knew about it from experience. Time and again a question or argument would arise in our Brotherhood, especially in connection with editorial

work: how to express a certain Orthodox reality in contemporary English, or which issues to present in our magazine and which to avoid. Sometimes all we would need was a simple yes-or-no answer. And time and again it would happen that, after a debate between the two editors, Fr. Seraphim and myself, we would finally decide to ask Fr. Spyridon. We would usually resort to letters since we did not have a telephone and, even if we were to go down the hill to call him, he would often be in the hospital or in school.<sup>[a]</sup> Thus, having written him a letter with our question in it, we would take it down to the post office to mail it away. We would then pick up the letters of that day from our post-office box. Among these letters would be one from Fr. Spyridon in which, out of the blue, he would answer that very question we had just slipped in the mail!”<sup>3</sup>

In later years there was another incident that, as Fr. Seraphim said, revealed Fr. Spyridon as “something of a ‘prophet.’”<sup>4</sup> Having taken a group of young brothers to the Liturgy in Archbishop John’s Sepulchre on the latter’s repose day in 1982, Fr. Seraphim went with them to see Fr. Spyridon in Palo Alto. Fr. Spyridon had never met most of these young men before, and yet, as Fr. Seraphim recorded, “he blessed each of us with a spontaneous phrase that just hit our problems and gave us the answer to them!”<sup>5</sup>

**A**T the hermitage the fathers noticed that, when Fr. Spyridon would spend time within the bosom of nature and away from all worldly concerns, his true self would emerge. “At times,” Fr. Herman recalls, “he shone with indescribable purity, like a child who is bubbling with love of life. I shall never forget a glimpse of the real Fr. Spyridon, which I chanced to catch and imprint on my mind, and which will remain in my heart forever.

“It was in the late 1970s, soon after Pascha. One of the neighbors of our monastery, Mrs. Schneider, had given us two pair of snow-white doves. They would hover and flutter over our monastic grounds, sit in pairs on branches near our belfry, or promenade near the church porch, where we would strew some grain for them. It was already late spring when Fr. Spyridon, frail and sickly,



arrived. The whole of nature, imaging the Paschal rebirth of life, was in full bloom. Our black oaks put out their first leaves, which were pink in color. Against the cloudless May sky, our wooded grounds presented a festive picture.

“After Fr. Spyridon served Liturgy, we went to prepare lunch. Usually after Liturgy he would depart to his cell some distance away, but this time he just sat on the church steps, resting. He gazed in still contemplation into the ‘inner’ space. The doves quietly approached him and sat next to him, and he spoke to them. I glanced through the window and saw this scene. There was a man in his natural surroundings. It was a revelation of the state of infinite, unworldly peace. The doves were a symbol of the divine meekness embodied in him. No doubt he thought of Blessed Archbishop John, who had himself established a ‘friendship’ with a dove.

“I don’t know how long he sat there as I watched him, but I never wanted to forget that sight. In it was a hint of his secret, which he shared with Blessed John and which he would never reveal. I felt then that he could see something else, that he was looking into another world. He was consciously a part of the essence of things, while the rest of us fumble about in a semi-conscious state. In the face of the whirling vanity of worldly life to which we are all trained to be adjusted, Fr. Spyridon was always in a state that one might call distracted. And yet in the face of the reality he now beheld, it was not he but the rest of the world that was distracted, too inwardly cluttered.

“I called Fr. Seraphim to the window, and he also saw what I saw: a glimpse of the monastic mystery.”<sup>6</sup>





“In Silence,” from *Russkiy Palomnik (Russian Pilgrim)*, June 23, 1905. Fr. Herman discovered this drawing years after the incident related above, and felt that it remarkably captured the state in which he had found Fr. Spyridon on that May morning, on the steps of the monastery church.

## *The Desert Paradise*

*A silent man is a son of wisdom, always acquiring much knowledge.*

—St. John Climacus<sup>1</sup>

*Not every quiet man is humble, but every humble man is quiet.... The humble man is always at rest, because there is nothing which can agitate or shake his mind.... I should say that the humble man is not of this world.*

—St. Isaac the Syrian<sup>2</sup>

**W**ITH the little flame that burned in their hearts since their tonsure, the fathers were able to follow Fr. Spyridon deeper and deeper into the monastic mystery. Now they truly began to reap the spiritual fruits of the desert.

“Our attention,” Fr. Herman writes, “gradually began to take in the life that directly surrounded us. We began to see reality more as it is, and to not depend on human opinion. The sound of the wind, the changes of the weather, its influence on one’s mood, the life of the forest animals and birds — it was as if even the breathing of the plants and trees now had significance. Peaceful ideas were sown. The eyes began to accustom themselves to seeing not just what was external and jumped out at them, but the essence of the matter. Although friends came with love and tried to help, they were actually more of a burden and right from the beginning made errors of simple judgment, worrying about the external aspect that passes and not seeing the essence. And with what joy was the heart filled when silence reigned again and much-speaking stillness.”

Elder Zosima of Siberia,<sup>[a]</sup> whose Life and writings were among the

seminal texts that had drawn the fathers to the wilderness in the first place, once wrote about the desert: “How is it possible to describe accurately all the inner spiritual feelings which are so sweet that not even a successful reign over a kingdom can give the same joy and peace as does the desert life! For when you neither see, nor hear, nor associate with the world which has gone astray, you find peace, and your whole mind naturally aspires to God alone. There is nothing in the desert life that would hinder or distract one from serving God, reading the Holy Scripture, and nourishing one’s soul with deep contemplation of God. On the contrary, every event and every object inspire one to strive towards God. The dense forest surrounds one and hides him from the whole world. The path to heaven is clear and pure, and it attracts one’s gaze and inspires one’s desire to be vouchsafed to be translated into that blessedness. And if one’s gaze does turn towards the earth, to behold all the creatures and the whole of nature, one’s heart is no less exalted with sweet love towards the Creator of all, with awe at His wisdom, with gratitude for His merciful kindness; even the pleasant singing of birds inspires one to prayerful praise and song. All creation leads our immortal spirit to unite with its Creator!”

“I believe,” wrote Elder Zosima elsewhere, “that if one departs for the inner desert overcome and persuaded by a divine love for Christ, he will truly live as if in Paradise.”<sup>3</sup>

This became Fr. Seraphim’s own experience. Fr. Herman recalls how once he awakened from a terrible nightmare and ran to tell Fr. Seraphim his fears. “What are we doing out here in this place?” he demanded. “This is crazy!”

Fr. Seraphim rubbed the sleep from his eyes. “Why, we’re in Paradise!” he said.

On another occasion, Fr. Herman reminded Fr. Seraphim of his unfinished book, *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*, and spoke about the possibility of completing and publishing it. In response, Fr. Seraphim said that the Kingdom of Man was degenerating faster than he had expected. “And as for the Kingdom of God,” he concluded, “we’re creating that here. We already have

it... we're in it."

At this Fr. Herman began to laugh, thinking of their primitive shacks and muddy road, of their lack of a water source, of the local bats, rattlesnakes, and scorpions. "Don't laugh," Fr. Seraphim said. "It's true." And with a significant look he pointed a finger to heaven.

In Fr. Seraphim, as in Fr. Spyridon, Fr. Herman was to catch glimpses of another life, another existence. In the morning, before Church services, Fr. Seraphim had a practice of circling the entire monastery grounds. As the golden glow of the morning light filtered through the broad canopy of oak leaves, Fr. Seraphim could be seen blessing and even kissing the trees.

"What's this?" Fr. Herman asked him. "Kissing trees!"

Fr. Seraphim looked up, smiling radiantly, and continued walking.

Fr. Seraphim knew better than most people that this old earth, weighed down by the fallenness of man, had not long to live, that it would be "obliterated in the twinkling of an eye,"<sup>[b]</sup> transfigured into a new earth. And yet, as Fr. Herman realized while he watched him make his rounds, Fr. Seraphim was already living as if in the future age. "He wanted to die," Fr. Herman says, "to melt into the earth, which will be transformed.... To him, the very idea of the tree he kissed was otherworldly, for trees were originally created incorruptible in Paradise, according to the teaching of St. Gregory of Sinai."<sup>4</sup>

**I**N order to know this transfigured realm which was man's inheritance from the beginning, Fr. Seraphim was first of all being transfigured himself. The whole aim of monastic life is the transfiguration of the old man into an unearthly being, which is why the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor has traditionally held such great significance for monastics.

As Fr. Seraphim knew, however, such transfiguration does not happen of itself. He did not wait for the virtues to come naturally, but, seeing their lack in himself, he consciously labored to acquire them, hoping in Christ to strengthen him. Each day entailed constant unseen warfare, watching and fighting against

the interior movements of the fallen man. He was one of those about whom Christ said, *The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force* (Matt. 11:12). One of the visitors to the skete relates: “Fr. Seraphim believed that authentic Orthodox Christian life is *very* difficult and that one must grasp and hold onto it not only firmly and with all of one’s might, but with a certain ‘toughness’ and tenacity, even a fierceness, because everything in the world, everything in this life, is constantly trying to steal it away and substitute some cheap imitation. He particularly liked those very single-minded saints who just kept right on going, no matter what the obstacles. This was one of the things he especially admired in Archbishop John (Maximovitch), who kept his inner life intact, no matter what was going on around him, and remained always serenely indifferent to the opinions of others about him.”<sup>5</sup>

Never forgetting the necessity of *forcing himself* in the Christian spiritual life, Fr. Seraphim lived according to the following words of St. Macarius the Great, which he entered into his spiritual journal: “In coming to the Lord, a man must force himself to that which is good, even against the inclination of his heart, continually expecting His mercy with undoubting faith, and force himself to love when he has no love, force himself to meekness when he has no meekness, force himself to pity and to have a merciful heart, force himself to be looked down upon, and when he is looked down upon to bear it patiently... force himself to prayer when he has not spiritual prayer. And thus God, beholding him thus striving and compelling himself by force, in spite of an unwilling heart, gives him the true prayer of the Spirit, gives him true love, meekness, *bowels of mercies* (Col. 3:12), true kindness, and in short fills him with spiritual fruit.”<sup>6</sup>

**T**HE primary means of spiritual transformation is repentance: the awareness of sin within oneself — even the most subtle — and the heart-wrenching desire to turn from it and change. It has been seen how Fr. Seraphim, in the early years of his conversion, went through a process of deep repentance which changed him into a new being. But his repentance did not end there. As he

well understood, true spiritual life involves *continuous* repentance, and a corresponding continuous re-creation and perfecting of one's inner being through the grace of Christ. In 1964, not many years after his conversion, he had discussed this in one of his "lay sermons." Reflecting on the Good Thief who while hanging on the cross had acknowledged his sin and confessed Christ, Fr. Seraphim wrote: "We are all, whether we realize it or not, in the position of this thief. Like him we have been condemned by our sins as unworthy of this life; like him we have nothing to hope for in this world, and we face only suffering and a miserable death if we hope for no other life than this. But if, like him, even in our suffering and unworthiness we yet turn to the God Who condescended to share our human weakness, even to such an ignominious death, and believe that He has the power to fulfill the promises He has made to us — then is our condemnation revoked, our sins forgiven, our unworthiness overlooked, and our pain and sorrow and death swallowed up in victory and joy and eternal life."<sup>7</sup>

Every year during Great Lent, Fr. Seraphim tried to reread the whole of Blessed Augustine's *Confessions*, and every year he would weep at Augustine's profound repentance. From the portions he underlined in the book, it is clear that Fr. Seraphim saw his own life in the story of Blessed Augustine's conversion from sin and rebellion to faith. In many passages the similarities are striking, as if it were Fr. Seraphim and not Augustine who was writing about his past.

By humbling himself through unseen warfare and repentance, Fr. Seraphim was better able to give glory to God and appreciate the grandeur of His creation. For Fr. Seraphim, the apocalyptic transfiguration of the fallen world began right now, within himself. Through a process of gradual purification, in contrition, prayer, and spiritual vigilance, Paradise began to blossom in his heart. The Kingdom of God was indeed within him.

**W**HEN Fr. Herman would watch his co-laborer walking through the woods absorbed in thought, he would think: Now here's one who belongs here. Instead of shriveling away in solitude, he soars in it. He has a world of his own, and

being here only unfetters it.

Fr. Herman also noticed that Fr. Seraphim was always cheerful: not overly happy — just cheerful. The saints, Fr. Seraphim once explained, “are in a state of deep happiness, because they are constantly looking above and keeping in mind, with determination and constancy, to get to a certain place, which is heaven; and thus they see all the details in the world in that light. If what they see has to do with evil, with the nets of demons, with worldliness, with boredom, with discouragement, or just with ordinary details of living, all that is secondary and is never allowed to be first.”<sup>8</sup>

As Fr. Herman has said, “Fr. Seraphim had no interest in the mundane; he never forgot that there was another world. He could immediately determine what was worthwhile and what was not, and would totally ignore and dismiss low, cheap things. This was not even deliberate on his part; it had become automatic. He had the strength of character to concentrate only on what was needed. From this I could see that he had been practicing unseen warfare long before I met him.”

What most amazed Fr. Herman was that Fr. Seraphim never spoke an unnecessary word. “An intelligent man,” stated St. Anthony the Great, “is one who conforms to God and mostly keeps silent; when he speaks he says very little, and only what is necessary and acceptable to God.”<sup>9</sup>

Fr. Herman was wont to talk on and on about particular subjects related to their life and work; and Fr. Seraphim, valuing the transmission from holy teachers that his co-laborer imparted, would patiently absorb it all in silence. Fr. Herman would think this was the end of it; but time and again he would be surprised when Fr. Seraphim would later come up with a gem of a statement that would crystallize the very essence of what he had been trying to say with so many words.

“I could see,” Fr. Herman recalls, “that not only was his mind working but his heart was involved, and his heart caught those things you just can’t get, as a rational being, from books. He was on a different level of thinking. He thought



much and prayed much, and somehow the Mother of God was involved in this process. Things were open to him, but he couldn't tell of them because others wouldn't understand. That's why he said so few words, even when I urged him to reveal the fruits of his contemplation."

Fr. Herman remembers a mysterious incident from his early association with Fr. Seraphim, before the foundation of the Brotherhood, when they spent the night on the beach by a bonfire. The stars were out, and they could see the buoys flickering on the horizon. Fr. Seraphim sat for hours looking out to sea, not saying a word. Then he turned and looked at Fr. Herman out of the corner of his eye. His face was very serious. "I know you," he said. "I knew you before. I knew you were coming."

Fr. Herman knew these words had nothing to do with "reincarnation," for in his conversations with Fr. Seraphim on that subject he found his views thoroughly Orthodox.<sup>10</sup> Rather, his words revealed that he was seeing reality on a higher level, as it was in relation to eternity. Once Fr. Herman asked Fr. Seraphim how people could prophesy the future, and the latter told him precisely this, that it had to do with seeing from a higher perspective.

"When you are up in the sky," Fr. Herman explains, "you can see a man coming, hours before he reaches his destination. When on that night Fr. Seraphim said he had known me before, it was because he had seen my entering into his life from another perspective, twenty miles up in the sky. And it made sense to him.

"He was not at home in the world, he had no lust for life like I did; and that's why he could go so high — into super-consciousness."

Fr. Seraphim spoke very often about "the Truth," and every time it seemed to Fr. Herman that he was not talking about a mere principle or concept, but about a living Person. Once Fr. Herman found Fr. Seraphim praying alone in the church, fervently imploring God on his knees. When he asked Fr. Seraphim what he was praying about, the latter said that the world was turning away from the Truth, and the Truth was diminishing in the hearts of men. Fr. Herman marveled



that his co-laborer should be thinking in such terms, that he should be actually praying about Truth.

Observing Fr. Seraphim's silent contemplation, Fr. Herman would tell him half-jokingly, "You're a hesychast!" — meaning a "silent one" engaged in direct contemplation of Divinity. Fr. Seraphim, however, did not like this term applied to himself. He even became indignant, saying, "I don't know what that means." Of course he knew intellectually, but he did not want to pretend to understand it from experience. He detested posing and fakery of any kind. For him, spiritual life had to be first of all down to earth, filled with humility and a sober awareness of one's low spiritual state. In his younger days he had written: "He who thinks himself self-sufficient is in the snare of the devil; but such a man who thinks further that he is 'spiritual' has become almost an active accomplice of the devil, whether he realizes it or not."<sup>11</sup>

In his love of Truth, Fr. Seraphim clung above all to *sobriety (nipsis)*, seeing reality as it is in truth. Fr. Seraphim himself explained this as the state of Adam in Paradise. "Adam," he said, "was in a state of sobriety.... He looked at things and saw them the way they were. There was no 'double thought' like we have in our fallen state: looking at things and imagining something else."<sup>12</sup>

The saints and ascetics have demonstrated that it is indeed possible to regain the state in which Adam lived before the fall; and thus it was that they managed to live in forlorn and forbidden deserts as if in Eden. Fr. Seraphim approached this state in simplicity of heart. There was no "double thought" of looking at himself and imagining himself to be "spiritual." The closer he drew to incorruptible Paradise, the more he felt he did not deserve it.

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM cherished every day he was given to spend in the forest. He felt like the Russian desert-dweller, St. Cyril of White Lake (†1429), who, having found the wilderness spot which the Mother of God had given him for the salvation of his soul, had declared, "Here is my rest unto the ages, here will I dwell" (Psalm 131:15).<sup>13</sup> In 1972 Fr. Seraphim wrote to his godfather Dimitry:

“Yes, I remember our Easter together, and also our walks around Mount Tamalpais (once on the Second Sunday of Lent, I think). And now God has granted us the great gladness of being able to live in such an atmosphere all the time. Deep down I have great joy, and if sometimes I become loaded down with work I have only to step outdoors in order once again to ‘rejoice in the Lord.’”<sup>14</sup>

Fr. Seraphim expressed similar words of gratitude in December of 1974, when he was left alone at the hermitage for a few days, “deriving inspiration,” as he said, “from the Life of Elder Macarius of Optina.”<sup>15</sup> “Late last night,” he recorded, “our first snowfall of the season began, and today at noon there are ten inches on the ground, with the prospect of eighteen inches by nightfall if it keeps up. Beautiful and inspiring, and we are constantly grateful to God for giving us such a ‘desert.’ May it become fruitful!”<sup>16</sup>

Even if only for a day, Fr. Seraphim disliked to leave his place of salvation. When he would have to drive to town he would get it over with as quickly as possible, driving fast on the mountain roads, doing the specific errands without lingering for a moment, and returning home immediately. He especially disliked going to San Francisco. After having gone there for the celebration of Christmas in 1970, the fathers decided never to do this again. According to the desert tradition of St. Sergius of Radonezh and others, they henceforth celebrated Christmas and Pascha alone in their skete, going to a parish to receive Holy Communion either shortly before or after these Feasts. In general, they went to San Francisco but once a year, for the Liturgy in Archbishop John’s Sepulchre on the day of his repose.

In *The Orthodox Word* Fr. Seraphim wrote: “Christianity in practice, and monasticism above all, is a matter of *staying in one place and struggling with all one’s heart* for the Kingdom of Heaven. One may be called to do the work of God elsewhere, or may be moved about by unavoidable circumstances; but without the basic and profound desire to endure everything for God in one place without running away, one will scarcely be able to put down the roots required in order to bring forth spiritual fruits. Unfortunately, with the ease of modern

communications one may even sit in one spot and *still* concern oneself with everything but the one thing needful — with everyone else’s business, with all the church gossip, and not with the concentrated labor needed to save one’s soul in this evil world.

“In a famous passage of the *Institutes*, St. Cassian warns the monks of his time to ‘flee women and bishops....’ Women, of course, tempt by means of the flesh, and bishops by means of ordination to the priesthood and in general by the vainglory of acquaintance with those in high positions. Today this warning remains timely, but for the monks of the twentieth century one can add a further warning: Flee from telephones, traveling, and gossip — those forms of communication which most of all bind one to the world — for they will cool your ardor and make you, even in your monastic cell, the plaything of worldly desires and influences!”<sup>17</sup>

As Lao Tzu, the favorite philosopher of Fr. Seraphim’s early days, had put it, “The more one travels, the less one knows.”

Once Fr. Herman asked Fr. Seraphim if there was anywhere in the world he wanted to go.

“No,” replied Fr. Seraphim.

“Why not? Don’t you even want to go to Mount Athos?”

“We should strive, according to Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov’s advice, to have Mount Athos in our hearts. Actually, we are working to have our own Mount Athos in America. The only problem is there’s not much time left.”

In his reading of the Holy Fathers, Fr. Seraphim found many passages that spoke of the virtue of stability, i.e., of staying in one place.<sup>18</sup> Most of these counsels came from a monastic context, but as Fr. Seraphim discerned they pertained not only to monks. Anthony Arganda, who told Fr. Seraphim that he wanted to get married and raise a family, recalls Fr. Seraphim telling him that the monastic counsels on stability could also be applied to laymen in parishes: “Fr. Seraphim emphasized to me that, if one jumps around from place to place, one damages one’s ability to put down roots. If the life in one’s monastery is

not as ascetic and focused as in another monastery, he said that it is better to stay there than to skip around. Likewise, if in one's parish the spiritual level seems to be not very high, confessions are perfunctory, the choir sings off key, etc., it is better to remain there than to switch to a parish where everything seems to be on a higher level. Wherever you are, that's where you should work out your salvation, instead of wandering around, looking for the perfect expression of Orthodoxy, the most elevated spirituality, the perfect *starets*, etc. Fr. Seraphim told me that stability and loyalty are great virtues. What is most pleasing to God, he said, is your perseverance, your humility in working out your salvation where He has placed you."

SOME people, coming from bustling cities, were amazed that such a place as the Platina hermitage could exist in modern America. One young visitor had an expression of absolute awe as he walked through the monastery gate. He saw the two monks, in worn black robes, with long hair and beards, and behind them the silent woods and a few small buildings. As the fathers talked with him, he continued looking around at the forest, hidden from the world, where the prayers of monks in the ancient tradition of the Church were still rising to God. He asked the fathers if he could take a walk around the hermitage. As Fr. Seraphim watched the visitor walk down the trail in a state of obvious rapture, he turned to Fr. Herman and said, "That's our kind of man!"

About such people, the fathers were wont to say that they "got the point." But this "point," which the fathers termed the "desert ideal," was not so easy to propagate. Fr. Herman had made an attempt by publishing an account of his pilgrimage to the wilderness sketes of Canada.<sup>19</sup> One young Russian man had been so taken by these articles that he had decided to visit the sketes himself. A few months later, however, when he came to the St. Herman Hermitage for the first time, he told the fathers of his disappointment. "You made the Canadian sketes sound so wonderful," he said while hiking with the fathers to the top of Noble Ridge. "Your descriptions were so poetic. But when I went there, there

was nothing — just a few crude shacks and a few old Russian monks and nuns. In a short time they will all be dead and there will be nothing left. Why did you build this up into such a big thing? It isn't true!"

"Well, I admit that," Fr. Herman responded. In writing about all the holy places in America, he explained, he had wanted to present readers with the *potential* of Orthodox sanctity in their land, to inspire young people to labor to reach that potential. "The seeds of desert monasticism have already been planted in America and they are being nurtured, in a small way, by the old men and women whom you saw in those dilapidated sketes. If their tradition dies out, it will not be *their* fault, for they have done their part, struggling and praying alone in the wilderness. Instead, it will be the fault of the new generation of Orthodox Christians who have not valued the legacy handed down to them."

In the evening, after the young man left, the fathers were sitting by themselves in the refectory. Wanting reassurance, Fr. Herman began one of his lamentations. "What's the use of all our work towards the desert ideal?" he asked. "It's so hard for people to accept or even understand. It's as if there's some secret to it that people can't pick up just by reading about it. Maybe it really is beyond the capacity of contemporary American youth. We give them all these lofty messages to inspire them, but when they see the *reality*, that it means a life of struggle and deprivation without all the modern comforts and conveniences, their resolve weakens and they give up. So, in the end, is there really any point to what we're doing here?"

"You certainly expressed the answer to that eloquently at the top of Noble Ridge today," replied Fr. Seraphim. "We have to answer for ourselves. The last generation has done *its* part. Let's do ours."

**T**HE most difficult thing for many visitors to accept was the lack of a telephone at the hermitage. Valentina Harvey, who lived in the town of Redding, about forty-five miles east of the hermitage, was particularly concerned about this. Once, in speaking of it to Bishop Nektary, she said, "Here are these two

monks living in the woods, cold and in need. I work for the telephone company; I even know the workers who install and maintain telephone lines in Platina; and I've been trying to get the company to install a telephone at the monastery free of charge. But when I told Fr. Herman about it, he said, 'Over our dead bodies!' Why this refusal?"

Bishop Nektary smiled, and responded by telling a story. "Next to Optina Monastery," he said, "there was a river separating it from the nearby town. The only contact with the monastery was through a raft. This caused much inconvenience, both because of the changing seasons and because the monastery was growing fast, with a great inflow of visitors. The monks and abbots, however, would not build a bridge. Finally, the townspeople got together and offered to build a bridge for free. The monks flatly refused, explaining that they had left the world and did not want to have easy ties with it. This tie with the world is represented both by the bridge in Optina and by the telephone in Platina. When the Soviets took over Russia, they immediately built a bridge and closed the Optina Monastery."

It was not only lay people who did not understand the wish of the fathers to avoid easy contact with the world. Fr. Panteleimon, whose monastery was in an impressive mansion in a suburb of Boston, also expressed some disapproval. On one of his visits to the Platina hermitage he told the fathers, "You have a wonderful monastery here, but it will not be able to exist the way it is because American boys just can't live under such austere conditions."

"How can we make it easier?" asked Fr. Herman, thinking that Fr. Panteleimon would suggest plumbing, central heating, electricity, or some other convenience.

"You must get a telephone, dear Father," answered Fr. Panteleimon.

"But why a telephone?"

"So that you can contact me."

"How will that make life less austere?"

"Because then I can tell you what you need."

Standing in the background, Fr. Seraphim looked at Fr. Herman with surprise. “Why must we have a telephone to be in contact with *him*?” he asked after Fr. Panteleimon had left the room.

“Answer that yourself!” replied Fr. Herman.

“Let’s forget about it,” Fr. Seraphim concluded.

At Fr. Panteleimon’s departure, the fathers rang the monastery bells and went outside the gate to say farewell. Walking back to the hermitage after the car had passed from sight, Fr. Seraphim did not look pleased.

“What in the world is wrong?” inquired Fr. Herman, prodding a reaction from Fr. Seraphim. “Fr. Panteleimon is one of the leading Orthodox monastic figures in America, and he came all this way to visit us poor idiots in the middle of nowhere.”

“If it’s not our kind of monasticism,” Fr. Seraphim said emphatically, “I don’t want it!”

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM was not interested in monasticism according to the way the world thinks it *should* be: monks walking around acting spiritual, providing for admiring visitors a comfortable, convenient, and reasonably devised “retreat center.” At the Platina hermitage, the fathers did not even finish their buildings. They built just enough to keep the wind and rain out — and even in this they were not always successful. As mentioned earlier, their intention had never been to build an established place, but only a site of Christian struggle during their all-too-brief pilgrimage in this world. Even their church was never entirely finished. Its dark wood interior gave it a warm, homey feeling — but it was impossible to heat during the winter. “There is a certain opinion in the air,” Fr. Seraphim related, “that of course when you come to church you must be warm, because you cannot think about Church services and prepare yourself for Communion when you have to think about cold feet. People tell us this. ‘It’s a very great drawback,’ they say. ‘You cannot go and have cold feet and expect any spirituality to come out.’ This happens to be an opinion, and it’s totally off. The

Holy Fathers have been living throughout the centuries in all kinds of conditions; and, though there is no deliberate plot of torturing oneself with cold feet — still, this is something which helps to make one a little more sober about the spiritual life, perhaps helps one to appreciate what one has, and not just take for granted that one is going to be comfortable and cozy and that's it.”<sup>20</sup>

Fr. Herman recalls how, when he once complained about the cold church, Fr. Seraphim told him he was convinced that the more he suffered in the cold church, the closer he came to the lives of the very ascetics he was singing about. As that happened, he said, he felt the cold less and less.

**W**HEREAS the modern concept of a “retreat” often entails the expectation of spiritual enjoyment, rest and relaxation, the Orthodox concept of *pilgrimage* is something quite different. Orthodox Christians have traditionally made pilgrimages to holy places as a *podvig* of cleansing repentance, taking on voluntary hardships to the point of traveling for several hundred miles on foot. Those who benefitted most from visits to Platina wanted not a vacation, but rather the chance to embrace a little hardship, casting aside the constant self-pampering of the American lifestyle.

It was very burdensome for Fr. Seraphim to have to deal with casual visitors who came from the world “just to look around.” He felt obliged to be polite and receive them in the name of Christ; but, as Fr. Herman noticed, such obligations “made him turn green.” Fr. Herman would have to “rescue” him by taking these people off his hands. Tremendously relieved, Fr. Seraphim would cross himself and return to his monastic cell to work on his next article.

One woman who came to the hermitage was positively scandalized by it. Accompanied by a reluctant Fr. Seraphim, she sauntered around the monastery grounds in a flaming red dress. “How boring your life must be here!” she exclaimed. “No television, no radio, not even a telephone! How can you stand it?!”

“We’re very busy here,” Fr. Seraphim replied. “We don’t have time to be



bored.”

Later, when this woman had left for her home in the city, Fr. Seraphim made this observation to Fr. Herman: “The city is for those who are empty, and it pushes away those who are filled. The desert keeps those who are filled and allows them to thrive.”

## *The Mind of the Fathers*

*When on a clear autumn night I gaze at the clear sky, sown with numberless stars, so diverse in size yet shedding a single light, then I say to myself: such are the writings of the Fathers! When on a summer day I gaze at the vast sea, covered with a multitude of diverse vessels with their unfurled sails like white swans' wings, vessels racing under a single wind to a single goal, to a single harbor, I say to myself: such are the writings of the Fathers! When I hear a harmonious, many-voiced choir, in which diverse voices in elegant harmony sing a single Divine song, then I say to myself: such are the writings of the Fathers!*

—St. Ignatius Brianchaninov<sup>1</sup>

**N**EVER has there been,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “such an age of false teachers as this pitiful twentieth century, so rich in material gadgets and so poor in mind and soul. Every conceivable opinion, even the most absurd, even those hitherto rejected by the universal consent of all civilized peoples — now has its platform and its own ‘teacher.’ A few of these teachers come with demonstration or promise of ‘spiritual power’ and false miracles, as do some occultists and ‘charismatics’; but most of the contemporary teachers offer no more than a weak concoction of undigested ideas which they received ‘out of the air,’ as it were, or from some modern self-appointed ‘wise man’ (or woman) who knows more than all the ancients merely by living in our ‘enlightened’ modern times. As a result, philosophy has a thousand schools, and ‘Christianity’ a thousand sects. Where is the truth to be found in all this, if indeed it is to be found at all in our most

misguided times?

“In only one place is there to be found the fount of true teaching, coming from God Himself, not diminished over the centuries but ever fresh, being one and the same in all those who truly teach it, leading those who follow it to eternal salvation. This place is the Orthodox Church of Christ, the fount is the grace of the All-Holy Spirit, and the true teachers of the Divine doctrine that issues from this fount are the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church.”<sup>2</sup>

As Fr. Seraphim spiritually soared in the desert, his soul drank from the fount of grace in the Church: from the Church’s Divinely inspired Scriptures, and from the true interpreters of Scripture, the Holy Fathers. “In the Holy Fathers,” he wrote, “we find the ‘mind of the Church’—the living understanding of God’s revelation. They are our link between the ancient texts which contain God’s revelation [i.e., the Holy Scriptures] and today’s reality. Without such a link it is every man for himself — and the result is a myriad of interpretations and sects.”<sup>3</sup> In another place, Fr. Seraphim quoted from the Patristic theologian Archbishop Theophan of Poltava to elucidate this point: “The Church is *the house... of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth* (I Tim. 3:15). Christian truth is preserved in the Church in the Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition; but it requires a correct preservation and a correct interpretation. The significance of the Holy Fathers is to be found precisely in this: that they are the most capable preservers and interpreters of this truth by virtue of the sanctity of their lives, their profound knowledge of the word of God, and the abundance of the grace of the Holy Spirit which dwells in them.”<sup>4</sup>

Over years of prodigious reading, Fr. Seraphim gathered extensive knowledge of Patristic teaching. In addressing a particular issue in his writings, he would make use of a wide range of Patristic sources both ancient and modern, from both Eastern and Western Christendom, many of them quite obscure and never before rendered in English. His aim, however, was not to become a scholar whose specialty was the Holy Fathers. Such experts, he wrote, are often “total strangers to the true Patristic tradition, and only make their living at its

expense.”<sup>5</sup> As always, he had to go deeper, to get the whole picture. He had to not only know the Fathers, but to actually *acquire their mind*, to learn to think, feel, and look at things as they did. Too often in contemporary Orthodoxy the tendency is to reinterpret the Faith in order to conform it to the mind of modern man. Fr. Seraphim knew he had to do just the opposite: to conform his consciousness to the mind of the Fathers, to plug himself fully into the two-thousand-year continuity of Christian experience. In acquiring the mind of the Fathers and thus the mind of the Church, he was at the same time acquiring the Mind of Christ, Who is the Head of the Church and Who guides His Church in the fullness of Truth.

In an informal talk for Orthodox converts at the hermitage, Fr. Seraphim spoke about how one can begin acquiring the Patristic mind. One of the keys is *constancy*. “Constancy,” he said, “is something which is worked out by a spiritual regime based upon wisdom handed down from the Holy Fathers — not mere obedience to tradition for tradition’s sake, but rather a conscious assimilation of what wise men in God have seen and written down. On the outward side, this constancy is worked out by a little prayer, and we have this basic prayer in the Church services which have come down to us. Of course in different places they are performed according to one’s strength, more or less.

“Constancy also involves a regular reading of spiritual texts, for example at mealtime. We must be constantly injected with otherworldliness in order to fight against the other side, against the worldliness that constantly gnaws at us. If for just one day we stop these otherworldly ‘injections,’ it is obvious that worldliness starts taking over. When we go without them for one day, worldliness invades — two days, much more. We find that soon we think more and more in a worldly way, the more we allow ourselves to be exposed to that way of thinking and the less we expose ourselves to otherworldly thinking.

“These injections — daily injections of heavenly food — are the outward side, and the inward side is what is called spiritual life. Spiritual life does not mean being in the clouds while saying the Jesus Prayer or going through various

motions. It means discovering the laws of this spiritual life as they apply to one's own position, one's situation. This comes over the years by attentive reading of the Holy Fathers with a notebook, writing down those passages which seem most significant to us, studying them, finding how they apply to us, and, if need be, revising earlier views of them as we get a little deeper into them, finding what one Father says about something, what a second Father says about the same thing, and so on. There is no encyclopedia that will give you that. You cannot decide you want to find all about some one subject and begin reading the Holy Fathers. There are a few indexes in the writings of the Fathers, but you cannot simply go at spiritual life in that way. You have to go at it a little bit at a time, taking the teaching in as you are able to absorb it, going back over the same texts in later years, reabsorbing them, getting more, and gradually coming to find out how these spiritual texts apply to you. As a person does that, he discovers that every time he reads the same Holy Father he finds new things. He always goes deeper into it....

“Fr. Nicholas Deputatov,<sup>[a]</sup> who is obviously one who has much love for the Holy Fathers, has read their writings, underlined them, and written them out in books. He says: When I get in a very low mood, very discouraged and despondent, then I open one of my notebooks, and I begin to read something that inspired me. It is almost guaranteed that when I read something which once inspired me, I will again become inspired, because it's my own soul that was at one time being inspired, and now I see that it was something which inspired me then and can nourish me now also. So it's like an automatic inspiration, to open up something which inspired me before.”<sup>6</sup>

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM pointed out that the teaching of the Fathers is not something of one age: “Orthodoxy, of course, does not change from one day to the next, or from one century to the next. Looking at the Protestant and Roman Catholic world, we can see that certain spiritual writings become out of date. Sometimes they come back into fashion again, sometimes they go out. It is

obvious that they are bound up with worldly things, which appeal to people at one time, or rather to the spirit of the times. This is not so with our Orthodox holy writings. Once we get the whole Orthodox Christian outlook — the simply Christian outlook — which has been handed down from Christ and the Apostles to our times, then everything becomes contemporary. You read the words of someone like St. Macarius, who lived in the deserts of Egypt in the fourth century, and he’s speaking to you now. His conditions are a little different, but he’s speaking right to you, in the same language. He’s going to the same place, he’s using the same mind, he has the same temptations and failings, and there’s nothing different about him. It’s the same with all the other Fathers from that time down to our century, like St. John of Kronstadt. They all speak the same language, one kind of language, the language of spiritual life, which we must get into.”<sup>7</sup>

Fr. Seraphim emphasized that “the genuine, unchanging teaching of Christianity is handed down in unbroken succession both orally and by the written word, from spiritual father to spiritual son, from teacher to disciple.” There was never a time, he said, when the Church was without Holy Fathers, or when it was necessary to discover a “lost” Patristic teaching: “Even when many Orthodox Christians may have neglected this teaching (as is the case, for example, in our own day), its true representatives were still handing it down to those who hungered to receive it.” He spoke of how important it is for us, the last Christians, “to take guidance and inspiration from the Holy Fathers of our own and recent times, those who lived in conditions similar to our own and yet kept undamaged and unchanged the same ever-fresh teaching.” There were two key figures whom he especially stressed in this regard: the Russian spiritual writers Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov (†1867) and Bishop Theophan the Recluse (†1894).<sup>[b]</sup> “They spoke to people in the language of their times,” he said, “a period very close to our twentieth century. All the temptations of our times were known to them, especially to Bishop Ignatius, who read all the Western writers, was himself an engineer, and knew all the latest theories of

mathematics and calculus. Knowing the present situation and the whole of modern Western wisdom, they set forth the Orthodox teaching for these times and answered all kinds of arguments. Bishop Ignatius, for example, wrote a volume on hell and the state of the soul after death, elucidating Orthodox teaching in a way that can be understood by Western man. These Fathers, as well as others who have read them and followed them, hand down Orthodoxy to us in a very accessible way....

“We have to look at ourselves: if we see that we have zeal for Orthodoxy and yet are not ‘linked’ with the line that goes back to Ignatius Brianchaninov and Theophan the Recluse, there is a danger that we might not be linked up to all the Fathers. There should be a continuous line.”<sup>8</sup>

It was by being a devoted son of the Fathers of his own time (beginning with Archbishop John) and of recent centuries (Ignatius, Theophan, Paisius, etc.) that Fr. Seraphim became a true son of the ancients. Linked to the transmission, he himself became a transmitter of ancient Patristic wisdom in our days. Again, this was not just because he knew what this or that Holy Father said about such and such, but because he actually became of one mind and soul with them.

Having traced his development thus far, we can discern several qualities in him that enabled him to succeed in this where others had not.

1. *Deadness to the world.* Bound up with nobility and suffering, this element grew in Fr. Seraphim from his adolescence to his life in the desert, when he truly began to live like the Holy Fathers. During the years prior to his conversion he had tasted the emptiness of this world, and he knew that *all is vanity* (Eccles. 1:2). Thus, he did not care to be in step with intellectual fashions in order to be heard and respected by the world. When he came upon a Patristic teaching that was clearly at odds with the spirit of the age, with contemporary predilections, philosophies, or theoretical scientific models, he was not afraid to set forth that teaching in its purity. While he strove to make the teaching understandable to the people of his day, he never tried to dilute it, qualify it, or present it in a vague manner in order to make it palatable. He wrote that we must



live by this teaching “even while knowing that by doing this we shall lose the favor of this world and become outcasts from it.”<sup>9</sup>



St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (1807–67), Bishop of the Caucasus and the Black Sea Coast. Icon printed in Russia after his canonization in 1988.

2. *Discernment of the times.* Fr. Seraphim had seen through the nihilistic philosophy of his age; he had understood its root, its essence. He knew that it affected everyone, himself included, and only in this way was he able to overcome it. Other contemporary Orthodox spokesmen remained victims of the subtle mind-set of modernity precisely because they failed to recognize it in



themselves.

3. *Humility*. “We must go to the Holy Fathers,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “*in order to become their disciples*, to receive the teaching of true life, the soul’s salvation.... We shall find true guidance from the Fathers, learning humility and distrust of our own vain worldly wisdom, which we have sucked in with the air of these pestilential times, by means of trusting those who have pleased God and not the world. We shall find in them true *fathers*, so lacking in our own day when the love of many has grown cold (Matt. 24:12)—fathers whose only aim is to lead us their children to God and His heavenly Kingdom, where we shall walk and converse with these angelic men in unutterable joy forever.”<sup>10</sup>

4. *Love*. A loving and devoted son will not have the attitude of “knowing better” than those who have begotten him. This “knowing better,” Fr. Seraphim realized, is the main stumbling block preventing people from entering fully into the spirit of the Fathers, the spirit of Orthodoxy. It is a pitfall created by the rationalistic Western mind, which has to calculate the credibility of something before it can accept it. Turning aside from this cold intellectual approach, Fr. Seraphim sought to believe in the Orthodoxy of the Fathers like a child, with innocence and guilelessness. His piety was childlike; he purposefully acquired this quality for himself because he wanted what was genuine. He knew that simplicity of heart was the normal state of Christians, of the most profound and penetrating Holy Fathers. As he came to realize, the only hope for today’s Orthodox Christians (especially converts) was to *engage the heart*, to come to the Faith with love so as not to reject something in Orthodoxy merely because one’s mind — filled as it is with modern preconceptions — cannot immediately accept it. “There can be a whole realm of confusion in the Holy Fathers,” he said, “and thus we have to approach them not with our ordinary rationalistic minds. We must be trying to raise our minds up to a higher level; and the way to do this is to soften the heart and make it more supple.”<sup>11</sup>

5. *Down-to-earth realism*. Fr. Seraphim understood the need of rightly applying the writings of the Holy Fathers to one’s own condition of life. In a

series of articles on how and how not to read the Fathers, he spoke of rationalist scholars and inexperienced converts who “derive no spiritual benefit from the Fathers but only increase their pride at ‘knowing better’ about them than anyone else, or — even worse — begin to follow the spiritual instructions in their writings without sufficient preparation and without any spiritual guidance.” With the aid of abundant Patristic passages, Fr. Seraphim explained how readily people can fall into deception by thinking themselves worthy of revelations, visions, and so on. “We must,” he wrote, “come to the Holy Fathers with the humble intention of *beginning the spiritual life at the lowest step*, and not even dreaming of ourselves attaining those exalted spiritual states, which are totally beyond us.... We must remember that the whole purpose of reading the Holy Fathers is, not to give us some kind of ‘spiritual enjoyment’ or confirm us in our own righteousness or superior knowledge or ‘contemplative’ state, but solely to aid us in the active path of virtue.... One must come to this reading in a *practical* way so as to make maximum use of it.”<sup>12</sup>

6. *Pain of Heart*. In this is found the last and most crucial key to Fr. Seraphim’s entry into the mind of the Fathers. In the Patristic writings, “pain of heart” generally refers to an elemental inward suffering, the bearing of an interior cross while following Jesus Christ, and a spirit broken in contrition. “Suffering,” Fr. Seraphim stated, “is the reality of the human condition and the beginning of true spiritual life.”<sup>13</sup> From Archbishop John, who had utterly crucified himself in this life, Fr. Seraphim had learned how to endure this suffering in thankfulness to God, and from him he had learned its fruits. If used in the right way, suffering can purify the heart, and *the pure in heart... shall see God* (Matt. 5:8). “The right approach,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “is found in the heart which tries to humble itself and simply knows that it is suffering, and that there somehow exists a higher truth which can not only help this suffering, but can bring it into a totally different dimension.”<sup>14</sup> According to St. Mark the Ascetic (fifth century), “Remembrance of God is *pain of heart* endured in the spirit of devotion. But he who forgets God becomes self-indulgent and insensitive.”<sup>15</sup>

And in the words of St. Barsanuphius the Great of Egypt, whose counsels Fr. Seraphim translated into English, “Every gift is received through pain of heart.”<sup>16</sup>

Besides its general meaning, “pain of heart” has a literal meaning in the writings of the Fathers, for when the heart is concentrated in fervent prayer to Christ, it may be actually pained. As Fr. Seraphim noted, in Patristic terminology the “heart” does not mean mere “feeling,” but “something much deeper — the organ that knows God.”<sup>17</sup> The heart is both spiritual and physical: spiritually, it is the center of man’s being, identified with his *nous* (spirit); physically, it is the organ where the *nous* finds its secret dwelling place.<sup>18</sup> Concentrated within the physical heart, the *nous* cries out to the Saviour, and such a heart-cry — born in pain and desperation, yet hoping in God — calls down Divine grace. This is seen especially in the Orthodox practice of the Jesus Prayer. When we approach the Jesus Prayer simply, says Elder Paisios of Mount Athos (†1994), “we will be able to repeat it many times, and our heart will feel a sweet pain and then Christ Himself will shed His sweet consolation inside our heart.”<sup>19</sup>

“The Patristic teaching on *pain of heart*,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “is one of the most important teachings for our days when ‘head-knowledge’ is so over-emphasized at the expense of the proper development of emotional and spiritual life.... The lack of this essential experience is what above all is responsible for the dilettantism, the triviality, the want of seriousness in the ordinary study of the Holy Fathers today; without it, one cannot apply the teachings of the Holy Fathers to one’s own life. One may attain to the very highest level of understanding with the mind of the teaching of the Holy Fathers, may have ‘at one’s fingertips’ quotes from the Holy Fathers on every conceivable subject, may have ‘spiritual experiences’ which *seem* to be those described in the Patristic books, may even know perfectly all the pitfalls into which it is possible to fall in spiritual life — and still, without pain of heart, one can be a barren fig tree, a boring ‘know-it-all’ who is always ‘correct,’ or an adept in all the present-day ‘charismatic’ experiences, who does not know and cannot convey the true

spirit of the Holy Fathers.”<sup>20</sup>

**B**ISHOP IGNATIUS BRIANCHANINOV, speaking of his first discovery of Patristic wisdom, once wrote: “What was it that above all struck me in the works of the Fathers of the Orthodox Church? It was their harmony, their wondrous, magnificent harmony. Eighteen centuries, through their lips, testified to a single unanimous teaching, a Divine teaching!”<sup>21</sup>

Bishop Ignatius and Fr. Seraphim had come to this teaching in a similar way. Both had burst the bonds of modern knowledge after an arduous search for the Truth; both were highly conversant with the intellectual currents of their times, and thus were acutely aware of the sweeping tide of apostasy. Both had seen two worlds — the world of modern thought, and the world of the Holy Fathers that this thought has abandoned — and both had been able to form a bridge leading from the first world to the second. In the sum of their writings, they provided the means whereby their contemporaries could derive maximum benefit from the Fathers, reading them as they were meant to be read, simply and soberly, without the foreign and complex filters of the rootless modern mind. It may be said that Fr. Seraphim did for the twentieth century what Bishop Ignatius had done for the nineteenth. His work did not supersede that of his predecessor, however; it only complemented it.

In introducing the Lives and writings of the Fathers to present-day readers, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “There is no problem of our own confused times which cannot find its solution by a careful and reverent reading of the Holy Fathers: whether the problem of the sects and heresies that abound today, or the schisms and ‘jurisdictions’; whether the pretense of spiritual life put forth by the ‘charismatic revival,’ or the subtle temptations of modern comfort and convenience; whether complex philosophical questions such as ‘evolution,’ or the straightforward moral questions of abortion, euthanasia, and ‘birth control’; whether the refined apostasy of ‘Sergianism,’ which offers a church organization in place of the Body of Christ, or the crudeness of ‘renovationism,’ which begins

by ‘revising the calendar’ and ends in ‘Eastern-rite Protestantism.’ In all these questions the Holy Fathers, and our living Fathers who follow them, are our only sure guide.”<sup>[22](#)</sup>

In transmitting ancient Patristic teaching to the modern age, Fr. Seraphim’s writings were marked by a virtue all-too-seldom seen nowadays: basic honesty. Fr. Seraphim was honest before his Fathers, honest before his readers, honest before himself. It was his selfless love for Truth that set him apart from those who would reinterpret the teaching of the Fathers according to modern conceptions.

Fr. Seraphim approached Patristic truths with the utmost reverence because he knew they were inspired by Jesus Christ Himself, Who lives in His Church and in Whom alone is eternal life. “The genuine teaching of the Holy Fathers,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “contains the truths on which our spiritual life or death depends.”<sup>[23](#)</sup>

## *Modern Academic Theology*

*Theology that is taught like a science usually examines things historically, and, consequently, things are understood externally. Since Patristic ascesis and inner experience is absent, this kind of theology is full of uncertainty and questions.*

—Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, 1975<sup>1</sup>

*From the practical point of view, the best thing is not to trust that you know so much, and to receive simply the Faith that is passed down to you.*

—Fr. Seraphim Rose, 1979<sup>2</sup>

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM lived at a time when there was talk among scholars and intellectuals of a “Patristic revival” in Orthodoxy. This was a positive development in that many rare Patristic texts were being made known in the modern world; but Fr. Seraphim also perceived a negative side to it. Among the Orthodox scholars and theologians of his time, Fr. Seraphim saw a new school which he said was creating “a whole new approach to Orthodoxy,”<sup>3</sup> and in his writings he sought to expose the dangers of this approach.

The new theologians came first of all from what its critics called the “Parisian school” of Orthodox thought, composed of members of the Russian intelligentsia. In the “Russian Paris” of the 1930s — where lived tens of thousands of Russians who had fled Communism in their homeland — this “Parisian school” included conservative Orthodox scholars such as Vladimir Lossky (†1958), as well as freethinking and liberal-minded thinkers such as

Nicholas Berdyaev (†1948) and the former Marxist philosophers Peter Struve (†1944) and Fr. Sergius N. Bulgakov (†1944).

The theological center of the émigré community was the St. Sergius Theological Institute in Paris. Its dean, Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, spent the last decades of his life defending a system of heretical ideas which were later condemned by the Russian Church both in the Soviet Union and in the free world. His system of “sophiology” posed such a threat to the integrity of Orthodox teaching that in 1937 Archbishop John Maximovitch had written a lengthy Patristic treatise against it.

Fr. Sergius’ teaching by no means represented that of the entire Institute. Teaching at the same Institute were Orthodox scholars who were generally more careful in their exposition of the Faith, Fr. Georges Florovsky (†1979) being the most traditional among them. Interestingly, Ivan Kontzevitch, whom Fr. Seraphim regarded as a true transmitter of the Orthodox theological tradition, had himself studied at the St. Sergius Institute. Having already received his spiritual formation in Optina Monastery in Russia, Kontzevitch had received the best of what the Institute had to offer.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the Institute was made up of a varied array of teachers who often disagreed among themselves, its more liberal faculty members earned it the reputation of being the hub of modernist theology in the Russian diaspora. In the minds of many, especially within the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, “Parisian Orthodoxy” became a term associated with theological modernism.

In the aftermath of World War II, several Orthodox scholars from Paris and other parts of Europe emigrated and joined the faculty of the main theological school of the American Metropolia: St. Vladimir’s Seminary in Crestwood, New York. Among these were two scholars from the St. Sergius Institute, George Fedotov (†1951) and Fr. Georges Florovsky.<sup>[a]</sup> Then, in the 1950s, members of the new generation of scholars from the St. Sergius Institute came to teach at St. Vladimir’s Seminary: Fr. Alexander Schmemmann (†1983), Fr. John Meyendorff

(†1992), and Serge Verhovskoy (†1986).<sup>[b]</sup> It was this new generation, particularly in the persons of Fathers Schmemmann and Meyendorff, which became influential during Fr. Seraphim's time.

**A**s true sons of the heterogenous theological school in Paris, the new generation of academic theologians were in some ways traditional and in others more modernist. Rejecting the errors of the previous generation of free-thinking theologians (most notably the “sophiology” of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov), they yet tended to subject Orthodox history, tradition, Scripture, Patristic teaching, liturgics, and practice to modern academic criticism. They took part in the latest theological movements, particularly the “liturgical movement” and the movement to “return to the sources” (*ressourcement*) in contemporary Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.

It is not difficult to discern why Fr. Seraphim felt he could have no share in the critical approach of the new generation of theologians from Paris, and why he saw it as dangerous. As has been seen, many years earlier he had rejected modern academia due to “the skepticism promoted by the academic system,” which he saw present despite “the integrity of the best of its representatives.”<sup>4 [c]</sup> He saw modern academic criticism as a product of the rationalism of contemporary Western man, in which man assumes a position superior to that of his forbears and uses his intellectual gifts to subject history and tradition to critical analysis. Ostensibly this criticism is objective, but in reality, Fr. Seraphim said, it “seduces men to the gospel of subjectivism and unbelief,”<sup>5</sup> for the modern scholar inevitably replaces old meanings with new ones based on his own conceptions. Even before his entrance into the Orthodox Church, Fr. Seraphim had rejected this approach in favor of that of true representatives of tradition like Gi-ming Shien, who wrote that “a student of Chinese philosophy must... trust the traditional Chinese viewpoint, rather than follow the newly invented and untraditional arguments of modern scholars.”<sup>[d]</sup> Later, after he entered the Church, the same basic approach was taught to him by holy carriers



of the Orthodox Christian tradition, beginning with Archbishop John: an approach characterized by humble fidelity to the tradition and grateful love for the Holy Fathers who have transmitted it.

Rationalistic criticism of the Christian tradition had originally come out of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Having seen how such criticism had led to the further spiritual disintegration of these confessions, Fr. Seraphim was greatly disturbed to see it making inroads into the Orthodox Church as well. His own bitter experience of modern academia, and his repudiation of its approach, caused him to react strongly when he saw such an approach being brought to bear on Orthodox tradition. “In the Russian emigration,” he wrote, “the ‘theologians’ of the new school... are eager to be in harmony with intellectual fashion, to quote the latest Roman Catholic or Protestant scholarship, to adopt the whole ‘casual’ tone of contemporary life and especially of the academic world.”<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere he noted concerning the study of Orthodox Patristic tradition by heterodox Western scholars: “Such ‘patrology’ is only rationalist scholarship which happens to take Patristic teaching for its subject.... When Orthodox scholars pick up the teaching of these pseudo-Patristic scholars or make their own researches in the same rationalistic spirit, the outcome can be tragic; for such scholars are taken by many to be ‘spokesmen for Orthodoxy,’ and their rationalistic pronouncements to be part of an ‘authentically Patristic’ outlook, thus deceiving many Orthodox Christians.”<sup>7</sup>

For the new Orthodox academicians, Fr. Seraphim observed, “the whole of Orthodoxy is transformed into a series of tremendously self-important ‘problems’ to which only a few of the academic elite have the approach to any ‘solutions.’”<sup>8</sup> Among the theologians who had come from Paris to America, there were some who were critical of old-fashioned Orthodox piety, particularly that of pre-Revolutionary Russia. They believed this “piety” (the very word they used in a pejorative sense) was the result of unfortunate “cultural accretions” which had to be reevaluated and stripped off in layers by modern scholars. They said that Orthodoxy had come under “Western captivity,” that its theology had

been completely dominated by “Western influences” in recent centuries. They spoke of finding “new ways of Orthodox theology,” of intellectually “mastering history” and thus “restoring” Orthodoxy to what they regarded as its pure form. This, they said, was the task of the new theological movement that had sprung up in the 1920s and 1930s.

Fr. Seraphim understood that there had indeed been “Western influences” on Orthodoxy in recent centuries. But he was taught by Archbishop John and other “living links” that these influences were outward and did not change the heart of the Orthodox tradition, the continuity of which remained unbroken. “Archbishop John,” Fr. Seraphim once said in a lecture, “was very balanced with regard to the question of Western influence.” Fr. Seraphim saw this most of all in Archbishop John’s attitude toward the seventeenth-century Church figure Metropolitan Peter Mogila, who is the person most often blamed for placing Russian Orthodoxy under the “Western captivity.” “Metropolitan Peter,” said Fr. Seraphim, “has been accused of being under great Western influence; and some people even want to throw him out completely, saying that he is not Orthodox. Archbishop John, however, had very great reverence towards him; and we can see in this attitude something very important about the whole question of Western influence....

“There were some cases in which Metropolitan Peter used phrases which came straight from the Latins and were not in the earlier Fathers. In cases like this, however, one does not have to become too upset. It so happens that the Orthodox tradition is the tradition of Truth, and therefore this tradition itself corrects error whenever a statement becomes a little too much, a little off the mark. The *Catechism* of Metropolitan Peter Mogila, for example, was later corrected by a Greek theologian. After that it was corrected even further in Russia by Metropolitan Platon, and finally by Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, [\[e\]](#) the great hierarch who was primarily responsible for abolishing the teaching of theology in Latin.”<sup>9</sup>

As early as 1957, Fr. Seraphim had read in the writings of René Guénon about modern scholars who look into a traditional religion to find “something that can be made to fit the framework of their own outlook,” and then claim that this represents the “primitive and true” form of the religion, “whereas the remaining forms, according to them, are but comparatively late corruptions.”<sup>10</sup> This, in Fr. Seraphim’s view, described the approach of the modernist Orthodox spokesmen: they were not restoring Orthodoxy to some lost purity, but were instead “renovating” it to conform to the modern outlook. While disclaiming the fruits of the Reformation, they were in effect doing what Guénon had said of Protestantism: “exposing revelation to all the discussions which follow in the wake of purely human interpretations... [giving] birth to that dissolving ‘criticism’ which, in the hands of so-called ‘historians of religion,’ has become a weapon of offense against all religion.”<sup>11</sup>

Fr. Seraphim saw an example of this in Fr. Alexander Schmemmann’s book, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (1961), which contained a scholarly critique of the whole substance of Orthodox worship. To Fr. Seraphim, the book’s arguments often appeared more Protestant than Orthodox. Fr. Alexander’s approach to his subject did indeed tend to follow along the lines of the above-mentioned “liturgical movement” in Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. The Anglican liturgical scholar Dom Gregory Dix had affected his thinking considerably,<sup>12</sup> but he had been influenced even more by the French Roman Catholic thinkers of the movement.<sup>13</sup> Although the latter were from among the Roman Catholic clergy and hierarchy, their critical approach had led them to conclusions resembling those of Protestantism, and this became a decisive factor in the reform of the Roman Church at the Second Vatican Council.

In trying to overcome the “Western captivity” of Orthodox Liturgics, Fr. Alexander had, in Fr. Seraphim’s words, “himself become the captive of Protestant rationalistic ideas concerning liturgical theology,”<sup>14</sup> relying on heterodox Western sources, historical assumptions and methodologies in his

critique of Orthodox tradition. In his book Fr. Alexander looked upon the chief stages in the development of the Divine services as upon an ordinary historical manifestation, formed as a result of changing historical circumstances, and he rejected the approach of Orthodox writers who considered the whole history of worship to be “divinely established and Providential.” Like Protestant and some modern Roman Catholic scholars, he put the changes that occurred at the beginning of the Constantinian era in a dubious light, regarding them not as new forms of the expression of the same piety but rather as a *reformation* of the interpretation of worship and a deviation from the early Christian liturgical spirit and forms. The true, “eschatological” nature of worship, he said, had been partially obscured by “mysteriological piety,” as well as by the “ascetic individualism” arising largely from monasticism. Accordingly, the theological idea of the cycle of services — which, following the Jesuit scholar Jean Daniélou, he called “the sanctification of time” — had been “obscured and eclipsed by secondary strata in the Ordo.” This “secondary strata” consisted of precisely those elements which Protestantism has disowned: the division of clergy and laity, the distinction between Church feasts and “ordinary days,” the glorification of saints, the veneration of relics, etc. He expressed doubts as to “the complete liturgical soundness of Orthodoxy,” decried the present “liturgical piety,” and claimed that the Church was in a “liturgical crisis.”

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann’s book was acclaimed by Orthodox and non-Orthodox scholars alike. Its approach was a matter of concern, however, to one of the teachers at Holy Trinity Seminary in Jordanville, Fr. Michael Pomazansky. Being one of the last living theologians to have graduated from the theological academies of pre-Revolutionary Russia, Fr. Michael felt called upon to write a review of Fr. Alexander’s book. Originally printed in Russian, the article was translated by Fr. Seraphim and printed in *The Orthodox Word*. Fr. Seraphim thought it was very well written: evenhanded, with clear expositions of Orthodox teaching.

About the author of *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, Fr. Michael wrote:

“He pays tribute to the method that reigns completely in contemporary science: leaving aside the idea of an overshadowing of Divine grace, the concept of sanctity of those who established the liturgical order, he limits himself to a naked chain of causes and effects. Thus does positivism intrude nowadays into Christian science, into the sphere of the Church’s history in all its branches. But if the positivist method is acknowledged as a scientific working principle in science, in the natural sciences, one can by no means apply it to living religion, nor to every sphere of the life of Christianity and the Church, insofar as we remain believers.”<sup>[12](#)</sup>

IN introducing Fr. Michael Pomazansky’s article to the readers of *The Orthodox Word*, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “In all fairness, it should be noted that Fr. Schmemmann probably does not see himself as a ‘reformer,’ and it will doubtless be left to other less sensitive souls, another generation removed from the life of genuine Orthodoxy, to draw the inevitable iconoclastic conclusions from Fr. Schmemmann’s already Protestant views.”<sup>[13](#)</sup>

It should also be said that Fr. Alexander Schmemmann’s “reforms” were actually a sincere attempt on his part to improve the morale of contemporary parishes, to raise the consciousness and participation of Orthodox believers above the level of nominalism. Indeed, he was not only a scholar but also an Orthodox priest and a pastor who was concerned about increasing the faith of the flock of Christ. In one article he wrote that the Metropolia’s “financial bankruptcy only reveals and reflects its spiritual state — a state of apathy and demoralization.”<sup>[14](#)</sup> He correctly diagnosed the disease, but, in Fr. Seraphim’s view, he gave the wrong cure. The Metropolia’s chief hierarch, Metropolitan Irenay, had been trying to help matters by salvaging at least some *parts* of the liturgical practice of the Russian Church. But Fr. Schmemmann believed that the nominal parishioners would even find this minimum unmeaningful. “He believes,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “the Typicon<sup>[15](#)</sup> must be revised in the light of our knowledge of its historical development, of other traditions, and the like. In a

word, *the services must be made somehow palatable to spiritually bankrupt people!* Fr. Schmemmann takes a bad situation and makes it worse, advocating the establishment of a new typicon, a lower standard — which the next generation of the Metropolia will undoubtedly likewise find ‘unmeaningful’ and too demanding!”<sup>15</sup>

Here Fr. Seraphim saw the effects of modern academic criticism on Church life: the process that begins with criticism of the traditional standard usually ends with a lowering of that standard. As Fr. Seraphim observed, the new school of Orthodox thinkers “adapts the Faith to the present low level of spiritual awareness; there are exceptions, of course, but that is the general trend.”<sup>16</sup>

Fr. Seraphim witnessed this same orientation promoted on a popular level in the Metropolia’s magazine for teenagers, *Concern*. “A new ‘women’s liberation’ column,” he noted, “is edited by a smart young convert: ‘When I converted to Orthodoxy, I felt that I was aware of most of the problems that I would meet in the Church. I knew of the scandalous ethnicism that divides the Church, of the quarrels and factions that plague parishes, and of the religious ignorance....’”<sup>17</sup> This columnist then proceeds to advocate the ‘reform’ of the traditional forty-day period for ‘churching’ a woman after childbirth, as well as other ‘old-world’ attitudes which this ‘enlightened’ modern American finds ‘unfair.’ Perhaps she has never met a genuine Orthodox clergyman or layman who could explain to her the meaning or convey to her the tone of the authentic Orthodox way of life; perhaps if she did encounter such a one, she might not even wish to understand him, nor to comprehend that the worst of a convert’s ‘problems’ today are not in the easily-criticized Orthodox environment at all, but rather in *the mind and attitude of the converts themselves*. The way of life reflected in *Concern* is not the Orthodox way of life, and its very tone makes any approach to the Orthodox way of life almost impossible. Such periodicals and conferences reflect the majority of pampered, self-centered, frivolous young people of today who, when they come to religion, expect to find ‘spirituality with comfort,’ something which is instantly reasonable to their immature minds

which have been stupefied by their ‘modern education.’” [18](#)

Fr. Seraphim also wrote against attempts to lower Church standards when reform-minded Orthodox gathered in 1971 to prepare for an “Eighth Ecumenical Council.” Evidently this council was intended to do for Orthodoxy what the Second Vatican Council had done for Roman Catholicism six years before. One of the reports on the agenda, entitled “Revision of the Ecclesiastical Prescriptions Concerning Fasting, in Conformity with the Needs of our Epoch,” proposed that, since most Orthodox believers do not keep the whole Orthodox fast, the fast should be made easier to suit them, “in order to avoid the problems of conscience created by the violation of the severe ecclesiastical prescriptions.”

“Such an approach,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “is totally un-Orthodox, and constitutes an obvious and crude imitation of the reform spirit in the Latin church, which ended by abolishing fasting altogether. The Orthodox rule of fasting is not intended to ‘avoid problems of conscience,’ but rather to call believers to a difficult, inspiring, and humbling standard of Christian life; if they fall short of the standard, then at least they can see how far their life is from the *standard*, the *norm*, which always remains the same. The Papal idea, based on the corrupt modern principle of spiritual self-satisfaction, is either to give a special ‘dispensation’ from the standard (an idea which has already entered some Orthodox jurisdictions), or else to change the standard itself so that the believer can fulfill it easily and thereby obtain a sense of satisfaction from ‘obeying the law.’ This is precisely the difference between the Publican and the Pharisee: the Orthodox man feels himself constantly a sinner because he falls short of the Church’s exalted standard (in spirit if not in letter), whereas the ‘modern’ man wishes to feel himself justified, without any twinge of conscience over falling short of the Church’s standard.” [19](#)

Fr. Seraphim, then, saw that the cure for apathy lay not in revising the standard of Orthodox life and practice, but in setting up the whole of Orthodox tradition as a goal toward which people could strive. “We, the last Christians,” he wrote, “are far from *the normal life of Orthodox piety*; how much, therefore,

must we struggle in order to get back to that normal life! But how inspiring is the path to it!” [20](#) Elsewhere he wrote that “the natural transmission of Orthodoxy” can occur in “the normal parish, if its priest is of the ‘old-fashioned’ mentality, on fire with Orthodoxy and so desirous for the salvation of his flock that he will not excuse their sins and worldly habits but is always urging them up to a higher spiritual life.” [21](#)

**A**LTHOUGH the new school of Orthodox theologians never thought of themselves as breaking with Orthodox tradition, Fr. Seraphim saw them as being disconnected from the genuine, living tradition of the Church and from the humble bearers of that tradition. “In our confused days,” he wrote, “when a hundred conflicting voices claim to speak for Orthodoxy, it is essential to know *whom one can trust as spokesmen for true Orthodoxy*. It is not enough to claim to speak for Patristic Orthodoxy; one must be in the genuine *tradition* of the Holy Fathers, not merely ‘rediscovering’ them in a modern academy or seminary, but actually receiving their tradition from one’s own fathers. A merely clever explainer of Patristic doctrine is *not* in this tradition, but only one who, not trusting his own judgment or that of his peers, is constantly asking of his own fathers what is the proper approach to and understanding of the Holy Fathers.” [22](#)

Writing about an eighty-year-old “living link” in Australia, the aforementioned Fr. Nicholas Deputatov, Fr. Seraphim noted that such true theologians “are not, as a rule, to be found in Orthodox academies, nor in pompous ‘theological conferences.’ They are to be sought in humbler places, and usually they will not bear the name of ‘theologian.’ They themselves would not presume to call their handing down the Orthodox theological tradition anything more than ‘faithfulness to the Holy Fathers’—but it is just this faithfulness and this humility that mark them out as bearers of the authentic tradition of Orthodoxy — qualities which are lacking in the most renowned ‘Orthodox theologians’ today.” [23](#)



After Archbishop John's death, Fr. Seraphim's own guide to the Holy Fathers had been Archbishop Averky, to whom Archbishop John had once told the brothers to turn whenever they had questions. "Archbishop Averky," Fr. Seraphim wrote, "is in the genuine Patristic tradition as few other living Orthodox fathers. A disciple of the great twentieth-century theologian and holy hierarch, Archbishop Theophan of Poltava, Archbishop Averky is a bearer and transmitter, in a direct and unbroken line of Orthodox theologians, of the genuine Patristic doctrine which is in danger of being eclipsed by today's generation of Western-educated proud 'young theologians.' In recent years his voice has resounded and thundered as never before... as he strives to give the true Orthodox teaching to Orthodox Christians who are rapidly losing the salt of Orthodoxy." [24](#)

Archbishop Averky himself addressed the phenomenon of the new theologians. "Alas!" he wrote. "How few people there are in our times, even among the educated, and at times even among contemporary 'theologians' and those in the ranks of clergy, who understand correctly what Orthodoxy is and wherein its essence lies. They approach this question in an utterly external, formal manner and resolve it too primitively, even naively, overlooking its depths completely and not at all seeing the fullness of its spiritual contents." [25](#)

**I**T was clear to Fr. Seraphim's mind that the spirit of modern academic theology could not be successfully blended with the life of monasticism. Although some of the new theologians spoke highly of monasticism in principle, they also blamed monastic influence in large part for the piety and Church traditions of which they disapproved. They saw the monastic-ascetic tradition as being somehow in opposition to the "lay" Orthodoxy they envisioned, rather than seeing the former as the prime motivator and inspirer of the latter. As Fr. Seraphim wrote, however, the monastic experience, far from obscuring the experience of the Church, actually sets the tone for the whole Church: "It is precisely the *monastic* services which are taken as the standard of the Church's

life of worship, because monasticism itself most clearly expresses the ideal toward which the whole believing Church strives. The condition of monasticism at any given time is ordinarily one of the best indicators of the spiritual condition of the whole Church, or of any Local Church; and similarly, the degree to which the local parishes in the world strive toward the ideal of the monastic services is the best indicator of the condition of the Divine worship which is conducted in them.” [26](#)

Further, Fr. Seraphim stated that one of the primary places in which the natural transmission of Orthodoxy occurs is in a monastery, “where not only novices but also pious laymen come to be instructed as much by the atmosphere of a holy place as by the conversation of a particularly revered elder.” [27](#)

Elsewhere, countering the idea that Orthodox theology has been for some time in total “Western captivity,” Fr. Seraphim pointed out that “the true Patristic tradition of recent centuries... is to be found more in the monasteries than in the academies.” [28](#) Undoubtedly he was thinking of such places as Optina and Mount Athos, where Patristic teaching was first of all put into practice and then disseminated throughout the Orthodox world.

**H**AVING embraced the traditional Orthodoxy that had raised up so many saints — including one whom he knew personally, Archbishop John — Fr. Seraphim was dubious that the “restored” Orthodoxy of modern academic theology would bear the same fruit. As far as Fr. Seraphim could see, the latter had already lost the feeling for the ascetic piety in which the saints had been raised. In an article for *The Orthodox Word*, he strove to explain why:

“The powerlessness of Orthodoxy as it is so widely expressed and lived today is doubtless itself a product of the poverty, the lack of seriousness, of contemporary life. Orthodoxy today, with its priests and theologians and faithful, has become *worldly*. The young people who come from comfortable homes and either accept or seek (the ‘native Orthodox’ and ‘converts’ being alike in this regard) a religion that is not remote from the self-satisfied life they have known;

the professors and lecturers whose milieu is the academic world where, notoriously, nothing is accepted as ultimately serious, a matter of life or death; the very academic atmosphere of self-satisfied worldliness — all of these factors join together to produce an artificial, hothouse atmosphere in which, no matter what might be said concerning exalted Orthodox truths or experiences, by the very context in which it is said and by virtue of the worldly orientation of both speaker and listener, it *cannot* strike to the depths of the soul and produce the profound commitment which used to be normal to Orthodox Christians.” [29](#)

Fr. Seraphim was one with the academic Orthodox theologians in his labors to make people aware of the meaning and sources of the Orthodox Faith. Above all, however, he wanted to inspire the new generation with ascetic *podvig*: “emphasis on *doing* spiritual life rather than talking about it.” [30](#) *Podvig* was what had moved all the great “living links” to become men and women of sanctity, and it could give birth to more sanctity in the American land. As Archbishop Averky had said, “Orthodoxy is an *ascetic* Faith that calls to ascetic labor in the name of the uprooting of sinful passions and the implanting of Christian virtues.” [31](#) And, according to the teaching of St. John Climacus and other Holy Fathers, one must conquer the passions before even attempting to theologize. [32](#)

In almost every issue of *The Orthodox Word*, the Platina fathers presented the Life of an ascetic laborer, a true *knower of God*. They knew that, more than anything else, it was love for the *ascetics themselves* that inspired one to *podvig*. Fr. Seraphim did not see this love for ascetics coming from the journals of the new theologians. “And without love for saints,” he wrote, “one’s Orthodoxy is crippled and one’s sense of direction is off — for they are the examples one has to follow.” [33](#)

In 1973 the fathers began to publish the Lives of the desert-dwellers of Northern Russia, having painstakingly written and compiled them from a number of rare sources. Their definite aim, they said, was to give them “not merely as an example of dead history, but of living tradition.” Even while they

were printing them separately in each issue, however, one leading academic theologian chastised in print “those who call to non-existent deserts,” evidently regarding such Lives as an appeal to a religious “romanticism” totally out of step with contemporary conditions of life. When the fathers finally printed the Lives together in a book, which they called *The Northern Thebaid*, Fr. Seraphim answered this criticism as follows:

“Why, indeed, should we inspire today’s Orthodox youth with the call of the ‘Northern Thebaid’ [of Russia], which has in it something attractive and somehow more accessible for a twentieth-century zealot than the barren desert of Egypt?

“First of all, the monastic life here described has not entirely disappeared from the earth; it is still possible to find Orthodox monastic communities which teach the spiritual doctrine of the Holy Fathers, and to lead the Orthodox monastic life even in the twentieth century — with constant self-reproach over how far one falls short of the Lives of the ancient Fathers in these times.... The wise seeker can find his ‘desert’ even in our barren twentieth century.

“But this book is not intended only for such fortunate ones.

“*Every Orthodox Christian* should know the Lives of the Fathers of the desert, which together with the Lives of the Martyrs give us the model for our own life of Christian struggle. Even so, every Orthodox Christian should know of Valaam, of Solovki, of Svir, of Siya and Obnora and White Lake, of the Skete of Sora, and of the Angel-like men who dwelled there before being translated to heaven, living the Orthodox spiritual life to which every Orthodox Christian is called, according to his strength and the conditions of his life. Every Orthodox Christian should be inspired by their life of struggle far from the ways of the world. There is no ‘romanticism’ here. The actual ‘romantics’ of our times are the reformers of ‘Parisian Orthodoxy’ who, disparaging the authentic Orthodox tradition, wish... to replace the authentic Orthodox worldview with a this-worldly counterfeit of it based on modern Western thought. The spiritual life of the true monastic tradition is the *norm* of our Christian life, and we had better be

informed of it before the terrible last day when we are called to account for our lax life. We shall not be judged for our ignorance of the vocabulary of contemporary ‘Orthodox theology,’ but we shall surely be judged for not struggling on the path to salvation. If we do not live like these Saints, then let us at least increase our far-too-feeble struggles for God, and offer our fervent tears of repentance and our constant self-reproach at falling so short of the standard of perfection which God has shown us in His wondrous Saints.” [34](#)

**T**HESE were strong words indeed about the academic theologians of Fr. Seraphim’s day. That was how Fr. Seraphim saw things in 1975. In succeeding years he continued to see modernism in academic theology as a significant problem, but he began to focus greater attention on yet another problem that he came to regard as more immediate: phariseeism among the traditionalists. As his faith matured and he experienced ever more deeply what it meant to be a Christian, he saw more clearly not only the need to be faithful to tradition so as to avoid the pitfalls of modernism, but also the need to cultivate the fundamental Christian virtues of compassion and humility so as to avoid the pitfalls of a self-serving “traditionalist” mentality. As we shall see, this deepening of perception brought about a change in the tone of his published writings. In his later years, as he continued to address problems in the Church, he would do so not so much with a polemical spirit as with a spirit of sorrow. As he was to write in those years: “Discourses against current follies don’t work unless one puts *oneself* into it — seeing it as *our* common problem.” [35](#)

## *The Desert in the Backyard*

*They say, as I have heard, that it is impossible to achieve virtues without withdrawing to some distance and running away into the desert, and I was surprised that they had taken it upon themselves to determine a location for that which is indeterminable. For, if proficiency in virtue is the restoration of the soul's strength to its primordial nobility and the integration of the main virtues for the proper functioning of the soul according to its nature, then this does not come from without, as something foreign, but as something inborn in us from creation, through which we enter the Kingdom of Heaven which is, according to the word of the Lord, within us. Thus the desert is something extra and we can enter the Kingdom without it, through repentance and the keeping of the commandments. Thus it is possible that God's dominion can be present in any place, as the divine David sang: "Bless the Lord, all His works, in all places of His dominion" (Psalm 103:22).*

—Nicetas Stithatos, from *The Philokalia* [1](#)

**A**LTHOUGH the fathers knew that their wilderness hermitage was the place wherein God intended them to work out their salvation, they could not of course expect everyone who came to them to follow an identical path. They saw that most people who were inspired by the desert ideal and the Lives of the holy anchorites were destined, due to their God-given circumstances, to save their souls while living in the world.

The desert, as Fr. Seraphim once defined it, is “a refuge from the storms and occupations of the world and a place of intense spiritual combat for the sake of the heavenly Kingdom.” <sup>2</sup> Obviously, life in the wilderness is tremendously conducive to this, but what is truly vital is the disposition of one’s soul — a soul that feels itself an “exile.” This disposition can be acquired by Christians in all types of surroundings.

As previously mentioned, the desert ideal is but the direct historical continuation of the mentality of the early Christians who had to hide in the catacombs due to persecution by the pagan Roman world: a mentality of conscious Christianity that transforms one’s entire being, sets one apart from the mind of the world, and enables one to be ready to die for Christ at any moment. In the words of St. Macarius the Great, which Fr. Seraphim quoted many times: “Christians have their own world, their own way of life, and mentality, and word, and activity; quite different is the way of life, and mentality, and word, and activity of the men of this world. One thing is Christians, and another the lovers of this world; between the one and the other is a great separation.” <sup>3</sup> Having tasted the heavenly sweetness of being with Christ, the Christian feels the call to be “not of this world,” to renounce his fallen self, to enter what Nicetas Stithatos called the “desert of passions” — that is, the dispassion that allows one to rise above earthly cares.

In writing about the desert-dwellers of the Russian forests, the “Northern Thebaid,” Fr. Seraphim indicated that their “desert” mentality should be shared by all who follow Christ, whether in the wilderness or in the world. “And still the voice of the Northern Thebaid calls us,” he wrote, “—not, it may be, to go to the desert (although some fortunate few may be able to do even that, for the forests are still on God’s earth)—but at least to keep alive the fragrance of the desert in our hearts: to dwell in mind and heart with these angelic men and women and have them as our truest friends, conversing with them in prayer; to be always aloof from the attachments and passions of this life, even when they center about some institution or leader of the church organization; to be first of

all a citizen of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the City on high towards which all our Christian labors are directed, and only secondarily a member of this world below which perishes. He who has once sensed this fragrance of the desert, with its exhilarating freedom in Christ and its sober constancy in struggle, will never be satisfied with anything in this world, but can only cry out with the Apostle and Theologian: *Come, Lord Jesus. Even so, Surely I come quickly* (Apocalypse 22:20).” [4](#)

**S**UCH was the message the fathers proclaimed in their books and magazine, and it was only natural that they would personally be called upon to help Christians make it real in their lives. They had already helped Vladimir Anderson in this regard. While continuing to keep the Orthodox bookstore in San Francisco open on weekends, Vladimir was conscientiously striving to lead an Orthodox life in the small town of Willits. Having been orphaned and deprived as a child, he had dedicated his life to helping people in need. As in their “Catholic Worker” days, he and his wife Sylvia fed, clothed, and gave shelter to the homeless. Hobos would stop by their home on the side of the highway, knowing that there they would always find a good meal and a place to sleep. Vladimir would even take in whole families if he knew they needed assistance.

To its other God-pleasing work, the Anderson family added the labor of publishing Orthodox literature. Both Vladimir and Sylvia were lovers of books, and spent many hours searching for old and obscure books in libraries. In their search they found a surprising number of English translations of Orthodox spiritual classics, which had been long out of print and were now in the public domain. Being acutely aware of the dearth of Orthodox literature that was then available in English, they wanted to reprint these out-of-print titles so that people could make practical use of them. To this end they purchased a printing press. In 1970 Vladimir and his sons, under the name of “Eastern Orthodox Books,” published their first four books. In succeeding years they were to publish over



two hundred titles, including both books and pamphlets. Fr. Seraphim advised them on what materials to publish.

**T**HE Platina fathers had also been called upon to help another serious God-seeker: Craig Young. Like Vladimir, Craig was a school teacher of Roman Catholic background; like him also, he had been very disillusioned with the sudden and arbitrary changes that had occurred in the Roman Church following Vatican II. In 1966, having learned of the Brotherhood's bookstore in San Francisco from a friend, he had gone there and spoken with the future Fathers Seraphim and Herman. As he recalled many years later: "When I left the shop, I thought: this is really something! This little shop and these two men straight out of another world — old fashioned, intense, real — and not particularly interested in the secular world around them. I wanted to know more about their world." <sup>5</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Craig attended the funeral of Archbishop John. The service in the Cathedral, which turned out to be the awesome glorification of an Orthodox Saint, left a profound and indelible impression on him. He was then only twenty-two years old, and a year earlier had married a Roman Catholic woman of his same age.

Craig next met the Platina fathers at the Cathedral in San Francisco on Great Saturday in 1970, six months before their monastic tonsure. By this time Craig and his wife Susan, after many struggles, had finally decided to convert to Orthodoxy. Having attended the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral, they approached Archbishop Anthony and informed him of their decision. The Archbishop then summoned the fathers, who had come from their hermitage for the Paschal celebrations, and asked them to talk with the couple. After questioning the Youngs at length to see if they were serious about their decision, the fathers said they would report to the Archbishop about them and get his blessing for them to be received into the Church. They recommended that the couple correspond with them at their hermitage in order to prepare for becoming Orthodox. In August of that same year, Craig, Susan, and their four-year-old son

Ian were received into the Orthodox Church. Craig took the name Alexey, after St. Alexis the Man of God.

Two years prior to this, in 1968, Alexey had moved with his family to the small town of Etna (population 750), near the California-Oregon border. Not only were there no Orthodox parishes in the area, but there were no Orthodox Christians for hundreds of miles. On becoming Orthodox, the Youngs wondered if they should move back to the San Francisco Bay area so as to be part of regular parish life. But when Alexey wrote to the fathers in Platina expressing this concern, Fr. Seraphim wrote back to him: “Trust in God. Trust the reasons why He led you from the city into the country in the first place.”

Alexey first came to the St. Herman Hermitage in September of 1970. About halfway up the mountain he took a wrong turn and got his car completely stuck in deep mud. When he finally arrived at the hermitage on foot, Fr. Herman [\[a\]](#) told him that his getting stuck was a good sign.

“Why?” asked Alexey.

“Because Orthodoxy is tough — you have to struggle for it.”

The fathers wondered if Alexey could perceive why Christians in their right minds would choose to live in such “impossible” conditions, on a rattlesnake-infested hill with no water, inside shacks with leaky roofs. As it turned out, Alexey was attracted by their life of struggle. As he himself recalls: “The fathers received me most warmly in a large room that served as parlor, refectory, and temporary chapel. They brought cold water and slices of watermelon, offered a chair, and almost immediately began to talk about lives of saints and holy elders — as was always their custom with me or other pilgrims. There was no secular conversation of any kind, unless it had to do with the practicalities of living alone in a forest wilderness. It was all quite remarkable, and extremely inspiring. Even to a beginner such as myself, the otherworldly atmosphere of the skete was palpable....

“After a few hours of conversation on my first visit, Fr. Seraphim announced that they would walk back down the mountain with me to my car and

see what could be done about rescuing it from the mud. On the walk he sang hymns, troparia to various saints, which softly echoed through the forest and mingled with the sounds of birds. When we arrived at the car there was much pushing and shoving and groaning, but the car did not budge. Finally we had to walk into town and call for a tow truck. While we waited back at the car, Fr. Seraphim saw that I was frustrated and anxious about the vehicle. Suddenly he said, gesturing to the beautiful mountains and forests around us, ‘Do you see all this beauty? And those mountains over there — they’ve been here for so long, and it seems they’ll be here forever, doesn’t it? But it’s not true. Even those mountains will one day pass away.’ His point was clear: why get annoyed about the momentary problem of a stuck car, which in any case will shortly be solved, when even the substantial mountains themselves will one day dissolve? It was the first of many times that Fr. Seraphim’s own stillness of heart was momentarily communicated to me. I felt suddenly at peace, at rest, all agitation banished, as was so often to happen in his presence over the years to come.” [6](#)

ON his second visit Alexey brought with him his wife and son. While having tea with the fathers, he told them of his dissatisfaction as a school teacher, how he did not like what modern teachers were required to instill in the minds of children. The fathers felt warm concern for this good and conscientious family. When they were alone, Fr. Herman said to Fr. Seraphim, “I like these people!”

Soon Alexey came up to the fathers and told them that he had to be going.

“Wait!” exclaimed Fr. Herman. “You have to venerate the icons before you go. Go into the church and wait for me there.”

When Alexey and his family had done so, Fr. Herman again turned to Fr. Seraphim. “What will I tell them?” he asked.

“Be yourself,” replied Fr. Seraphim. “Tell them what you feel.”

Fr. Herman crossed himself and entered the church. He sang “Joy of All Who Sorrow,” the hymn of Archbishop John’s Cathedral, and was joined by

Alexey and his family, who had learned it from an audio tape of the Archbishop's funeral.

As he looked at his visitors and wondered where to begin, Fr. Herman thought of the image of Fr. Adrian of New Diveyevo. He began to speak to the family about this amazing married priest, telling how, in every place where historical circumstances had driven him — Kiev, Berlin, Wendlingen, New York state — a close-knit community of Orthodox lay people had formed around him. Even amidst great trials suffered in Germany during World War II, Fr. Adrian had been able to recapture the lost quietness of his Orthodox childhood, to create the conditions and acquire the state of soul by which he and his people could live the Christian life in the fullness of its grace. His present community in upstate New York, Fr. Herman said, was spiritually thriving because he instilled in people a *conscious Orthodox philosophy of life*. Though in the midst of the world, he and his flock did not belong to the world, forming an island of Orthodoxy.

Fr. Herman pointed out that the heartbeat of Fr. Adrian's community was the performance of daily services, and he encouraged Alexey and Susan to do likewise. He gave them a specific model to follow: out of the eight services in the daily cycle, he said, they should at least do the Ninth Hour (pre-evening) service every day without fail.

Having received Fr. Herman's message about lay Christian communities, Alexey was deeply moved. "That's all I needed," he said. "Now I have an image to live by."

Returning to his home in Etna, Alexey cultivated the "desert" in his backyard. Every evening he and his family would enter a small chapel, dedicated to Saints Adrian and Natalie, [lb](#) which they had set up in the pump house behind their home. There they would read and sing the Ninth Hour, to which they later added the Vesper (evening) service.

**H**AVING a degree in journalism and a talent for writing, Alexey also began

to write a little about his new life as an Orthodox Christian. In the summer of 1971 he sent the fathers a short article he had composed, feeling somewhat unsure of himself at this early attempt and asking their opinion.

In reply, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “It is not at all ‘vain and presumptuous’ for you to write such an article, for if nothing else it helps you to clarify and develop your own ideas and feelings.... I can even think of a good place where it might suitably be published: in a newspaper called *Orthodox America*, which, besides giving Orthodox news, enlightenment, and the proper Orthodox viewpoint on contemporary issues, has a section where Orthodox converts and all the diaspora children of ‘Orthodox America’ in general share some of their ideas, insights, hopes, etc. Unfortunately, such a newspaper doesn’t exist! Maybe it will one day.” [7](#)

Fr. Seraphim had been given the idea of *Orthodox America*—an American version of the newspaper *Pravoslavnyaya Rus’* (*Orthodox Russia*)—from Fr. Herman, who in turn had gotten it from his friend from seminary, Fr. Alexey Poluektov. Little did Fr. Seraphim suspect that his brief mention of it to Alexey Young would evoke a wave of enthusiastic response. In his return letter, Alexey told the fathers of his own plan for a more modest Orthodox periodical which was different enough to require its own title and format.

Fr. Seraphim gave him encouragement in this, speaking of the need for more Orthodox material in English. “But before a single line is printed,” he wrote, “the whole thing should be thoroughly thought — and probably also suffered!—through.... In our experience, the single most important thing for such a periodical is to have its own distinct ‘personality,’ its definite guiding idea together with the way this idea is expressed. This personality is seen not merely in the content, format, and editorial policy, but as well in the style, and the revelation of *who* is behind it (not anyone personally, but what kind of person: scholar? preacher? instructor? the voice of a ‘jurisdiction’? a convert speaking to and for and with other converts? etc.) and to *whom* it is directed (a scholarly audience? popular or semi-popular? converts? etc.). All this is not too easy to

define, but it has to be at least *felt* if the periodical is in fact to have its own personality and not be merely a miscellaneous collection of materials.

“Fr. Herman and I would be happy to be your ‘advisors’ (in this sphere our two heads are definitely better than one!) in this, but that function is limited to general advice, plus any specific comments on content. The ‘creative’ burden — specifically, the creation of a personality, and that not as an artificial thing but as coming out of a definite desire to meet a definite need — will rest right on you and your collaborators.... If you want to know whom to consult, you should consult people just like yourself and put out a periodical by and for converts....

“Reflect, consult, pray. Pray to Vladika John. There wouldn’t be any *Orthodox Word* today without him.” <sup>8</sup>

Alexey wanted to call his new periodical *Nikodemos*, after the Saint to whom Christ said, “Unless a man be born again....” Published quarterly, it would have a simple, homespun format, and focus on the needs of lay people and “born-again” Orthodox converts.

Fr. Seraphim wrote to Archbishop Anthony about the proposed periodical — in order, as he said, “to let down somewhat the language and psychology barrier between converts and bishops.” <sup>9</sup> When Alexey was planning a trip to San Francisco to ask the Archbishop’s blessing on the new venture, Fr. Seraphim advised him: “Before seeing the Archbishop by all means go to Vladika John first, beg his help, and right there at his tomb ask him, if what you are undertaking is God-pleasing, to bless you. If Vladika John blesses, it will go through, no matter what difficulties come!” <sup>10</sup> Alexey followed this advice, and, as he later recalled, “Archbishop Anthony generously and even enthusiastically gave his blessing to our new project.... He appointed Fathers Seraphim and Herman to be my ‘guides,’ as he put it.” <sup>11</sup>

Alexey sent a dummy of the first issue for the fathers to review, and Fr. Seraphim sent him back a detailed letter with suggestions. Incorporating Fr. Seraphim’s suggestions, Alexey sent out the first issue to the mailing list of *Orthodox Word* subscribers, which the fathers had shared with him in order to

help get the new periodical started.

When he received the first issue in the mail, Fr. Seraphim was delighted. “A seed has sprouted,” he wrote in his Chronicle, “planted by the life of Vladika John and in some small way watered by our Brotherhood. The first issue is modest — but one clearly senses that the faith is alive and burning. And what a joy for us to see that someone not only *cares*, but has the courage to *do* something! May God prosper this good beginning.” [12](#)

In the years to come, Fr. Seraphim gave Alexey much assistance, translating Orthodox texts, reviewing articles, and keeping up a voluminous correspondence in which he strove to guide Alexey in a sober Orthodox consciousness.

With the missionary and publishing work of Alexey and Vladimir, the fathers beheld the fruit of God-pleasing activity among Orthodox converts. They rejoiced, but at the same time realized that they had to continue to nurture these humble endeavors. In his Chronicle Fr. Seraphim wrote: “Today few converts have the necessary guidance that will keep them from going astray and eventually ‘burning out.’ Even a few words can do much to give them a sense of belonging, and encouragement. Thank God for Alexey Young and Vladimir Anderson, who have the spark and are working well — better than all the committees in the world! God grant us to offer what counsel and encouragement we can to them and others.” [13](#)

**I**N the meantime, the services that Alexey’s family held daily in their little pump-house chapel had not gone unnoticed. One day a neighbor lady came up to them and said, “Pardon me — excuse my intrusion. Every day, as I wash the dishes, I see you hasten to the pump house. And when you come out a half-hour or so later, you’re different, you seem so calm and peaceful. *What do you do in there?*”

The answer followed: “Come and see!”

Soon this woman and her daughter — former Pentecostals — joined the

Youngs in their services. When the wife of one of Alexey's colleagues at school learned of the Orthodox community, she also wanted to take part in its life of daily prayer. In time these people were converted to the Orthodox Faith, and others followed later. "The word of Orthodoxy," noted Fr. Seraphim after some of them had visited the hermitage, "*does* have access to American hearts — a few, and how carefully they must be nourished!" [14](#)

In January of 1974, Fathers Seraphim and Herman made their first visit to Alexey's home and chapel in Etna. They held a service in the chapel — which by this time had been painted and rearranged — along with the Youngs and the two other Orthodox convert families who then made up the small community. "The fathers sang with us the Akathist to the Lord Jesus Christ," Alexey recalls, "teaching us the beautiful Russian melody. They sang with such fervor and compunction that even though we were in quite humble surroundings, 'we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth,' as the emissaries of Grand Duke Vladimir had reported a thousand years ago after attending Orthodox services for the first time." [15](#)

Returning home from his visit to Etna, Fr. Seraphim wrote that "the sprout of Orthodoxy is growing well there." Elsewhere he noted that the community "so far seems to be developing just right for preserving an island of Orthodoxy." [16](#)

This new offshoot of the Brotherhood spurred the fathers to contemplate the principles of lay Orthodox communities, especially as lived out in modern conditions. In an article for *The Orthodox Word*, Fr. Seraphim drew from the teachings and example of Fr. Adrian (then Archbishop Andrew) in order to set forth these principles. "The essence of the true Orthodox life," he wrote, "is *godliness* or piety (*blagochestiye*), which is, in the definition of Elder Nektary, [\[c\]](#) based on the etymology of the word, 'holding what is God's in honor.' This is deeper than mere right doctrine; it is the entrance of God into every aspect of life, life lived in trembling and fear of God.... Such an attitude produces the Orthodox *way of life* (*byt*) which is not merely the outward customs or behavior



that characterize Orthodox Christians, but the whole of the *conscious spiritual struggle* of the man for whom the Church and its laws are the center of everything he does and thinks. The shared, conscious experience of this *way of life*, centered on the daily Divine services, produces the genuine Orthodox community, with its feeling of lightness, joy, and inward quietness. Non-Orthodox people, and even many not fully conscious Orthodox Christians, are scarcely able to imagine what this experience of community might be, and would be inclined to dismiss it as something ‘subjective’; but no one who has wholeheartedly participated in the life of a true Orthodox community, monastic or lay, will ever doubt the reality of this Orthodox feeling.” [17](#)



Alexey Young, Bishop Nektary, and Fr. Seraphim in Etna, 1975.

Right after publishing this, the fathers were shown letters which an Orthodox man in Greece had written to Alexey on the subject of Orthodox communities. “We found them most interesting,” wrote Fr. Seraphim to this

man. “We ourselves have given much thought to this question, and the new issue of *The Orthodox Word* has a little of our ideas on this.... But it is not possible to express oneself fully on this subject in print, because the Orthodox people are simply too immature — the idea of an ‘Orthodox community’ is very attractive, but almost no one is aware of or prepared for the difficulties and sacrifice involved in bringing it into reality, and the result is only hopeless experiments and disillusionment....

“But still, if one learns to be realistic and does not expect from a lay community as much as one does of a monastic community, this also is a possibility for our days — and actually a very important one. Life in an ordinary Orthodox parish today, in the abnormal big-city atmosphere and surrounded by unheard-of temptations — is *not normal* for Orthodoxy. We know a very zealous priest in New Jersey, with a very large flock and many young people. But he tells us that he is fighting a losing battle. He has the young people in church for a few hours on Sunday, and perhaps on Saturday night, and for an hour or two of church school on Saturday — and the whole rest of the week they are subject to the contrary influences of the public schools, television, etc. The desire to have an atmosphere where the Church can have more part in life and more influence on children—is *a very natural Orthodox desire*, and not something ‘odd’ or a sign of ‘prelest,’ [\[d\]](#) as many seem to think.” [18](#)

The members of the Etna community went to San Francisco once a month to receive Holy Communion. But their “daily spiritual injections” came from reading spiritual texts and attending services in the chapel. The most apparent *outward* sign of an Orthodox community, Fr. Seraphim wrote, “seems to be the Divine services (even if only a minimum of them), whether with a priest or without — but *daily*, this being the point around which everything else revolves.” [19](#)

In a series of articles he wrote on the Typicon of Church services, Fr. Seraphim tried to dispel what he called “the popular misconception that Orthodox Christians are not allowed to perform any Church services without a

priest, and that therefore the believing people become quite helpless and are virtually ‘unable to pray’ when they find themselves without a priest — as happens more and more often today.” After quoting an appeal by Archbishop Averky for Orthodox Christians to come together in public prayer even where there is no priest, Fr. Seraphim concluded: “This practice can and should be greatly increased among the faithful, whether it is a question of a parish that has lost its priest or is too small to support one, of a small group of believers far from the nearest church which has not yet formed a parish, or a single family which is unable to attend church on every Sunday and feast day.” [20](#)

When Alexey began to wonder about the meaning of his growing pastoral concerns, Fr. Seraphim wrote him this loving word of encouragement: “Do not worry about the increased responsibilities and new souls that come your way; God will not send you more burdens than you can bear, and what can we poor Christians do if we don’t help at least a little those who are thirsting for the truth? Let us labor a little for others, who often have nowhere else to turn to in this wasteland of modern life, and let us look forward to the repose of the next life, when the spiritual harvest will be in and secure from harm! And even in all our trials and sorrows — for which constantly be prepared!—what joy our loving God sends to us unworthy ones!” [21](#)



Fathers Herman and Seraphim with some members of the Etna Orthodox community, standing next to the Youngs' home, 1975. Susan Young is the third from left in the back row.

Fr. Seraphim saw hope for the small community in the personal hardships which its members had, for different reasons, endured in their lives. “All the adults in the community,” he wrote in his Chronicle, “have suffered much.... This is a good sign for their remaining firm in Orthodoxy.” <sup>22</sup> With this in mind, he once gave a talk in Etna on the Patristic teaching *of pain of heart*, on learning to accept trials and sorrows as precisely the path to salvation. Their suffering, he told them, was God’s visitation to them. <sup>23</sup>

**W**HEN Alexey began enlarging the chapel on his property, Fr. Seraphim warned him not to be too anxious to have it proclaimed a parish. “We’re glad to hear of the progress on the chapel,” he wrote to Alexey. “Don’t worry about Vladika Anthony. He has to know, of course, when you are ready to open a ‘church,’ and if he is informed now he will assume that you are, indeed, opening a ‘church’—and that will be a trap, because you aren’t ready for that yet. Just don’t start calling your improved shed a ‘church’ or start making big plans. You are just a very small group of Orthodox Christians far off in the sticks, not a

‘parish,’ i.e., something ‘officially registered’ in the ‘Diocese.’” [24](#)

Years after Fr. Seraphim’s death, Alexey recalled: “More than once Fr. Seraphim wrote/said: ‘Do not learn Russian. If you know Russian you’ll hear all the gossip and be tempted to participate in it. And don’t join a parish council anywhere. Avoid parish politics like the plague!’ Of course my family and I were encouraged to attend Liturgy in various parishes and receive the Holy Mysteries, but we were discouraged from participating in other parish activities, which he felt would derail me from the ‘calling’ he believed had been sent to me by God — i.e., missionary work through writing, teaching, publishing. As a result, many lay Russians referred to me as an ‘Old Believer’!” [25](#)



The enlarged chapel of Saints Adrian and Natalie in Etna.

In his letter to Alexey’s correspondent in Greece, Fr. Seraphim explained the need of communities like Alexey’s to escape the influence of worldliness: “In our present-day conditions, there must be a conscious effort to get away from involvement in the world — thus, small towns in preference to large cities, freedom (as much as possible) from television, newspapers, telephone, etc. And something more: there must be a getting away from the worldly spirit *in the*

*Church itself*; this means getting away even from ordinary parish life, if possible, for this has become very worldly today.

“The Etna community is by no means a highly ‘idealistic’ or ‘experimental’ community; it is rather a natural growth from special conditions which are exceptionally favorable for Orthodox self-preservation — provided, of course, that the basic Orthodox zeal and fervor are present to begin with. The greatest blessing for this community is, paradoxically enough, that *they are far from an Orthodox parish*—this has forced them to get out of the rut of so many Orthodox people today who *take for granted* everything about the Church and assume that *someone else* is ‘in charge’ of the Church and its services, etc. These people have been forced to do the services themselves, and therefore the services are much more dear to them; and the difficulties they must go through to get to a priest and receive Holy Communion are so great that they dearly treasure this privilege and are literally working out their salvation with fear and trembling. Of course, we Americans are also blessed because everything in Orthodoxy is new to us and therefore precious — every new translation of a saint’s life or service is a new discovery for us, all the more so if we can participate in it ourselves.” [26](#)

**I**N a letter to Alexey, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “You should give great thanks to God for having such an opportunity to live remotely and independently, where Orthodoxy can really enter into your daily life.” [27](#) And in another letter, commenting on *Nikodemos*: “We rejoice to see the seed of genuine Orthodoxy taking root and bearing sprouts, opening up a ‘dimension’ of Orthodox life that has not been too much seen yet in America: lay Orthodoxy that is not ‘worldly,’ that searches for deeper roots and feels that it cannot ‘fit in’ with the world; that is not satisfied to be like everyone else only with an ‘Orthodox point of view’ on everything; that looks to the Fathers for answers, not on academic questions or theology, but on how to live. There is a glimpse here of an Orthodoxy not merely ‘added to’ the American way of life and then apologized for and made understandable to non-Orthodox, ‘fitting in’ as a fourth major faith — but



something rather that transforms life, makes Orthodox people something of a scandal to the world, that grows up on its own principles quite apart from the world around it, and yet that is quite sound and normal in itself.” [28](#)

At the same time, however, Fr. Seraphim realized how fragile such precious little communities are, how powerfully the devil tries to weaken and destroy them. “Without a constant and conscious spiritual struggle,” he wrote, “even the best Orthodox life or community can become a ‘hothouse,’ an artificial Orthodox atmosphere in which the outward manifestations of Orthodox life are merely ‘enjoyed’ or taken for granted while the soul remains unchanged, being relaxed and comfortable instead of tense in the struggle for salvation. How often a community, when it becomes prosperous and renowned, loses the precious fervor and oneness of soul of its early days of hard struggles! There is no ‘formula’ for the truly God-pleasing Orthodox life; anything outward can become a counterfeit; everything depends on the state of the soul, which must be trembling before God, having the law of God before it in every area of life, every moment keeping what is God’s in honor, in the first place in life.” [29](#)

Fr. Seraphim’s fervent prayer for people in the Etna community was that they remain as they were: with fear of God and love for each other, valuing their “living links” such as Bishop Nektary. Having returned from a visit there in September of 1975, he wrote in his Chronicle: “The community, though small and weak, is struggling to live in the true spirit of Orthodox piety, and perhaps now is the best time for it — before it has grown too large to lose the essential oneness of mind and soul or to take Orthodoxy for granted. The community was very inspired by Bishop Nektary’s visit earlier in the week, and Fr. Seraphim gave a talk after Vespers (in the enlarged chapel) on treasuring the contact with Orthodox tradition through Vladika Nektary and even through the newly installed icon-screen which comes from the Sacramento Church of the Kazan Mother of God, and was built by Alexey Makushinsky, who was a member of the Catacomb Church in Russia, who sang in the choir of St. John of Kronstadt, and was healed in Moscow at the relics of St. Basil the Blessed.... May God

preserve them all in oneness of mind and soul!” [30](#)

The next stage for the community lay in its having a priest in its midst — but this would come only at the time appointed by God’s Providence. In the meantime the community was building a solid spiritual foundation of *daily common prayer*: a foundation which can serve today as a model for others who are seeking a quiet island of otherworldly Christianity amid the tumultuous sea of our materialistic, post-Christian society.



## ***On the Means of Our Redemption***

*How much more shall the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? For this cause He is the Mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*

—Hebrews 9:14–15

*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.... When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.*

—Romans 5: 8, 10

*Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood.*

—Apocalypse (Revelation) 5:9

**I**N 1973 Fr. Seraphim was called upon to defend the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad — and the Orthodox Church as a whole — against a novel teaching which was, in his own words, “potentially not only explosive, but absolutely catastrophic.” <sup>1</sup> This was a new interpretation of the Christian dogma of redemption, formulated in the first decades of the twentieth century by the founding chief hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad, Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky (†1936).

“Metropolitan Anthony,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “was unquestionably a great church figure, but he should be understood first of all as a *pastor*. With him theology was secondary, and proceeded from his *pastoral* thought and feeling. He tried to make dogmatics ‘exciting’;... he spoke of rephrasing the dogmas in terms of ‘moral monism’; sometimes he succeeded and sometimes he did not. He had a great compassionate heart, but when he tried to translate this feeling into theology, he ran into difficulties which sometimes aroused violent opposition. His ‘Dogma of Redemption’ is the one great cause of serious controversy; about his other ideas there may have been disagreements, but never charges of ‘heresy.’” <sup>2</sup>

In applying his system of “moral monism” to the dogma of redemption, Metropolitan Anthony had attempted to combat the exaggerated explanation of redemption propounded by Western Scholastic theologians after the Schism: that Christ suffered and died on the Cross because God the Father Himself needed to be appeased. <sup>3</sup> The interpretation of redemption that Metropolitan Anthony offered in its stead was derived from his own experience as a pastor who “co-suffered” with his flock. According to his formulation, our redemption occurred through Christ’s “sufferings of soul” or his “sufferings of co-suffering love.” <sup>[a]</sup> Although he was right to place emphasis on the love of Christ in the work of redemption — an emphasis also found in the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers — the end result of Metropolitan Anthony’s attempt was fraught with difficulties. In arguing against the Latin Scholastic explanation he had gone too far in the opposite direction. He had undermined the Scriptural/Patristic teaching of the Orthodox Church that mankind’s redemption from sin and death came through Christ’s sacrificial death on the Cross and through its consequence, His Resurrection from the dead.

“In the thought of Metropolitan Anthony,” Fr. Seraphim explained, “the sufferings of Christ’s soul are separated from those of His body and are not only given a central place, but in fact are *identified* with our redemption. The Holy Fathers do not make such a distinction.” Further, in the Metropolitan’s teaching

“the *center of emphasis* or central moment of redemption is *transferred* from Golgotha to Gethsemane,” that is, to Christ’s prayer in the Garden. Golgotha is not omitted from the Metropolitan’s exposition of redemption, since according to him Christ also “suffered in soul” on the Cross. As Fr. Seraphim observed, however, in the Metropolitan’s teaching “the Cross is given a secondary place.... Against such teaching stand all the Holy Fathers, the Divine services and the Liturgy. All of them place an emphasis on Golgotha as the central moment of our salvation.” [4](#)

The overshadowing of the Cross by the Gethsemane prayer in the work of redemption was the most obvious novelty in the new “dogma.” But behind this lay a more fundamental problem. As Fr. Seraphim explained, Metropolitan Anthony “rejected the idea of Christ’s *sacrifice* on the Cross in any but a metaphorical sense.” [5](#) Since he saw Christ’s “sufferings of soul” as the means of our redemption, Metropolitan Anthony lost sight of the real significance of Christ’s *death* on the Cross.

**I**N the Orthodox Patristic dogma of redemption, Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross is seen to be a sacrifice in the true sense of the word, and His death is seen to have objective value in the Divine plan of man’s salvation. In the words of St. Athanasius the Great (†373), known as the “Father of Orthodoxy”: “Having proved His Godhead by His works, He [Christ] offered the sacrifice in behalf of all, surrendering His own temple to death in place of all, to settle man’s account with death and free him from the primal transgression.” [6](#)

According to the Patristic interpretation of Holy Scripture, before the primordial fall man’s body was not subject to death and corruption, and his soul had the grace of the Holy Spirit dwelling within it. [7](#) [\[b\]](#) At the fall, writes St. John Damascene (†750), “man was stripped of grace and deprived of that familiarity which he had enjoyed with God; he was clothed with the roughness of this wretched life... and put on death, that is to say, the mortality and grossness of the flesh; he was excluded from Paradise by the just judgment of

God; and was condemned to death and made subject to corruption.” <sup>8</sup> Death was the sentence for sin. Christ took upon Himself that sentence, but since He was without sin and thus undeserving of the sentence, the sentence was abolished for all mankind, and mankind was freed from the consequences of the primal transgression. As St. John Damascene explains, “Since our Lord Jesus Christ was without sin, He was not subject to death and dies and offers Himself to the Father as a sacrifice for us.... Then, having tasted of the sinless and life-giving body, it [death] is destroyed and gives up all those whom it had swallowed down of old.” <sup>9</sup> St. Athanasius puts it this way: “Taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death in place of all, and offered it to the Father. This He did out of sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die, and the law of death thereby be abolished.” <sup>10</sup> [\[c\]](#) Likewise, St. Symeon the New Theologian (†1022), in a passage translated by Fr. Seraphim, writes: “Thus God, Who is incomparably higher than the whole visible and invisible creation, accepted human nature, which is higher than the whole visible creation, and offered it as a sacrifice to His God and Father.... Honoring the sacrifice, the Father could not leave it in the hands of death. Therefore He annihilated His sentence.” <sup>11</sup> “The Father accepts the sacrifice,” says St. Gregory the Theologian (†390), “not because He demanded it or felt any need for it, but on account of the economy,” <sup>12</sup> that is, in order to fulfill the Divine plan of our salvation.

In freeing man from the primal transgression, Christ’s death on the Cross makes it possible for man to be restored to all that he had lost at the fall, and makes it possible for him to attain all that he had originally been meant to attain. Man can receive the grace that was lost at the fall; can be freed from the spiritual death that occurred at the fall; can be re-created and receive new, eternal life in Christ; can enter into union with God; and can again become a dweller of Paradise and heaven. By the power of Christ’s sacrifice in the flesh, people receive a new birth in Holy Baptism, which signifies the death and Resurrection of the Saviour. “Their souls,” writes St. Symeon, “are brought to life and again

receive the grace of the Holy Spirit as Adam had it before the transgression.... Having become in this way worthy of being associates of God, they taste his Flesh and drink His Blood, and by means of the sanctified bread and wine become of one Body and Blood with God Who was incarnate and offered Himself as a sacrifice.” [13](#) Finally, through Christ’s Resurrection which inevitably followed upon His sacrificial death, man is made subject to future resurrection: he will one day be raised in a spiritual body that will be incomparably superior to the incorruptible body of Adam before the fall. [14](#) [d] “By means of the one death and Resurrection of His flesh,” affirms St. Gregory Palamas (†1359), “Christ healed our twofold death and freed us from our double captivity of soul and body.” [15](#)

The saving fruits of Christ’s death were made available not only to those who lived after Him, but also to those who lived before Him; for during His three-day burial Christ harrowed hell and brought to Paradise those righteous ones who had lain in hades throughout the ages. “Christ’s death,” writes St. Symeon, “was an indispensable sacrifice also for the pious ones who died before His coming in the flesh.” [16](#)

St. John Damascene sums up the consequences of Christ’s death on the Cross: “Death has been brought low, the sin of our first parent destroyed, hell plundered, resurrection bestowed, the power given us to despise the things of this world and even death itself, the road back to the former blessedness made smooth, the gates of Paradise opened, our nature seated at the right hand of God, and we made children and heirs of God. By the Cross all things have been set aright. *For all we who are baptized in Christ, says the Apostle, are baptized in His death* (Rom. 6:3), and *as many of us as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ* (Gal. 3:27); moreover, *Christ is the power and wisdom of God* (I Cor. 1:24). See how the death of Christ, the Cross, that is to say, has clothed us with the subsistent wisdom and power of God!” [17](#)



Icon depicting the creation of Eve, the fall, the expulsion from Paradise, the Annunciation, the Crucifixion of Christ, the harrowing of hell by Christ, and the reentry of man into Paradise. Icon from the Monastery of St. Anthony of Siya, Russia, printed in *Russkiy Palomnik*, no. 10, 1895.

Perhaps the most succinct expression of the Patristic teaching on redemption is found in the writings of St. Gregory the Theologian: “We needed an Incarnate God, a God put to death, that we might live. We were put to death together with Him, that we might be cleansed; we rose again with Him, because we were put to death with Him; we were glorified with Him, because we rose again with Him.” [18](#)

Such is the clear teaching of the Holy Fathers, based on the Holy Scriptures, concerning Christ’s death and Resurrection as the means of our redemption. In Metropolitan Anthony’s interpretation of the dogma of redemption, however, Christ’s death is seen first of all as a pedagogical tool for



the sake of moral edification: so that simple believers, unable to “understand the sufferings of the soul” [19](#) that had brought about our redemption, might be moved by seeing the physical Crucifixion. In his work *The Dogma of Redemption*, the Metropolitan wrote: “The bodily torments and bodily death of Christ are needed primarily so that *believers would value the power of His sufferings of soul*, as incomparably more powerful than His bodily torments, which in themselves lead the reader and hearer of the Gospel to a state of trembling.” [20](#) He stated that he was far from insisting that this was the only value of Christ’s death, but then, having failed to give the Patristic teaching, he ended by reaffirming the mere pedagogical value of the Crucifixion, from the viewpoint of “moral monism.” [21](#)

As Fr. Seraphim pointed out, “This is a rationalistic view: that the significance of the Holy Cross is something *sentimental*.” Fr. Seraphim also saw a certain intellectual elitism in the Metropolitan’s perspective. Having once been an intellectual elitist himself, he observed in Metropolitan Anthony’s teaching “a condescending attitude toward the Holy Cross.” “Here,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “Orthodox Christians are divided into two categories:... those who know the real teaching (by going to the [theological] academy) and those who must have something to move them.... In general, the aforementioned understanding is very similar to the teaching of the Western Protestant writers of Metropolitan Anthony’s time such as Ellen White (the foundress of Seventh-Day Adventism) and others.” [22](#) [\[e\]](#)

Metropolitan Anthony, Fr. Seraphim explained elsewhere, “is not known as a careful theologian, but rather as a great pastor whose theology is one of fits and starts.... His theology is at times closer to *expressionism*.... Although he liked to *talk* about a return to the sources, the Fathers, etc., he belonged rather to the literary intelligentsia wing of the hierarchy than to the Patristically oriented (such as the fathers of Optina Monastery, Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, etc.).” [23](#)

WITH the publication of Metropolitan Anthony's essay *The Dogma of Redemption* in Russia in 1917, his ideas immediately evoked criticism. The great controversy, however, arose only in 1925, when the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Church Abroad approved a proposal to replace, in church schools, the *Catechism* of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow <sup>24</sup> with the *Catechism* of Metropolitan Anthony, which contained the new teaching on redemption. "This caused a furor," Fr. Seraphim wrote, "which was led by the most eminent and Patristically minded among the Russian hierarchs abroad, a leading member of the Synod who sometimes presided over it and who was as well noted for his ascetic and holy life: Archbishop Theophan of Poltava (†1943)." <sup>25</sup> Archbishop Theophan wrote a penetrating sixty-two-page critique of Metropolitan Anthony's teaching, drawing from the Holy Scriptures and from a vast body of Patristic writings. He was joined by another holy hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad, Archbishop Seraphim Sobolev (†1950), <sup>26</sup> who wrote a report outlining the errors found in Metropolitan Anthony's *Catechism*. Due to their opposition and that of others, Metropolitan Anthony requested that his *Catechism* not be made official. <sup>26</sup>

In the years to come, the new "dogma" proved influential in some circles, but it continued to evoke controversy. In 1931 monks of Mount Athos wrote "The Epistle of Protest of Athonite Monks Concerning the Brochure of Metropolitan Anthony, *The Dogma of Redemption*." In 1938, two years after Metropolitan Anthony's repose, the theological writer Fr. Georges Florovsky also wrote an incisive critique of the new "dogma," in which he found "an insurmountable aftertaste of psychologism." "What is immediately striking in this artificial scheme," he wrote, "is the rationalism and primitiveness of its deductions, the theologizing from common sense, and the stubborn violation of the evidence of revelation." <sup>27</sup>

Within the Russian Church Abroad, views on the new "dogma" were sharply divided. Some of the hierarchs went so far as to call the "dogma" a



heresy; others simply expressed their grave differences with it without giving it a name; while still others eagerly promoted it without reservations, not admitting that it was possible for their founding chief hierarch to have made an error. [28](#)

Archbishop John, it seems, did not belong in any of these categories. Having tremendous love for Metropolitan Anthony as the one who first inspired him to serve the Church, he endeavored to defend the good name of the Metropolitan, to affirm the best part of the Metropolitan's teaching on the love of Christ, and at the same time to carefully avoid or correct the Metropolitan's clear departures from Patristic tradition. In 1938, at a gathering held in honor of the recently reposed Metropolitan, Archbishop John attempted to excuse the Metropolitan from the charge of heresy through a very sympathetic exposition of his teaching. [29](#) During the same year, however, he wrote an article in which he corrected an error that the Metropolitan had made regarding Christ's prayer in Gethsemane, [\[g\]](#) but without once mentioning the Metropolitan's name. [30](#) In this article, as in his subsequent articles and sermons, Archbishop John held strictly to the Orthodox teaching of man's redemption coming through Christ's death on the Cross. [\[h\]](#) As Fr. Seraphim noted, the aforementioned *Catechism* of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, which contained the true teaching on redemption, "was always the first book Vladika John would give to a new convert!" [31](#)

By the time Archbishop John was appointed to the San Francisco Diocese in 1962, the new "dogma" had been officially condemned by the Orthodox Church in Russia (the Moscow Patriarchate). [\[i\]](#) When Fr. Seraphim (then Eugene) asked Archbishop John about the question of Metropolitan Anthony's "dogma," the Archbishop responded only with a gesture of his hand, as if to say "It's unimportant"; [32](#) and then he immediately began speaking about Blessed Augustine of Hippo: another righteous hierarch who had made theological errors. From this Fr. Seraphim later concluded, speaking about Blessed Augustine and Metropolitan Anthony: "These are both teachers, flawed in theology, but great in piety, moral inspiration, and Orthodox life." [33](#)

After Archbishop John's repose, the people who became Fr. Seraphim's mentors in the Russian Church Abroad were unanimous in not accepting the new "dogma." Archbishop Averky, whom Archbishop John had appointed as the Brotherhood's trustworthy guide in matters of theology, had been a spiritual son of the "dogma's" first main opponent: Archbishop Theophan of Poltava. Speaking as a member of the Russian Church Abroad, Archbishop Averky called Metropolitan Anthony's teaching "our wound." In 1963, with Archbishop Averky's blessing, Fr. Constantine Zaitsev wrote and published a lead article in Holy Trinity Monastery's Russian-language periodical, *Pravoslavnaya Rus'*, in which he warned of the errors of the new "dogma" and unequivocally stated that Christ's death on the Cross has brought about man's redemption. <sup>34</sup>

Other mentors and instructors of Fr. Seraphim who did not implicitly accept the "dogma" were Archbishop Leonty, <sup>[j]</sup> Bishops Sava and Nektary, I. M. Andreyev, Fr. Michael Pomazansky, and Ivan and Helen Kontzevitch. <sup>35</sup> Like their predecessors in the Church Abroad who rejected the new teaching (Metropolitan Anastassy; Archbishops Tikhon of San Francisco, Ioasaph of Canada, and Vitaly of Jordanville, etc.), almost all of these people were, in Fr. Seraphim's words, "*extremely* well-disposed and sympathetic to Metropolitan Anthony." <sup>36</sup> Avoiding condemnation of the man himself, they honored his memory as a great pastor of the Church.

The "wound" caused by Metropolitan Anthony's teaching refused to close and heal primarily because some of the leaders of the Russian Church Abroad — most notably Archbishop Nikon, <sup>[k]</sup> Archbishop Gabriel, <sup>[l]</sup> and, after them, Archbishop Vitaly of Canada <sup>[m]</sup> and Bishop Gregory (formerly Archpriest George) Grabbe <sup>[n]</sup> — continued to promote it in Russian publications. These hierarchs seemed more concerned to propagate the new "dogma" than Metropolitan Anthony himself had been. In a detailed critique of the "dogma" written six years after the Metropolitan's repose, Archbishop Seraphim Sobolev pointed out: "Metropolitan Anthony was a stranger to the inclination, peculiar to heretics, to disseminate his teachings at all costs. He fulfilled our request and did

not print anything else in defense of his views on redemption. Unfortunately, he had not renounced it in his soul. In 1933 I spoke alone with him regarding his dogmatic teaching and again declared to him that it was not in agreement with the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the Holy Fathers. To this he replied that his teaching was in accordance with Divine revelation. I did not have occasion to speak further with Metropolitan Anthony about this.

“But if Metropolitan Anthony himself did not insist upon the dissemination of his teaching on co-suffering love as the means for our redemption, his followers began to busy themselves with this dissemination.” [37](#)

According to Helen Kontzevitch, support of or opposition to the new “dogma” was the watershed that separated what Fr. Seraphim had called the two “traditions” of bishops in the Russian Church Abroad. [38](#) Helen’s view, which she did not hesitate to express to Fathers Herman and Seraphim, was perhaps oversimplified. As has been shown, for example, Archbishop John did not wholly support nor wholly oppose the “dogma.” What is striking, however, is the fact that, during the time of Archbishop John’s trial in San Francisco, his friends and defenders were all in opposition to the “dogma”; while those who worked against him were the “dogma’s” most avid supporters and promoters. Fr. Seraphim was well aware of this fact. With regard to the new “dogma,” he was never in doubt as to which “tradition” of bishops he should follow.

**O**F all Fr. Seraphim’s mentors in the Russian Church Abroad, the one who suffered the most over the new “dogma” was Bishop Nektary. By nature Bishop Nektary was a meek and gentle man, never wanting to speak out or put himself forward, and always willing to stay in the background and take the lowest place. Yet he was a hierarch of the Church of Christ, and as such he understood that his first responsibility was to uphold the purity of the Orthodox Faith. He knew that Faith well, having come from the rich Patristic tradition embodied in Optina Monastery and its elders. When he saw the true dogma of the Church being threatened, he overcame his meek and docile nature and ended his customary

silence. Although as a vicar he was one of the lowest-ranking bishops in the Russian Church Abroad, during Fr. Seraphim's time he became the most outspoken opponent of the false dogma in that entire Church. As we shall see, he helped avert a huge disaster for the Russian Church Abroad and a major temptation for the entire Orthodox Church. And he did not do this without the participation of Fr. Seraphim — with whom, as he wrote, he was “of one mind on this question.” [39](#)

In the early 1970s, the false dogma began to pose a threat to the flock to which Fr. Seraphim's missionary labors were primarily directed: the English-language mission of the Russian Church Abroad. As with Bishop Nektary, his concern for the flock demanded that he speak out.

At that time Fr. Panteleimon and his monastery in Boston had begun to align themselves with one of the “dogma's” main promoters, Archbishop Vitaly of Canada, and together with him they had produced several issues of an English-language periodical, *The True Vine*. In a letter of June 16, 1972, Fr. Seraphim sought to warn one of Fr. Panteleimon's associates of the problem of the “dogma” and of Archbishop Vitaly's connection with it. “Vladika Vitaly,” he wrote, “is on the wrong side of this issue, a side that has not been accepted by the best Synod theologians living and dead.” [40](#)

Soon after this Fr. Seraphim was disturbed to learn that the Boston monastery itself had now begun to promote the “dogma,” quoting the most dangerous passages of Metropolitan Anthony's writings as representative of the greatest theology of the twentieth century. The monastery had an English translation of Metropolitan Anthony's work *The Dogma of Redemption*, and one of the monks wrote about their hopes of publishing it.

When Bishop Nektary learned about this, he looked to Fathers Herman and Seraphim as ones who might be able to persuade Fr. Panteleimon not to publish Metropolitan Anthony's work. In a letter of November 21, 1972, Bishop Nektary wrote to the Platina fathers:

Perhaps there is still some possibility of stopping Archimandrite Panteleimon from printing of *The Dogma of Redemption*. After all, this work of Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) is an outright heresy. And, since there are bishops, for example Archbishop Nikon and others, who share the teaching of Metropolitan Anthony, this could be taken for the point of view of the whole Church Abroad. If the question of the dogma floats to the surface, this will be the “Achilles heel” of our Church, if within it no one stands up in defense of the truth. The results could be extremely sad — right up to a schism. May the Lord preserve us from this. The Soviets are just waiting for a reason to find fault with us in something so as to destroy the Church Abroad, and Archimandrite Panteleimon by this printing is himself pushing her into the jaws of a boa constrictor. This is giving the trump card to the enemies of our Church to accuse us of heresy.

I was with Vladika Averky on his nameday.... Unfortunately there was no opportunity at all to speak with him “eye to eye”.... However, I have in mind to make a special trip to him about this matter, since I consider its importance to be of the first order.

In the next day or so I’ll send you the photocopy of the article by Protopresbyter Fr. Georges Florovsky, “On the Death on the Cross,” which you requested of Helen Yurievna [Kontzevitch]....

I would be very happy to meet with you to acquaint you with other very valuable materials on this question. Let me know, please, if it is possible now to reach you, or if you are snowed in.

**I**N January of 1973, Fr. Panteleimon was to come to the West Coast for a conference at a parish that was closely tied with his monastery. By this time he had built up a large following of priests and parishes nationwide, comprised largely of converts. For Fr. Nektas Palassis — the priest of the parish in Seattle, Washington, where the conference was to take place — the visit of Fr.

Panteleimon was a big event, and he promoted it with notices in the newspaper. He very much desired the attendance of Fathers Herman and Seraphim, whom he regarded as firm supporters since they had published laudatory articles both on Fr. Panteleimon and on Fr. Neketas' own parish of "zealot Orthodoxy." Sending the fathers two airplane tickets, Fr. Neketas wrote to them, "YOU MUST COME."

It was impossible for both fathers to make the trip, since at that time Fr. Seraphim's twelve-year-old godson was staying at the hermitage. Fr. Herman asked Fr. Seraphim to go alone, and with one aim in mind: to inform Fr. Panteleimon about the "dogma."

Fr. Seraphim dreaded the idea of having to leave his desert. "We are sending you back the ticket made out to both of us," he wrote to Fr. Neketas. "If you wish to trade it for a single ticket for me, then may God's will be done, I will bow to the obedience, trusting in Vladika John's prayers that I will travel safely (never having traveled in an airplane before)." [41](#)

Bishop Nektary asked Fr. Seraphim to compose a report on the "dogma" before he went. This Fr. Seraphim did, writing the report in outline form, in both Russian and English. [\[o\]](#) Taking what was to remain the only airplane ride of his life, he met with Fr. Panteleimon at the conference. As he later recorded, "With the approval of Vladika Nektary... I gave to Fr. Panteleimon a 'report' on the 'dogma,' telling him of the errors in it which have been pointed out by Archbishop Theophan of Poltava, Fr. Michael Pomazansky, and others." [42](#)

At the beginning of his report, Fr. Seraphim wrote that it contained "nothing of our own opinion, but only what has been handed down to us by the best theological tradition of the Russian Church Abroad." He went on to show that the "dogma" has no Holy Fathers to back it (as was admitted by its defenders, who said that the Fathers throughout history had been unable to "arrive" at it), and that it causes confusion as to what belongs to the human nature and what to the Divine nature of Christ.

Fr. Michael Pomazansky had written that, from the introduction of

modernism into the heart of Orthodoxy, “we are protected by liturgical theology.” <sup>43</sup> This was clearly the case with regard to the false “dogma,” since numerous ancient hymns of the Church speak of our redemption as coming through Christ’s Crucifixion and consequent Resurrection. <sup>[p]</sup> On the other hand, as Fr. Seraphim pointed out in his report, “to accept the ‘dogma’ opens the door not only to ‘creative theology,’ but to many reforms — to revising the services, etc. If the Holy Fathers didn’t realize the importance of Gethsemane when they were writing the Church services, then the services can be revised to compensate for this lack [of emphasis].” <sup>44</sup>

Fr. Seraphim concluded his report with what may now be regarded as a definitive Orthodox statement on the “dogma” — one that both acknowledges the indefensibility of the teaching and excuses Metropolitan Anthony: “A hopeless abyss, the ‘dogma’ cannot be defended, it can only be excused because of theological ‘expressionism’ which came from a loving pastoral heart. To defend the ‘dogma’ is to abandon the cause of the return to the Fathers in exchange for ‘creative theology’ which Metropolitan Anthony defended, which equals rationalism, sentimentalism.... Only the most sympathetic possible reading can excuse Metropolitan Anthony from the charge of error, or even heresy.” <sup>45</sup>

At the end of Fr. Seraphim’s report, Fr. Panteleimon was hesitant to acknowledge that Metropolitan Anthony could have made a theological error. As Fr. Seraphim recalled: “At that time he wouldn’t listen, being, I think, under the influence of the fashion which declared that Metropolitan Anthony was a theologian beyond compare.” <sup>46</sup> However, at Fr. Seraphim’s plea not to publish the English treatise on the “dogma,” Fr. Panteleimon said he would not do so himself. “He at least saw some of the difficulties [with the ‘dogma’],” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “and said he didn’t have any chance to print anything like this anyway in the conceivable future.” <sup>47</sup>

**I**N 1974 a much greater threat arose when a report on the “dogma” was

included on the agenda of a forthcoming All-Bishops' Council of the Russian Church Abroad. As Bishop Nektary noted in a letter to the Platina fathers, "If the report is accepted by the Council, it would give cause for our Church Abroad to be condemned." <sup>48</sup> Now the moment had arrived when Bishop Nektary knew he had to speak out. He resolved to address the issue at a pre-council session of the Synod of Bishops. In his letter to Fathers Herman and Seraphim (dated June 10, 1974), Bishop Nektary wrote:

At the end of the session of the Synod I said that I wanted to share with the members of the Synod my alarm in connection with the fact that on the agenda of the actions of the upcoming All-Bishops' Council is Metropolitan Philaret's report on the "Dogma of Redemption." <sup>[a]</sup> I reminded them that after Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky's work on that theme had been published a storm of reaction, criticism, and accusations of heresy had arisen. I spoke about how the enemies of our Church were just waiting to establish our guilt in something or other and that, if in the report there are those or other ideas which, in their time, were subject to criticism and condemnation, then this would give cause for the condemnation, even of heresy,... of our entire Church.... Why should we give our enemies cause to attack us and accuse us of breaking a dogma, that is, of heresy? It is natural that Fr. Alexander Schmemmann and the Church in the Soviet Union will not miss an occasion, getting together with the local Patriarchs, to depose us. And in addition to all this, a schism is also possible within our Church.

Vladika Nikon said that this was the personal and private opinion of Metropolitan Anthony. To this I replied that one can only have a personal opinion when a dogma is not yet established. Then a discussion is going on, and personal opinions are expressed; but after a dogma is established — as we believe, by the Holy Spirit — it is not permitted to have a personal opinion, since this would be a sin and apostasy from the Truth. In addition, this would be a precedent and would give grounds for everyone to have his



own personal opinion in questions of the Faith, that is, “to believe however one wants,” which is so fashionable in our own wicked times.

Vladika Afanassy [\[r\]](#) unexpectedly supported me. He said, in a rather sharp tone, that the dogma of redemption in the exposition of Metropolitan Anthony is an outright heresy, and that if it is accepted we will have to take the crosses out of all the churches.

Vladika Nikon said that we still have to explain dogmas to our flocks. To this Vladika Afanassy and I said that it is necessary to do this, but only according to the Holy Fathers.

I’ll tell you in more detail when we meet.

No resolution was passed on this question. And the session of the Synod was closed.

Metropolitan [Philaret] left for Mahopac. The next day I went to see him to say goodbye. I felt that I had caused the Metropolitan some bitterness and that he had been offended by my speech at the session of the Synod. It was very unpleasant for me, but I likewise felt that I could not have acted otherwise, since my conscience would have reproached me very greatly.

When taking leave of the Metropolitan I asked him to forgive me for causing him unpleasantness, but that according to my conscience, as a bishop, I had to share my apprehension with the members of the Synod, and by this had fulfilled my duty before the Church on this question.

Totally unexpectedly, Vladika Metropolitan told me that he had given Vladika Laurus instructions to inform the Pre-council Commission that he was removing the report on the Dogma of Redemption from the agenda of the Council.... I related all this to Vladika Andrew and Vladika Averky. They both crossed themselves when they heard that Vladika Metropolitan had removed the report on the dogma. I greatly implored Vladika Andrew to persuade Metropolitan Philaret not to print and not to publish the report. Vladika Andrew promised.

SOMETIME later, Fathers Seraphim and Herman learned that Fr. Panteleimon had given the English translation of Metropolitan Anthony's work, *The Dogma of Redemption*, to Archbishop Vitaly of Canada for publication. The latter published it in 1979, and in his own introduction he went much further than the "dogma's" inventor in absolutizing it and thereby diminishing the significance of Christ's death on the Cross. Quoting one of the most questionable passages in the entire book, he called the new "dogma" a "true Divine revelation," "the conciliar voice of the entire Church of Christ," "a miracle of theological thought, a pinnacle of godly deliberation, equal to the very dogmatical formulation of the Council of Chalcedon in its profundity." [49](#) He also stated his desire "that some God-inspired ecclesiastical writer would compose a prayer in the spirit and the sense of the dogma of redemption." [50](#) This was exactly what Fr. Seraphim had warned might happen: the infiltration of the false dogma into Orthodox Church services.

Although the "dogma" was still not declared officially, Archbishop Vitaly's hierarchical commendation of it did what Fr. Seraphim had feared: it made it *appear* official. It introduced into the English-speaking mission a stumbling block that would, in Fr. Seraphim's words, "only take attention away from the main task of this mission (presenting Orthodox tradition according to the Holy Fathers)." [51](#)

Right after the book on the "dogma" came out, Fr. Seraphim wrote to an Orthodox bookseller in England: "Vladika Vitaly has just published Metropolitan Anthony's *Dogma of Redemption* in English, and Bishop Gregory Grabbe praises it sky-high. Please don't advertise or sell this book — Metropolitan Anthony's teaching on this subject has been controversial for decades, and our best bishops and theologians have rejected it. Jordanville and other book centers here are deliberately not stocking it, and our Bishop Nektary has asked Fr. Nektas also not to distribute it. Years ago, at the instigation of Bishop Nektary, we warned Fr. Panteleimon about this teaching, but for political

reasons he fell for it.” [52](#)

No one was more hurt by the publication of the new book than was Bishop Nektary. On his next visit to the fathers in Platina, he spoke from his heart, asking them to vow to defend the Russian Church Abroad against the false teaching. Seeing the pastoral burden of their bishop, who at his consecration had vowed to guard the teachings of the Orthodox Church free from taint, the fathers gave him their solemn vow.

In 1992 the St. Herman Brotherhood published the Russian version of Fr. Seraphim’s report on the “dogma,” [\[s\]](#) and also the original Russian text of the treatises written against the “dogma” by Archbishops Seraphim Sobolev and Theophan of Poltava. [53](#) Later, in 1994, Fr. Seraphim’s report was published in English. [\[t\]](#) Although it is only in the form of a rough outline that Fr. Seraphim could have expanded into a lengthy and polished article, the report stands as a clear and concise overview of the many problems underlying the false dogma. Through it Fr. Seraphim, thanks to Bishop Nektary’s urging, has done an important service to the Church — safeguarding the purity of her doctrine. But above all he has done honor to the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, *in Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace* (Eph. 1:7).

## “Super-Correctness”

*“Traditionalism” is not the same thing as the real traditional outlook.*

—René Guénon [1](#)

*Fanaticism hinders a man’s understanding, but true faith gives it freedom.*

—St. Macarius of Optina [2](#)

**O**F all the modern philosophies which Alexey Young, as a school teacher and later as a principal, was confronted with, perhaps the most powerful was that of evolution. He could see that most parents were ignorant of the very formidable scientific evidence *against* evolution, and also of the fact that evolution was being used (often quite deliberately) to undermine the very foundations of the Christian worldview. He decided to write an article for the sake of these parents, to make them more aware of what their children were being fed intellectually. Sending it to Fr. Seraphim for review, he received it back with a few suggestions and encouragement to print it in *Nikodemos*.

Some time thereafter, Fathers Herman and Seraphim were surprised to receive a letter expressing displeasure over the article, written by a priest of the Russian Church Abroad who was under the spiritual direction of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Boston. According to the fathers of the Boston monastery, evolution was a “forbidden subject”; and it hurt this priest to see that Alexey was not agreeing with these authorities. Amazed to read in *Nikodemos* an article against such an established “fact” as evolution, the priest wrote that

Alexey, as a convert who had retained his “Roman perspective,” should not be allowed the “privilege of publication,” and he stated that he was “withdrawing all support from *Nikodemos*.”

While working on *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*, Fr. Seraphim had made an investigation into the social, philosophical, and spiritual roots of evolutionism. Later, when attending the theological courses instituted by Archbishop John, he had studied the teaching of the Orthodox Church regarding the creation of the universe, as passed on through the Scriptures and the writings of the Holy Fathers. [\[a\]](#) Thus, having understood for a long time that evolutionism was antithetical to the Orthodox worldview, he concluded that the Orthodox critics of Alexey’s article were “just not aware of the whole issue of evolution, whether in its scientific side or in its religious-theological implications.” To Alexey he wrote: “Obviously your article has touched something very deep (frankly we are astonished that people so keen on ecclesiastical matters, ecumenism, etc., should seem never to have given much thought to such an important thing as evolution; apparently it is because it seems to be outside the Church sphere).” [3](#)

Fr. Seraphim counseled Alexey not to consider his critics so much “in error” as simply *unaware*. He said he should not argue at all, but that together they should “prepare a more thorough presentation of the whole subject.” “Your article,” he wrote, “beyond any doubt is going to make you ‘unpopular’ in places. Do not let this discourage you, or force you into a ‘defensive’ posture.” [4](#)

But there was more to come. Alexey wanted to print an article he had been given on the Shroud of Turin. When he sent it for Fr. Seraphim to check, Fr. Seraphim wrote back suggesting that it not be printed in its present form since it was full of Roman Catholic expressions which would immediately close the minds of some Orthodox. Unfortunately, this reply came too late: before Alexey could communicate Fr. Seraphim’s objections to the author of the article, the latter had the article printed and sent it out to everyone on the mailing list of *Nikodemos*. “When I discovered this I was distraught,” Alexey noted later, “for

Fr. Seraphim's objections were good and thoughtful ones, and could have been incorporated into the article without difficulty.” [5](#)

The Shroud article made Alexey's critics even more convinced that he was an unrepentant Catholic. As Fr. Seraphim recalled: “We sent two long letters to Fr. ——— in defense of Alexey (while admitting his mistakes) and begging him to apply Vladika John's principle of trusting and encouraging missionary laborers and not trying to make them fit into a preconceived pattern or forcing them to submit to some standard ‘authority.’ To our grief Fr. ——— replied that on this point Vladika John was wrong, and converts must at times be ‘stomped on.’” [6](#)

Fr. Seraphim had noticed other signs of this same mentality. “We were frankly horrified,” he wrote, “when we heard that Fr. ——— had suggested a year or so ago that Vladika Vitaly [of Canada] be somehow placed ‘in charge’ of converts or convert priests, to avoid the ‘mistakes’ of the past. Well, yes, that might mean the end of the ‘mistakes’ of the past (but somehow we doubt even that), but it would also mean the end of the Orthodox missionary movement in the Church Abroad, period. (And it wouldn't help to have someone better in charge — the principle itself is the dangerous thing.)” [7](#)

Alexey soon received a 21-page “Open Letter” from the Boston monastery against the articles he printed. “Its author,” wrote Fr. Seraphim to Alexey, “has obviously taken unfair advantage of you in order thoroughly to discredit you, based on the reputation of the monastery as against you, a ‘nobody.’ He is riding on a current of intellectual fashion, and this will pass, and it will not be for the good of the monastery that it has allowed itself to do this and not faced the *real* intellectual problems of the day. Pray to Vladika John for guidance. Know that not everything depends on what some people ‘think’ of you, and also that at a proper time others will speak up for you.” [8](#)

The “Open Letter” was published in a newsletter and sent all over the country. Years later, recalling this and other actions of the Boston monastery and its followers, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “The fact itself that they objected to the

articles did not upset us... it was rather the way in which they objected. Through our extensive correspondence with [them], [\[b\]](#) it became clear that they believed that on such subjects it is not possible to have different opinions or interpretations: the ‘Orthodox view’ must be one in *favor* of evolution (!) and *against* the Shroud. We had thought that Orthodox Christians could at least *discuss* these subjects together in a friendly way; but according to them one cannot discuss these questions, but must accept the opinion of the ‘Orthodox experts’ on them.... After this, they began to tell people to ‘stay away from Etna’ because Alexey Young was ‘just a Roman Catholic,’ and we know people who followed this advice....

“Thus, our first cause to be upset with them was our discovery that they had formed a *political party* within our Church, and those who do not agree with the ‘party line’ are dismissed and regarded as non-existent, and people are even warned about the ‘dangers’ of having contact with such ones.... In the Russian tradition of ‘longsuffering,’ we said little about this to anyone for a long time and did not have a similar feeling towards them, hoping that this was somehow a ‘misunderstanding’ that would improve with time.” [9](#)

By 1973 Fathers Seraphim and Herman began to discover that, not only had a “political party” been formed, but it also used political *techniques* to achieve its aims. For example, in 1972 one of the priests in the group suggested to Alexey Young that he ‘merge’ his *Nikodemos* with their own newsletter, and that they would be happy to print the combined periodical to make it “easier” for Alexey. “We thought this a very strange thing at the time,” Fr. Seraphim recalled, “and simply advised Alexey to continue his own independent publishing; only later did we realize that by this means they intended to ‘take over’ *Nikodemos* and ensure that it would never print anything not in accordance with the ‘party line.’ Later they told Andrew Bond in England that they would distribute his publication, *The Old Calendarist*, in America, but only on condition that no articles be printed without their censorship. In 1973, when we had asked them if they could help with the distribution of our proposed Russian-

language periodical (which we were never able to begin), they *insisted* that we let them *print* it also — and we began to realize that even our Russian-language work was to be ‘censored in Boston’—and not even by Russian-speaking people, but by converts who had learned some Russian.

“Other ‘political techniques’ include ‘spreading the word’ that some particular publication or person is ‘outside the party line.’ For example, after the publication of the ‘Shroud’ article, Alexey received a number of letters from [the group], all canceling their subscriptions to *Nikodemos* and offering, instead of the friendly criticism one would expect from fellow Orthodox Christians, a cold cutting him off. Alexey was so depressed and hurt by the treatment they gave him at that time that he would have given up printing altogether if we had not supported him and told him that the attitude of other people in our Church was not at all cold like that.” [10](#)

Thus, on many occasions the fathers received clear indications that the new party intended to make their “party line” prevail at least over the convert wing of the Russian Church Abroad, and if possible over the Russians also. “This whole attempt,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “is so foreign to the Orthodox spirit that we have found it to be extremely distasteful, and a kind of ‘Jesuitism’ that has crept into our Church.” [11](#)

Fr. Seraphim noted how the new party had begun to practice the “Jesuit” principle of “the end justifies the means.” “When I went to their conference in 1973,” Fr. Seraphim recalled, “[one of their priests] told me something that I did not fully appreciate then, but which I now see as a part of the ‘problem’ which they have become for us: He told me that if one is working for a good church cause, it is permissible for one to lie, cheat, etc., for the sake of the ‘good cause.’ Sadly, we’ve seen this ‘Jesuit’ principle in operation among them in the way they spread tales about people they do not like, misrepresent the position of people they wish to criticize, etc.” [12](#) At one point the faction began quoting letters against Alexey which the latter knew for certain he had never written! “The fact that you are having quoted against you letters that don’t exist,” Fr.



Seraphim advised Alexey, “should make you sober and realize that against *that* kind of attack you can’t fight, if you are an honest man. Therefore, *don’t*. Let them do and say what they will.” [13](#)

More than anything else, it was the “open letters” coming from the faction that led the fathers to conclude that something had gone wrong. Beginning in 1973, these letters were directed to people within the Russian Church Abroad whom the party wished to criticize and correct, including its chief hierarch and several bishops. “Almost without exception,” Fr. Seraphim noted, “these letters have made a bad impression on us. In most of their individual points they are ‘correct,’ but in their tone they are filled with self-justification, subtle mockery of others, and a tone of cold superiority.” [14](#)

Many of these letters were actually lengthy essays, filled with long theological passages which were, at best, only loosely related to the issues at hand. One young convert in England, on receiving such a letter about himself, was very disheartened; but Fr. Seraphim identified for him what was behind it. It was, he said, “a cold and calculating vehicle for their self-esteem, behind a mask of absolutely fake humility and ‘spirituality’ (the Russians would call it ‘oily’)... Father Herman, who has a thoroughly Russian approach to such things, said after reading this letter: ‘The man who wrote this does not believe in God,’ which is to say: everything holy, spiritual, and canonical in it is *used* for some ulterior motive, and the letter is devoid of Orthodox heart and feeling.... The letter itself does not deserve an answer. They are experts in this tactic and would tear any reply of yours to shreds, knowing how to make it *appear* that whatever you say is wrong.” [15](#)

Fr. Seraphim called the attitude that produced these letters “being spiritual while looking in a mirror.” [16](#) He noticed that all the letters coming from people in the party “breathe the same spirit, as if written by the same person — even though some of the writers we know personally to be not like that at all.... Just recently I came across some letters to us from Boston twelve years ago — and what a difference! They were just strugglers then, and too bogged down in daily

labors to be writing such long-winded epistles. What has happened?” [17](#)

**I**N order to have its own views prevail in the Russian Church Abroad, the new faction did not stop at “open letters,” but began to systematically undermine the authority of the most respected Orthodox teachers of recent centuries. Its chief weapon in this, noted Fr. Seraphim, “is the recent academic fashion of looking everywhere for ‘Western influence’ in our theological texts.” [18](#) Most of the recent teachers, from St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain down to Archbishop Averky, were accused of being under this influence, of being “scholastics.” The theologians of the party were giving people to believe that they knew more about Orthodox theology than St. Nektarios of Pentapolis, St. John of Kronstadt (who talked about the “merits” of Christ), Archbishop John (who commissioned a service to be written to the Western Holy Father, Blessed Augustine), and the Optina Elders. “Such presumption,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “can only do harm to the *real* cause of renewing Orthodox life by drawing from the fresh springs of Orthodox tradition.” [19](#)

As Fr. Seraphim realized, the alarm over “Western influence” was based upon a half-truth. “Fr. Michael Pomazansky,” he wrote, “and other good theologians will readily admit that there were such ‘Western influences’ in the theological texts of the latter period of the Russian (and Greek) history — but they also emphasize that these influences were *external* ones which never touched the heart of Orthodox doctrine. To say otherwise is to admit that *Orthodoxy was lost* (!) in these last centuries, and only now are young ‘theologians’... ‘finding’ again the Orthodoxy of the Fathers.... If such theological giants as Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, [\[c\]](#) Bishop Theophan the Recluse, Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, Archbishop Averky of Jordanville, Fr. Michael Pomazansky, and in general the theology taught in our seminaries for the last century and more, are not really ‘Orthodox’ at all — then we are in a very dangerous condition, and where are we to find our theological authority by which to stand firm against all the errors and temptations of these times? [The

theologians of the new party] teach: We will teach you what is right, we will read the Holy Fathers for you and teach you the correct doctrine, we have excellent translators and interpreters who are more Orthodox than Bishop Theophan, Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, Archbishop Averky, and all the rest. *This is a terribly dangerous game that they are playing*; they are unwittingly undermining the Orthodox ground under their feet.” [20](#)

Fr. Seraphim believed that what these apparent traditionalists and zealots were doing was precisely what the so-called liberals of the Parisian school were doing: severing the link, cutting off the recent roots to the ancient Fathers, in order that they themselves might be the authorities. The new theologians of the “traditionalist” school now claimed that they had been “able to sift through the scholastic attritions to our theology, and return to the Faith of the Fathers.” This was the claim of the Parisian school, also. As Fr. Seraphim wrote to one priest: “This points you in the direction of a kind of Protestantism, by placing a *gap* in the Orthodox theological tradition which only *your group* manages to span by skipping the interval of the ‘Latin captivity’ and getting back to the ‘original sources.’... The very notion of ‘Latin captivity’ is played up by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann and his colleagues precisely with the aim of destroying the idea of the continuity of Orthodox tradition throughout the centuries. DO NOT FALL INTO THAT TRAP! There are great theologians of the past several centuries who used expressions one might like to see improved; but that does *not* mean that they are in ‘Latin captivity’ or should be discredited. They just do not use these expressions in the same context as the Latins, and therefore the issue is not a very important one.” [21](#)

“A *well-balanced Orthodoxy*,” Fr. Seraphim wrote elsewhere, “can easily take any foreign influences that come and straighten them out, make them Orthodox; but a one-sided ‘party-line’ cuts itself off from the mainstream of Orthodoxy.” [22](#)

In the end, Fr. Seraphim identified this neo-traditionalism as a kind of “renovationism from the right.” “‘Boston Orthodoxy,’” he wrote, “is actually a

kind of right wing of ‘Parisian Orthodoxy’—a ‘reformed’ Orthodoxy which happens to be mostly ‘correct,’ but is actually just as much outside the tradition of Orthodoxy as Paris, just as much the creation of human logic. A terrible temptation for our times.” [23](#)

Concerning this lack of roots in the neo-traditionalists, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “They have to ‘do it themselves,’ with no one and no stable tradition to correct them. Their ‘roots’ are rather in twentieth-century America, which accounts for the ‘modern’ tone of their epistles [and] their failure to understand the whole significance, religious origin and context of ‘evolution.’... We’ve already seen several examples (particularly when they try to get into the Russian sphere, in which they are totally lost) of how they jump on some points purely on the basis of impression and whim, owing precisely to their lack of a thorough theological background. They do not trust their Russian elders (and we rather doubt that they have any Greek elders to take counsel of either).... They virtually boast that *they alone* are ‘great theologians’ who have just now rediscovered a lost theological tradition; but actually their theology is remarkably crude and simplistic, especially when put beside the writings of a truly great theologian in the unbroken Orthodox tradition — our own Fr. Michael Pomazansky of Jordanville, who is subtle, refined, deep — and totally overlooked by the ‘bright young theologians.’... We ourselves, not being ‘theologians,’... frequently take counsel from Fr. Michael and others, whose judgment we trust and respect, knowing that thus we are in a good tradition and do not have to trust our own faulty judgment for all the answers.” [24](#)

One point that the neo-traditionalists took issue with was the use of the nineteenth-century Orthodox *Catechism* of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, which the later *Catechism* of Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky had once been meant to replace. They called Metropolitan Philaret’s work “Roman Catholic” and “awful” even though, as we have seen, it had been this very catechism that Archbishop John had always recommended to converts. [25](#)

Another point concerned saints whom the neo-traditionalists said were “not

Orthodox” or even heretics, and should be thrown out of the Calendar. Fr. Seraphim was deeply disappointed when their newsletter published a pointless attack on his beloved Blessed Augustine. The article called those who venerated Augustine “untrained theologically” and “Latin-leaning.” As Fr. Seraphim pointed out in a letter, however, this would include Archbishop John, St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain, and the Greek and Russian theological tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not to mention the Fathers of the Fifth Ecumenical Council. “The universal tradition of the Orthodox Church,” he wrote, “accepts Blessed Augustine as a Holy Father, albeit with a [theological] flaw — very much like St. Gregory of Nyssa in the East.” [26](#)

The attack on Blessed Augustine revealed to Fr. Seraphim that the neo-traditionalist theologians were outside the spirit of Orthodox theology: “not,” he said, “because they are not smart or well-read enough, but because *they are too passionately involved in showing how right they always are.*” [27](#) In another letter he wrote: “The true Orthodox perspective is, first of all, to *distrust* one’s abstract ‘theological’ outlook and ask: what do our elders think; what did recent Fathers think? And taking these opinions respectfully, one then begins to put together the picture for oneself.... Anyone who has read Blessed Augustine’s *Confessions* with sympathy will not readily want to ‘throw him out of the Calendar’—for he will see in this book that fiery zeal and love which is *precisely* what is so lacking in our Church life today!... Perhaps Blessed Augustine’s very ‘Westernness’ makes him more relevant for us today who are submerged in the West and its way of thought.” [28](#)

Fr. Seraphim recalled how, when he had once asked Archbishop John about Metropolitan Anthony’s “dogma,” the latter had dismissed the subject and had instead begun to speak about Blessed Augustine, as if he associated Metropolitan Anthony and Blessed Augustine in his mind. [\[d\]](#) Taking an example from this, Fr. Seraphim once said, “If one calls Blessed Augustine a heretic, one has to call Metropolitan Anthony one, also; but if one accepts Metropolitan Anthony as a great hierarch while forgiving him for his error, then one has to do the same with

Blessed Augustine.” [29](#) This view was in marked contrast to the logic of the neo-traditionalist theologians, who, while rejecting Blessed Augustine, asserted that Metropolitan Anthony was virtually the only teacher of recent times who was entirely free of “Western influence.”

As Fr. Seraphim once told Fr. Herman, the real “Western influence” was to be seen in those who placed the opinion of one man (in this case, the leader of their party) above the testimony of living tradition. It was just such a concept of authority, he said, that had caused the theological errors in the contemporary Roman Church. In one letter he lamented, “Has our Orthodoxy in America become so narrow that we must be under the dictation of a ‘pope-expert’ and we must accept a ‘party-line’ on every conceivable subject? This is against everything Vladika John taught us and did in missionary labors.” [30](#)

**F**ATHER Seraphim gave this type of narrowness the term “super-correctness,” sometimes calling it “correctness disease.” He saw how it could have a strong pull on young people, both converts and Western-born native Orthodox. The new “super-correct” authorities, he observed, “offer them some ‘simple’ answers to complex questions, and that is very attractive to those a little uncertain or shaky in their faith.... We know many converts who grasp at ‘correctness’ like a baby’s bottle, and I think they could save their souls better by being a little ‘incorrect’ but humbler.” [31](#)

With its modern, overly logical approach, the “super-correct” wing had set itself above the simple believing Greeks of the “old school”; and Fr. Seraphim perceived how their mentality was also foreign to that of long-suffering Russians. In a letter he wrote: “One basic element seems lacking in all their ‘wisdom,’ one which the Holy Fathers emphasize is essential for genuine Orthodox life: *suffering*. The ‘wisdom’ born of leisure and idle disputes is not worth having; but the wisdom born of deep suffering (such as God has given above all to the Russians of our day) is alone truly balanced and sound, even if it cannot give a glib answer to every mocking question. Let us try to enter more

deeply into this suffering, God giving us His grace to do so!” [32](#)

One of the “simple answers” provided by the super-correct contingent concerned the relations of the various Orthodox Churches. These people maintained that all Churches on the New Calendar or involved in ecumenical activities were “heretical” and “invalid,” that they were “no churches at all,” that their bishops were “pseudo bishops,” and that they had no grace in their sacraments.

Some of the leading priests of the new faction, before being received into the Russian Church Abroad, had been ordained by one of these New Calendar Churches, the Greek Archdiocese of America. These priests had a whole theory worked out whereby the Greek Archdiocese, due to ecumenical activities, had supposedly lost its grace sometime after they had been ordained.

Unfortunately, one of the priests had a brother who was still a priest in the Greek Archdiocese. During a visit to Platina he told Fr. Herman, “I certainly don’t pray for *my* brother!” — meaning that he would not pray for him when the Orthodox are commemorated during the Divine Liturgy. Astounded, Fr. Herman went to tell Fr. Seraphim. “Can you imagine?” he asked. “He’s talking about his own blood brother, ordained by the same bishop as he!”

Fr. Seraphim blinked his eyes with astonishment. “Well, it certainly is ‘correct,’” he said with a sigh.

When *The Orthodox Word* published an appeal from the poverty-stricken Orthodox Church in Uganda [33](#) — which was in desperate need of food, clothing, spiritual books, icons, etc.—another of the super-correct priests wrote to the fathers inquiring whether these African Orthodox were “indeed brethren.” This priest maintained that if they belonged to a New Calendar, allegedly “graceless” jurisdiction (which in fact they did), they should not be helped. “I would rather donate whatever I can to some worthy Orthodox family or organization,” he concluded.

“How can we combat this cold-hearted elitism?” [34](#) Fr. Seraphim asked on reading this letter.



The super-correct view of grace — or rather gracelessness — caused many problems for the Russian Church Abroad. The faction's leaders were representing to people — especially impressionable converts — that the bishops of the Russian Church Abroad considered this Church virtually the only Orthodox body left in the world, most of the others being graceless. As Fr. Seraphim observed, however, “our bishops refuse to ‘define’ this matter and make everything ‘black and white’; and I am sure that, perhaps without exception, our bishops not only refuse to declare them without grace, but positively believe (at least by giving them the benefit of any doubt) that they do have grace.” <sup>35</sup> Many of these hierarchs had spoken powerfully against ecumenism, Sergianism, etc., but they had not formally broken communion with any Church save the Moscow Patriarchate — and even there they had not presumed to proclaim it “without grace.” As Fr. Seraphim wrote elsewhere, “The bishops [of the Russian Church Abroad], on various occasions, have specifically *refused* to make such a proclamation; and in their statement at the 1976 Sobor they specifically addressed the sincere and struggling priests of the Moscow Patriarchate in terms reserved only for priests who possess and dispense the grace of God.” <sup>36</sup>

Going to Greece, the super-correct faction tried to create political ties between the Russian Church Abroad and the most extreme of all Old Calendar groups: the “Matthewites,” who believed that not only were all the New Calendar Churches without grace, but any Church that had anything at all *to do* with them was also graceless. This plan later backfired, for the Matthewites learned that, contrary to what they had been led to believe, the Russian Church Abroad was far too “liberal” for them.

In 1976 the English-speaking Orthodox mission was also struck a blow when people (mostly insecure converts) who had been baptized in other canonical Orthodox Churches were directed by the super-correct contingent to get *rebaptized* in the Russian Church Abroad. “Recently,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “some wished to see such a ‘rebaptism’ performed in our Western American



diocese, but our Archbishop Anthony wisely refused to allow it, in which we gave him our full support — for indeed, it would have been tantamount to an open declaration of the absence of grace in the Greek Archdiocese.” [37](#)

Bishop Nektary was alarmed to hear of this unprecedented practice. “Perhaps the second baptism,” he remarked, “washes away the grace of the first one.”

At the height of the correctness mania in 1976, Fr. Seraphim explained to one convert why his path could not be with this type of “zealotry.” “Their ‘strictness,’” he wrote, “forces them to become so involved in church politics that spiritual questions become quite secondary. I know for myself that if I would have to sit down and think out for myself exactly which shade of ‘zealotry’ is the ‘correct’ one today — I will lose all peace of mind and be constantly preoccupied with questions of breaking communion, of how this will seem to others, of ‘what will the Greeks think’ (and *which* Greeks?), and ‘what will the Metropolitan think?’ And I will not have time or inclination to become inspired by the wilderness, by the Holy Fathers, by the marvelous saints of ancient and modern times who lived in a higher world. In our times especially, it is not possible to be *entirely* detached from these questions, but let us place first things first.” [38](#)

In another letter he wrote: “We who wish to remain in the true tradition of Orthodoxy will have to be zealous and firm in our Orthodoxy without being fanatics, and without presuming to teach our bishops what they should do. Above all we must strive to preserve the true fragrance of Orthodoxy, being at least a little ‘not of this world,’ detached from all the cares and politics even of the Church, nourishing ourselves on the otherworldly food the Church gives us in such abundance.” [39](#)

**T**HERE were times when Fr. Herman feared that the super-correct group was actually powerful enough to set the tone for all the converts coming to traditional Orthodoxy in America, and particularly to the Russian Church

Abroad. But Fr. Seraphim, although it hurt him to watch people being captured by this extremism, was not convinced. Quoting Abraham Lincoln, he told Fr. Herman, “It is true that you may fool all the people some of the time; you can even fool some of the people all the time; but you can’t fool all of the people all the time.”

Judging from the way things were going, Fr. Seraphim predicted that the super-correct group would eventually stage a schism and end up as a narrow, isolated sect of its own. In his letters over the years, he stated this many times:

June 15, 1976: “The ‘right wing’ of Orthodoxy will probably be divided into many small ‘jurisdictions’ in future, most of them anathematizing and fighting with the others.... We must keep up the living contact with the older Russian clergy, even if some of them may seem to us a little too ‘liberal’—otherwise we will be lost in the ‘zealot’ jungle which is growing up around us!” [40](#)

July 8, 1980: “We ourselves have felt for some time that Fr. ——— and others who share his attitude are heading straight for a schism, which now seems almost inevitable if he does not change his direction. Such a schism nobody needs; there are so many groups of ‘correct’ Orthodox in Greece now (none in communion with the others) that a new group will only prove the devil’s power to divide Orthodox Christians.” [41](#)

October 27, 1980: “I look with pain and sadness on this whole situation;... but I am powerless to do anything about it.... The inevitable schism which they are now preparing (if they don’t change soon) will be the last step in a process which only they can change.” [42](#)

September 17, 1981: “Judging from the last outburst, the schism is close, and I’m afraid the ‘silent majority’ of our priests and laymen will only heave a sigh of relief when the troublemakers are gone — leaving behind them a bad harvest of ill will, and continuing their name-calling and hatred in a louder tone from their new ‘jurisdiction.’

“May God preserve us from all of this! Please forgive my frankness, but I feel the time is very late, and anyone who can do anything had better do it now. I know God will continue to preserve His Church and I believe He will prosper the true Orthodox mission which is just *beginning* in our Church.... But the tragedy of souls caught in a self-willed schism will be incalculable.” [43](#)

December 8, 1981: “How tragic that some are now leading their flocks (albeit still very small flocks) out of communion with the only people who can still teach them what Orthodoxy is and help them to wake up from their fantasies of a ‘super-correct’ Orthodoxy that exists nowhere in the world.” [44](#)

Not long after Fr. Seraphim’s repose, his prediction unfortunately came true just as he had written.

“All this will pass, like some horrible nightmare,” [45](#) Fr. Seraphim remarked in a letter. Looking back at his support of the super-correct group in previous years, he wrote: “We feel ourselves badly betrayed.... All these years we trusted that they were of one mind and soul with us, giving everything they had for the cause of the English-speaking mission. But really, it seems that all this time they were only building for their own glory, cruelly abusing the trust of our simple Russian bishops, priests, and laymen.... [46](#) We fear that all our articles about ‘zealotry’ in the past years have helped to produce a monster!” [47](#)

Of course, there was disillusionment on both sides. The leaders of the new party, having been inspired to take up the zealot position in the first place largely thanks to the Platina fathers, assumed that the fathers would naturally join their movement and begin to take their directives from the Boston monastery. Some of them were truly disappointed when it became clear that the fathers were not going to follow their line. They had thought that Fr. Seraphim wanted absolute strictness just like they did, but in this they were wrong. Fr. Seraphim wanted Truth, which is on a deeper level altogether. “They have built a church career for

themselves,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “on a false but attractive premise: that the chief danger to the Church today is lack of strictness. No — the chief danger is something much deeper—*the loss of the savor of Orthodoxy*, a movement in which they themselves are participating, even in their ‘strictness.’... ‘Strictness’ will not save us if we don’t have any more the feeling and taste of Orthodoxy.”  
[48](#)

During the last decade of his life, Fr. Seraphim poured an incredible amount of time and energy into the question of “super-correctness,” having to uphold the Orthodox consciousness handed down from his Fathers against the many idiosyncrasies of the neo-traditionalist “theology.” Not only were articles needed, but also carefully thought-out answers to the many who came to him wondering about the new tone that was being set in the Church.

Looking back on this, one might be inclined to regard it as a waste of time. These were, in Fr. Seraphim’s words, “college boys playing at Orthodoxy,” [49](#) trying to prove they were tougher than everyone else. They were not sensitive thinkers like Fr. Seraphim, and were not in the least interested in what he had to say if it did not accord with the party line.

Several considerations, however, lead one to conclude that his time was not wasted at all. First of all, as Fr. Seraphim was acutely aware, souls were at stake in this matter, for in leading people into schism from the Church, the super-correct faction was blocking off their means of salvation. “A number of people,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “have already left our Church in anger, and I see others evidently preparing to go the same way. Our warnings on this subject in *The Orthodox Word* are meant to save as many people as possible from this suicidal step. Some dangerous signs: Just recently the priest of the ——— church in ——— told two of my spiritual children whom I had sent there, that our Russian bishops are ‘betraying’ him by their ‘ecumenism’; another Greek priest has told his flock that soon they will again be without bishops because they will have to leave the Russian Church Abroad; another clergyman openly calls some of our bishops ‘heretics.’ The perils about which we are warning are not imaginary, not

at all.” [50](#)

Secondly, we should consider the effect that this matter had in rounding out Fr. Seraphim’s message to the modern world. As we have seen, super-correctness (and not always in the obvious forms mentioned above) is a big temptation for Orthodox people of these latter times, when “the love of many grows cold.” [\[e\]](#) Indeed, correctness is built into the very word “Orthodox,” which means “right worship.” A key question for our days, which Fr. Seraphim had to face, was: How does one remain a *right* (Orthodox) believer without becoming self-righteous?

It was because Fr. Seraphim had a head-on collision with “correct” extremism that he was able to help his contemporaries out of this ditch. If he had not had it, it is likely that his writings would have proved one-sided. Even if he had avoided this pitfall himself, his words would not have been able to prevent less balanced individuals from going off the deep end on the right side. As it stands now, however, his message to people of today is full of sobering warnings against renovationism on the right as well as on the left, against legalism and loveless externalism under the guise of “traditionalism.” “Anything outward,” he had said, “can become a counterfeit.” [51](#)

Finally, we should not neglect to mention the value of all this on the formation of Fr. Seraphim’s own soul. He himself had been a convert to “zealot Orthodoxy”; and it was necessary that he go deeper into the phenomenon of zealotry, which *by itself* was not the answer. By dealing with it, and even more by *suffering* over it throughout many years, he had been forced to eradicate vestiges of cold elitism from his Christian faith, even while maintaining his devotion to the cause of “true Orthodoxy.” As he wrote in a letter, “I think in all of this, despite appearances, God is helping us to a deeper, truer Christianity. So much of our Orthodoxy today is so self-righteous and smug, or at least lukewarm and comfortable, that we need to be shaken up a little. May God only grant that His sheep not be lost!” [52](#) And in another letter: “Deep down I *do* hope that we will ‘suffer through’ this whole problem and that the deeper heart of our Church

will make itself known in the end.” [53](#)

In this suffering Fr. Seraphim was able, as we shall see, to achieve that rare combination of an uncompromising stand for Truth and a warm, living *Orthodoxy of the heart*. Such is what makes all the difference between experts of dead “traditionalism” and true carriers of *living tradition* such as Archbishop John.

## *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*

*Today it requires a broader mind, less chained to “public opinion,” to see the enormity of the creative acts of God described in Genesis. The Holy Fathers — the most “sophisticated” and “scientific” minds of their time — can be the unchainers of our fettered minds.*

—Fr. Seraphim [1](#)

**T**HE “Open Letters” that the super-correct contingent sent to Alexey Young in protest of his anti-evolution article had underlined for Fr. Seraphim the need for a more thorough Orthodox critique of evolution, combined with a presentation of the Orthodox Patristic doctrine of creation. Seeing what a vitally important subject this was for our times, he encouraged Alexey to expand his article into a booklet. In the meantime, he made his own in-depth study, both of the scientific theory of evolution and of the teaching of the Holy Fathers regarding creation, the first-created world, and the first-created man. He discovered that the ancient Fathers, although they of course did not refute the theory of evolution *per se* (since it had not been devised until recent times), provided a definite refutation of its main tenets. They spoke at length on the distinction between the “kinds” of organisms both at the time of their creation and afterwards, and were clearly against any philosophy that would confuse this distinction. Their teaching allowed for *variation* within each kind, but was adamantly opposed to the idea that one kind could be transformed into another.

In 1973, while working on this study, Fr. Seraphim wrote in a letter: “At one time I believed entirely in evolution. I believed not because I had thought

very much about this question, but simply because ‘everyone believes it,’ because it is a ‘fact,’ and how can one deny ‘facts’? But then I began to think more deeply on this question. I began to see that very often what calls itself ‘science’ is not *fact* at all, but *philosophy*, and I began very carefully to distinguish between *scientific facts* and *scientific philosophy*.” <sup>2</sup> The theory of evolution, Fr. Seraphim observed, “developed together with the course of modern philosophy from Descartes onward, long before there was any ‘scientific proof’ for it.” <sup>3</sup>

But evolution is more than philosophy under the guise of science. As Fr. Seraphim said, “It is a kind of science-fiction theology, the product of *faith* (an atheistic faith, but nonetheless faith). That it is still so widely accepted surely shows how low not only theology, but just plain common-sense thinking have fallen today. (I still remember my freshman professor of zoology expatiating on the ‘great ideas of man’: for him the greatest idea man ever invented was the idea of evolution; much greater, he believed, than the ‘idea of God.’)” <sup>4</sup>

Long before, Fr. Seraphim had identified the faith of modern man as a form of *chiliasm*: the belief in the perfectibility of this fallen world. Evolutionism, in its belief in the gradual development from the lower to the higher, was closely linked to chiliasm. In Fr. Seraphim’s words, “Chiliasm is almost an inevitable deduction from evolution.” <sup>5</sup>

Together with chiliasm, evolution was what Fr. Seraphim called “a deep-seated primordial force, which seems to capture people quite apart from their conscious attitudes and reasoning. (There’s a good reason for that: it’s been drilled into everyone from the cradle, and therefore is very hard to bring out and look at rationally.) It’s a *rival thought-pattern* to Orthodoxy, not just another idea.” <sup>6</sup>

In the eighteenth century, there had been a *different* scientific faith: faith in the Newtonian model of a mechanical-deist universe of perfect order. This faith became out of date a century later, being mocked by Voltaire in his satire *Candide*. As Fr. Seraphim observed, evolution too was such a passing faith.



“Orthodoxy,” on the other hand “*does not follow the philosophy of the age*, because it has its own philosophy based on revelation. The Holy Fathers have a complete theology of the origin of man and the creation which is not bound up with any intellectual fashion that passes away.... Our philosophy is *not of this world*, and it is *the answer* to the vain speculations of modern man!” <sup>7</sup>

In studying the doctrine of the Holy Fathers touching on the creation of man and the world, Fr. Seraphim found it so clear that he was “simply amazed at the power ‘evolution’ has over even educated Orthodox minds. Such is the power of this world and its fashionable ideas.” <sup>8</sup>

In the “Open Letters” that Alexey received in response to his article, a monk of the super-correct group had written over sixty pages talking *around* the subject of evolution without dealing with it directly. He maintained that evolution (which he saw as *fact* rather than *philosophy*), since it was in the realm of “first-degree knowledge,” was totally irrelevant to spiritual people concerned with exalted “third-degree knowledge.” In the monk’s view, if an Orthodox youth comes home from school telling his mother that he learned that man evolved from a lower species, his mother’s best reply would be, “My boy, God could have created us by any manner He wished, and *no one* will ever be able to explain or comprehend His ways. All we can do is thank Him for creating us.”

“Unless we are crazy,” wrote Fr. Seraphim to Alexey, “Fr. ——— has gone off somewhere in the clouds and is not at all in contact with what is going on in the world today, intellectually — which is very much of concern to Orthodox Christians who live in this world. In trying to stand so far ‘above’ the whole question, he does *not* give the impression that he speaks from the heights of the third degree of knowledge (which seems to be what he is trying to hint at?), but rather uses this exalted knowledge for rather rationalistic purposes. We are very disappointed to see such narrowness. The reply of the mother to the Orthodox ‘high school youth’—this apparently sums up his ‘answer’ to the whole problem of evolution.... Can he really be so unaware of the anti-Christian purposes of such ‘scientific’ education? His reply is an open invitation to the youth to accept

whatever the school teachers teach him — because we poor Orthodox Christians, alas, having such high knowledge, can't 'know any better.'" [9](#)

As Fr. Seraphim indicated, such a wishy-washy approach comes from people feeling *unsafe* about evolution (since it so obviously contradicts the Scriptural and Patristic tradition) and at the same time *threatened* by anti-evolutionism (being ashamed of appearing "backward," "fundamentalist," etc.). For Fr. Seraphim, however, this had never been a dilemma. He wrote: "I have always regarded evolution, in all its ramifications, as an important part of the 'modern American' intellectual baggage which I left behind when I became Orthodox, and it never occurred to me that any aware Orthodox Christian would regard it as unimportant, especially now when many scientists have abandoned it (purely on scientific grounds), when the pseudo-religious presuppositions of its supporters are so evident, and when it is so much bound up with Masonry-ecumenism and the whole pseudo-religious modern outlook." [10](#)

Here Fr. Seraphim was pointing to the chiliastic goal shared by both evolutionism and ecumenism: a coming "new order" in which all previous standards, seen as relative to a particular stage in a process, will be entirely changed. In this connection, he found it extremely important to become familiar with the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, one of the most influential "prophets" of the "new Christianity." A paleontologist as well as a Roman Catholic religious philosopher, Teilhard succeeded in carrying evolution to its logical chiliastic conclusion. "The modern world," he wrote, "is a world in evolution; hence, the static concepts of the spiritual life must be rethought and the classical teachings of Christ must be reinterpreted." [11](#) He looked at the perfection and immortality of the coming age not according to the otherworldly understanding of traditional Christianity, but as an evolutionary "development" of the present world. According to Teilhard, in this process the "super-Christ" is being formed in the world, bringing about "a synthesis of Christ and the universe." This "evolving Christ," he stated, will bring a unity of all religions: "A general convergence of religions upon a universal Christ who fundamentally satisfies

them all: that seems to me the only possible conversion of the world, and the only form in which a religion of the future can be conceived.” [12](#) Clearly, this is the religion of Antichrist, the “emerging” pseudo-Christ who promises a “spiritual” kingdom of this world.

“Teilhard,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “is deeply in harmony *both* with the modern outlook *and* with Roman Catholicism, both of which are now ‘converging’ in a new worldview. However strongly Teilhardism might seem to break with certain aspects of the ultramontane Roman Catholicism of yesterday, there can be no doubt that most profoundly it is in harmony with and admirably expresses the deepest ‘spiritual’ current of apostate Rome: the use of ‘otherworldliness’ for a this-worldly chiliastic end, or as recent Popes have expressed it, the ‘sanctification of the world.’... Teilhard rightly saw that evolution, if it is true, cannot be kept in one compartment of human thought, but profoundly affects the whole of thought. He was unconcerned to ‘reconcile’ evolution with single points of Christian tradition and dogma, because he rightly saw that there is no possible reconciliation. Evolution is a ‘new revelation’ to man, and it is the single most important part of the worldview of the ‘Third Age of the Holy Spirit’ [\[a\]](#) which is now coming upon the last humanity. In the light of evolution everything must change — not just the ‘static worldview’ of the Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers, but one’s whole outlook toward life, God, the Church.” [13](#)

It was for this reason that Fr. Seraphim disagreed with the “zealots” who concerned themselves only with uprooting those modern ideas which directly attacked the Church (Masonry, ecumenism), ignoring other philosophies like evolutionism. “I don’t see how it can be denied,” he wrote to one of Alexey’s critics, “that ‘modern’ ideas are after all one whole: they are formed first outside the Church, develop in atheist-agnostic minds, and then move through the whole of society until they reach the Church, changing form in the meantime to fit in with each current of ideas. ‘Evolution’ is one such idea that has not yet directly attacked Orthodoxy. But look what it has already done to Roman Catholicism: is

it not true that the whole dissolution of Roman Catholicism in the last decade is directly bound up with the ‘unleashing’ of Teilhardism (whose books were more or less banned up to then) in that same period?...

“We were rather surprised when you (and Fr. ——— too, as I recall) mentioned that you haven’t read Teilhard and weren’t familiar with his ideas; i.e., you are waiting for the wave to hit Orthodoxy before you start thinking on the subject. But really, Teilhardism is the ‘Christianity’ (and ‘Orthodoxy’) of the future, or rather its metaphysical foundation (it fits in very nicely with ‘charismatic’ phenomena), and it is by no means too early to find out what is hitting us! Here it may well be that Alexey’s position (as a layman in the midst of the world, and coming from outside of Orthodoxy which has already been completely captured by ‘evolutionary’ spirituality and philosophy) has enabled him to be aware of something that the more ‘sheltered’ Orthodox (clergy, monks, lifelong Orthodox) simply don’t see yet. How overjoyed I myself was to find this ‘shelteredness’ when I became Orthodox, because I saw that in this ‘world-to-itself’ I would be able to change completely my mental orientation (not to mention spiritual) and no longer think at all in terms of the reigning despotism of ideas (in which evolution has a key place). I did notice, however, that other converts didn’t seem to grasp this point, and some of them began to discuss how this or that modern current can be understood or accepted or criticized in terms of Orthodoxy — a false outlook, because there are two quite separate worlds involved, and the difference is rather greater than that between two totally unrelated languages....

“We fully agree with Alexey that ‘evolution is one of the most dangerous concepts that faces Orthodox Christians today’—perhaps it is the very key (intellectual) to the assault upon the Church, to the very ‘philosophy’ (and there is such a thing!) of the coming Antichrist.” [14](#)

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM understood that his battle was not so much with atheistic physical evolution and its absurdities as with the allegedly more

“refined” forms of theistic or spiritual evolution. The latter, he said, “are not at all more ‘refined,’ just more vague and confused!... ‘Theistic’ evolution, as I understand its motives, is the invention of men who, being *afraid* that physical evolution is really ‘scientific,’ stick ‘God’ in at various points of the evolutionary process in order not to be left out, in order to conform ‘theology’ to the ‘latest scientific discoveries.’ But this kind of artificial thinking is satisfactory only to the most vague and confused minds (for whom, apparently, ‘God’ supplies the energy and order that can’t be explained according to the Second Law of Thermodynamics): it is satisfactory neither for theology nor for science, but just mixes the two realms up. Again, ‘spiritual’ evolution applies the ‘conclusions’ of atheistic physical evolution to the ‘spiritual’ realm and comes to results which are monstrous and unacceptable either from the scientific or the theological point of view: a mixup and confusion which can only disguise itself in fantastic jargon à la Teilhard de Chardin. Both these kinds of evolution depend entirely on acceptance of physical evolution, and if that is shown to be unsound they fall; and in addition they are self-contradictory because the whole purpose and intent of the theory of physical evolution is *to find an explanation of the world without God*; i.e., physical evolution is *by its nature atheistic*, and it’s only ridiculous when ‘theologians’ run after the latest ‘scientific’ theory in order not to be left behind by the times.” [15](#)

At the time Fr. Seraphim wrote this, there was a definite trend among Orthodox writers and thinkers to advocate evolutionism. The official Greek Archdiocese newspaper, *The Orthodox Observer*, printed an article called “Evolution: A Heresy?” [16](#) which quoted the “well-known Orthodox theologian Panagiotis Trempeles” in favor of evolution; while the American Metropolia’s magazine for teenagers, *Concern*, published an article entitled “Evolution: God’s Method of Creation.” [17](#) The author of the *Concern* article, Theodosius Dobzhansky, was a world-famous evolutionary biologist who had just received a Doctorate honoris causa in theology from St. Vladimir’s Seminary. [b1](#) “Here are the arguments of an ‘Orthodox evolutionist,’” commented Fr. Seraphim. “Read

between the lines and answer: does this man believe in God as a true Orthodox Christian believes in Him? He does not! He believes in Him as ‘modern’ man believes, he is a deist. And very revealing is his conclusion: ‘One of the great thinkers of our age, Teilhard de Chardin, wrote the following: “Is evolution a theory, a system, or a hypothesis? It is much more — it is a general postulate to which all theories, all hypotheses, all systems must henceforward bow and which they must satisfy in order to be thinkable and true. Evolution is a light which illuminates all facts, a trajectory which all lines of thought must follow — this is what evolution is.”’” [18](#)

Earlier, Teilhard had been praised by theologians of the “Parisian school.” One of them, Fr. John Meyendorff, had written that Teilhard was “connected with the profound intuition of the Orthodox Fathers of the Church”; [19](#) while another, the editor (presumably Nikita Struve) of the Orthodox periodical from Paris, *Messenger of the Russian Student Christian Movement*, wrote that Teilhard had “overcome the negative approach to the world which is deeply rooted among Christians.” [20](#)

“The Patristic illiteracy of our own day,” Fr. Seraphim remarked, “is so great that any ‘theologian’ can say virtually anything and attribute it to a ‘Holy Father’ and not be corrected. Particularly with regard to evolution it is allowed to make extremely vague statements which seem to give a ‘Patristic’ justification for belief in this modern doctrine.” [21](#)

All the “living links” to Orthodox tradition known to Fr. Seraphim were aware that evolutionary theory was a faith rather than pure science. The critics of Alexey Young’s article, however, kept holding up a traditional Greek Orthodox writer and medical doctor, Alexander Kalomiros, as one who was pro-evolution. Not being able to read Dr. Kalomiros’ writings in Greek, Fr. Seraphim was frustrated at having his name repeatedly thrown at him in this way. He had appreciated the English translation of Kalomiros’ strong critique of ecumenism, *Against False Union*, and could not imagine how the same author could be in favor of evolution. He wrote to Kalomiros asking his views, and the latter

promised to send a detailed reply in English, with quotes from the Holy Fathers. “We look forward to this with open mind and some expectation!” wrote Fr. Seraphim to Alexey. “We hope to receive confirmation of our suspicion that he is quite wrongly used as virtually a proponent of evolution.” [22](#)

Several months later the fathers received a forty-page epistle from Dr. Kalomiros. “I must confess,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, again to Alexey, “that it is shocking beyond our expectations — giving the ‘evolutionary’ teaching quite unadorned and unqualified, complete with the ‘evolved beast Adam’ and ‘he who denies evolution denies the Sacred Scriptures.’ In a way, however, we are rather glad of this — because now *for the first time* we have found a reputable Orthodox ‘evolutionist’ who is willing to be quite frank about matters which others, I believe, are afraid to speak up about for fear of offending ‘weak consciences’ which are under ‘Western influences.’” [23](#)

“Patristically,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, Dr. Kalomiros’ letter was “very weak.... He bases his whole argument on two or three Patristic passages, very one-sidedly interpreted.... It is quite obvious that Kalomiros has gone to the Fathers *already knowing* that evolution is a ‘fact.’ He obviously has *not* given deep thought to examining the presuppositions of the ‘fact’ of evolution, so we will have to challenge him to start thinking and *not* bring to the Holy Fathers his preconceptions based on modern Western ‘wisdom.’... The man is *not* a theologian, but reads the Fathers hit and miss.... He is *very* imprecise on the meaning of the word ‘evolution’—he thinks the development from embryo to mature man is ‘evolution,’ and that the existence of different races of men is due to ‘evolution.’” [24](#)

**F**ATHER HERMAN recalls that “Fr. Seraphim put all his energy into composing a reply to Dr. Kalomiros.” [\[c\]](#) While thinking and writing about the creation/evolution issue, Fr. Seraphim prayed fervently to God. As he did when dealing with all such theological and philosophical questions, he not only studied but *suffered* to find and enter into the mind of the Holy Fathers. Not content to



merely read their writings, he personally addressed the ancient Fathers as fellow believers in the Body of Christ and as vehicles of Divine wisdom, so that he would be given to see how they apprehended the creation. He felt especially close to the fourth-century Father, St. Basil the Great, who among his many other achievements wrote the definitive Patristic commentary on the Six Days of Creation, the *Hexaemeron*.

In a prefatory reply to Dr. Kalomiros, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “We dearly love the Holy Fathers and wish to live by their teaching, and we sense that you do also. May it be that by this love, with the help of God and by the prayers of these Holy Fathers, we may now begin a ‘dialogue’ with you that will bring us all to the true Patristic teaching and be of help also to others.

“Everything that I write will be read and criticized by my co-laborer Fr. Herman, to whom I am in obedience, and we will try also to obtain the opinions of some of our Russian theologians whom we respect.” [25](#)

Fr. Seraphim’s full reply turned out to be as long as Dr. Kalomiros’ letter. In writing on the Patristic teaching as it relates to evolution, Fr. Seraphim realized that he first of all had to define the word “evolution.” At the outset he wrote: “Many of the arguments between ‘evolutionists’ and ‘anti-evolutionists’ are useless, for one basic reason: they are usually not arguing about the same thing.... In order to be precise, I will tell you *exactly* what I mean by the word ‘evolution,’ which is the meaning it has in all textbooks of evolution.... All scientific textbooks define evolution as a specific theory concerning HOW creatures came to be in time: by means of *the transformation of one kind of creature into another*, ‘complex forms being derived from simpler forms’ in a natural process taking countless millions of years (Storer, *General Zoology*)....

“I wish to make very clear to you: I do not at all deny the fact of *change and development* in nature. That a full-grown man grows from an embryo; that a great tree grows from a small acorn; that new *varieties* of organisms are developed, whether the ‘races’ of man or different kinds of cats and dogs and fruit trees — but all of this is *not evolution*: it is only variation *within* a definite



kind or species; it does not prove or even suggest (unless you already *believe* this for non-scientific reasons) that one kind or species develops into another and that all present creatures are the product of such a development from one or a few primitive organisms....

“No one, ‘evolutionist’ or ‘anti-evolutionist,’ will deny that the ‘properties’ of creatures can be changed; but this is not a proof of evolution *unless* it can be shown that *one kind or species can be changed into another*, and even more, that *every species changes into another in an uninterrupted chain back to the most primitive organism.*” [26](#)

Fr. Seraphim quoted extensive passages from St. Basil’s *Hexaemeron* to show that this major Holy Father, in teaching about *variation*, was clearly against any kind of *transformist* (evolutionary) ideas. “The Holy Fathers,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “quite clearly did not believe in any such theory—*because the theory of evolution was not invented until modern times....* I am sure you will agree with me that we are not free to interpret the Holy Scriptures as we please, but we must interpret them as the Holy Fathers teach us. I am afraid that not all who speak about Genesis and evolution pay attention to this principle. Some people are so concerned to combat Protestant fundamentalism that they go to extreme lengths to refute anyone who wishes to interpret the sacred text of Genesis ‘literally’; but in so doing they never refer to St. Basil the Great or other commentators on the book of Genesis, who state quite clearly the principles we are to follow in interpreting the sacred text.”

From the writings of many different Fathers, Fr. Seraphim went on to demonstrate that they truly did understand the book of Genesis “simply” — or, in the words of St. Basil the Great, “as it is written” — and that they even warned against “explaining away” things in this book which are difficult for our common sense to understand. He showed that all the Fathers taught that the first man Adam and likewise the first creatures “appeared in a way different from all their descendants: they *appeared not by natural generation but by the word of God....*

“The doctrine of evolution attempts to understand the mysteries of God’s creation by means of natural knowledge and worldly philosophy, not even allowing the possibility that there is something in these mysteries which places them beyond its capabilities of knowing; while the book of Genesis is an account of God’s creation *as seen in Divine vision by the God-seer Moses*, and this vision is confirmed also by the experience of later Holy Fathers....

“I believe that modern science in most cases knows more than St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. Ephraim, and other Fathers about the properties of fishes and such specific scientific facts; no one will deny this. *But who knows more about the way in which God acts*: modern science, which is not even sure that God exists, and in any case tries to explain everything without Him; or *these God-bearing Holy Fathers?*” [27](#)

The final part of Fr. Seraphim’s letter dealt with the most important question which is raised for Orthodox theology by the theory of evolution: the *nature of man*, and in particular the nature of the first-created man Adam. Dr. Kalomiros, in trying to conform the Genesis account to evolutionary ideas, had posited that “man is not naturally the image of God... naturally he is an animal, an evolved beast.” According to Dr. Kalomiros, at a certain stage of man’s evolution, when his body could have been “in all aspects the body of an ape,” man was infused with grace, transforming him from animal to man “without changing a single anatomical feature of his body, without changing a single cell.” [28](#) As Fr. Seraphim showed, however, such a view ran contrary to the teaching of the Holy Fathers, who taught that man was created in the image of God according to his very nature; that his nature was originally dispassionate and virtuous; that his body and soul were created at the same time; that he was created *in grace* from the very beginning; that his body was originally incorruptible; and that his nature was changed through the fall. [29](#) Fr. Seraphim explained: “The Holy Fathers clearly teach that, when Adam sinned, man did not merely lose something which had been *added to his nature*, but rather *human nature itself was changed, corrupted*, at the same time man lost God’s grace....

Our whole Orthodox conception of the Incarnation of Christ and our salvation through Him is bound up with *a proper understanding of human nature as it was in the beginning*, to which Christ has restored us.” [30](#)

Dr. Kalomiros’ “naturalistic” view of man’s original nature fit much better with the Roman Catholic teaching of Thomas Aquinas than with the God-illuminated teaching of the Holy Fathers. Quoting from the *Summa Theologica*, Fr. Seraphim demonstrated that Aquinas “did not know that *man’s nature was changed* after the transgression,” and that he (Aquinas) understood the first-created world as do modern “Christian evolutionists,” solely from the viewpoint of the fallen world. Far different was the vision of the Holy Fathers, who saw the first-created world as being of an order entirely different from that of the present, corruptible earth. “The state of Adam and the first-created world,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “has been placed forever beyond the knowledge of science by the barrier of Adam’s transgression, which changed the very nature of Adam and the creation, and indeed the very nature of knowledge itself. Modern science knows only what it observes and what may be *reasonably* inferred from observation.... The true knowledge of Adam and the first-created world — as much as is useful for us to know — is accessible only in God’s revelation and in the Divine vision of the saints.” [31](#)



The creation of man. Detail of a Russian icon of about the year 1570, now located at the Solvychegodsk Museum of History and Art.

The Orthodox understanding of man's original state also has direct bearing on the Orthodox dogma of redemption. As discussed earlier, the Scriptures and Holy Fathers teach that Adam became subject to death only at the time of his fall; that death was the sentence for sin; and that Christ the second Adam, having taken on the sentence and died for us, offers mankind redemption from all the consequences of the fall. [\[d\]](#) This teaching — particularly the teaching that *by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin* (Rom. 5:12)—becomes extremely hazy if not entirely lost when one sees man as having evolved from lower creatures over millions of years.

Fr. Seraphim wrote to Dr. Kalomiros concerning how one's view of Genesis affects one's understanding of basic doctrines of the Orthodox Church: "We hear today many Orthodox priests who tell us, 'Our faith in Christ does not depend on how we interpret Genesis. You can believe as you wish.' But how can

it be that our negligence in understanding one part of God’s revelation (which, by the way, is indeed closely bound up with Christ, the Second Adam, Who became incarnate *in order to restore us to our original state*) will not lead to negligence in understanding the whole doctrine of the Orthodox Church? It is not for nothing that St. John Chrysostom closely binds together *the correct and strict interpretation of Scripture (specifically Genesis) and the correct dogmas which are essential for our SALVATION*. Speaking of those who interpret the book of Genesis allegorically, St. John Chrysostom says: ‘Let us not pay heed to these people, let us stop up our hearing against them, and let us believe the Divine Scripture, and following what is said in it, let us strive to preserve in our souls sound dogmas, and at the same time to lead also a right life, so that our life would both testify of the dogmas, and the dogmas would give firmness to our life.... If we live well but will be negligent over right dogmas, we can acquire nothing for our salvation. If we wish to be delivered from Gehenna and receive the Kingdom, we must be adorned both with the one and with the other — both with rightness of dogmas, and strictness of life.’” [32](#)

**T**HE reply of Dr. Kalomiros to Fr. Seraphim, which was two years in coming, was very disappointing. Kalomiros said that he did not know of any scientist who so much as questioned evolution. Accusing Fr. Seraphim of being “against science,” he held up Ernst Haeckel’s “recapitulation theory” of the human embryo as a proof of evolution: a theory which Fr. Seraphim knew had already been refuted and discarded by evolutionists themselves as a nineteenth-century fantasy. Having made this elementary error, Kalomiros yet told Fr. Seraphim that he forbade him to discuss any scientific questions with him until he had received advanced degrees in the physical sciences: “A typical refuge,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “of someone who doesn’t want a free discussion on the subject!” [33](#) Kalomiros also leveled the all-purpose accusation that Fr. Seraphim was under “Western influence”: under such influence, he said, that it was impossible for Fr. Seraphim to comprehend what he was trying to say.

Fr. Seraphim assured Dr. Kalomiros that he was not “against science.” “I do not have an advanced degree in science,” he wrote, “but I have taken college courses in zoology and done considerable reading in scientific sources on the theory and facts of evolution.... You seem to be unaware of the great mass of *scientific literature* in recent years which is highly critical of the evolutionary theory, which talks about relegating it to poetry and metaphors instead of scientific theory (Prof. Constance, professor of botany at the University of California, Berkeley), or even denies its validity altogether. If you wish (but it is quite pointless!), I could indeed compile a list of *hundreds* (if not *thousands*) of reputable scientists who now either disbelieve in evolution entirely or state that it is highly questionable as a scientific theory.” [34](#)

**B**Y this time, the original idea of coming out with a booklet on evolutionism no longer seemed adequate to Fr. Seraphim. Now he and Alexey began to plan the writing of a complete book, entitled *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*. Fr. Seraphim was to write the Patristic commentary on Genesis and an essay on the philosophical origins of evolution, while Alexey was to write about evolution as scientific theory and also about “Christian evolutionism.” “Our study,” wrote Fr. Seraphim to Alexey, “is supposed to give a ‘complete’ picture, which hopefully will clarify many minds. It’s certainly clarified my own mind, since previously I hadn’t thought in detail on many aspects of the question.” [35](#)

Fr. Seraphim’s correspondence with Dr. Kalomiros had underscored for him the importance of being abreast with Western discussions on the subject of evolution. “The question of evolution,” he wrote, “can’t be discussed at all if one doesn’t have a basic grasp of the scientific ‘proofs’ of it.... By this I don’t mean that one has to be a scientific specialist in order to discuss the scientific side of the question — the scientific side is *not* the most important one, and specialists usually trip themselves up by concentrating too much on it; but if one isn’t sufficiently aware of the scientific side one won’t be able to grasp the question in



its full scope. One can't say with assurance, for example, whether man has been on earth some seven or eight thousand years ('more or less,' as the Fathers often say) if one is totally ignorant of the principles of radiometric dating, geologic strata, etc., which 'prove' that man is 'millions of years' old. And such knowledge is not esoteric at all — the basic principles of radiometric dating (enough to show its strong and weak points) can be explained in a rather short article. And the question of whether man has been on earth for some *thousands* of years or some *millions* of years is one that certainly touches on some basic Orthodox questions — whether the genealogies of the Scripture are actually genealogies (as all the Fathers certainly believed) or just sketchy lists with many long blanks in them; whether some of the Patriarchs of the Old Testament (if these are not genealogies) might not be 'symbols' instead of concrete people; whether Adam himself ever existed (especially in view of what seems the prevailing theory now among evolutionists—'polygenism,' that new species begin in many pairs simultaneously); etc. This is just a sample to show that to get anywhere in this question one must have a basic, layman's awareness of the scientific evidences for and against evolution.... As a basic principle, of course, we must assume that scientific *truth* (as opposed to various opinions and prejudices) cannot contradict revealed *truth*, if only we understand them both correctly.” [36](#)

This was precisely the approach to science that the early Fathers had. Discussing the *Hexaemeron* of St. Basil the Great, Fr. Michael Pomazansky wrote: “St. Basil acknowledges all the scientific *facts* of natural science. But he does not accept the philosophical *conceptions*, or the interpretations of these facts, which were contemporary to him: the mechanistic theory of the origin of the world, and the like.... St. Basil knew how to raise himself above the theories contemporary to him concerning the basic principles of the world, and his *Hexaemeron* stands above the former theories as a bird soars above the creatures which are all to move along the earth.” [37](#)

In his investigation of the scientific aspect of evolution, Fr. Seraphim found

that many of the evolutionists themselves admitted that there was not actual *proof* for it, but that it “makes more sense,” or “the alternative is un-thinkable” — i.e., God’s creation. He quoted the historian of ideas J. H. Randall, Jr., himself an evolutionist, as saying: “Biologists admit that we do not strictly speaking know anything about the causes of the origin of new species. We must fall back on the scientific faith that they occur because of chemical changes in the germ plasm.” <sup>38</sup> It is *faith* because the larger changes from one kind of living thing to another have never been demonstrated, but only variations within a certain type.

The fossil record has also failed to produce evidence of such changes: every species appears at once. “In fact,” said Fr. Seraphim, “Darwin was extremely worried about this. He wrote: ‘The number of intermediate varieties, which have formerly existed, [must] be truly enormous. Why then is not every geological formation and every stratum full of such intermediate links? Geology assuredly does not reveal any such finely-graduated organic chain; and this, perhaps, is the most obvious and serious objection which can be urged against the theory. The explanation lies, as I believe, in the extreme imperfection of the geological record.’” <sup>39</sup> Today’s scientists say that the fossil record is extremely abundant: there are more fossil species known than living species. Still, there have not been found more than a couple which might be interpreted as somehow being an intermediary species.” <sup>40</sup>

In his letter to Dr. Kalomiros, Fr. Seraphim had discussed the fossils used to “prove” man’s transformation from ape-like beings. This discussion is all the more interesting in that it sheds more light on the influence of Teilhard de Chardin on modern ideas. “Teilhard,” Fr. Seraphim pointed out, “was closely connected with the discovery and interpretation of almost all the fossil evidence for the ‘evolution of man’ that was discovered in his lifetime....

“The scientific fossil evidence for the ‘evolution of man’ consists of: Neanderthal Man (many specimens); Peking Man (several skulls); the ‘men’ called Java, Heidelberg, Piltdown (until twenty years ago), and the recent finds



in Africa: *all extremely fragmentary*; and a few other fragments. The total fossil evidence for the ‘evolution of man’ could be contained in a box the size of a coffin, and it is from widely separated parts of the earth, with no reliable indication of even *relative* (much less ‘absolute’) age, and with no indication whatever of how these different ‘men’ were connected with each other, whether by descent or kinship.

“Further, one of these ‘evolutionary ancestors of man,’ ‘Piltdown Man,’ was discovered twenty years ago to have been a *deliberate fraud*. Now it is an interesting fact that Teilhard de Chardin was *one of the discoverers of ‘Piltdown Man’*—a fact which you will not find in most textbooks or in biographies of him....

“Some time later this same Teilhard de Chardin participated in the discovery, and above all in the ‘interpretation,’ of ‘Peking Man.’ Thanks to his ‘interpretation’ (for by then he had established a reputation as one of the world’s leading paleontologists), ‘Peking Man’ also entered evolutionary textbooks as an ancestor of man....

“Teilhard de Chardin was also connected with the discovery and above all with the interpretation of some of the finds of ‘Java Man,’ which were fragmentary. In fact, everywhere he went he found ‘evidence’ *which exactly matched his expectations*—namely, that man has ‘evolved’ from ape-like creatures.

“If you will examine objectively all the fossil evidence for the ‘evolution of man,’ I believe you will find that there is no conclusive or even remotely reasonable evidence whatever for this ‘evolution.’ The evidence is believed to be proof for human evolution because men want to believe this; they believe in a philosophy that requires that man evolved from ape-like creatures.” [41 \[e\]](#)

In his studies, Fr. Seraphim found the work of the “scientific creationists” very useful because, as he said, “they have hunted up evidence which had been selectively disregarded by predisposed evolutionists (for example, the remarkable evidence of an earth ‘under 10,000 years old,’ which must definitely

be weighed against the evidence for an earth much older... etc.)... Their presentation of the ‘Creation Model’ is a promising approach to a more objective view of the whole question. Their religious views, of course, suffer from the general short-sightedness of fundamentalism (in particular, their unawareness of the whole Patristic field of commentary on Genesis — but most Orthodox people have a similar lack of awareness!).” [42 \[f\]](#)

As Fr. Seraphim told Alexey in connection with the book they were writing, their aim should not be to prove evolution false and special creation true, but rather to show that “evolution, presented popularly as ‘fact’ and ‘truth,’ has no coercive scientific evidence to support it. All the supposed ‘proofs’ of evolution can equally be used to ‘prove’ another theory, depending on your presuppositions.” [43](#)

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM did not live to see *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* published, but he worked on it up until the time of his death. Alexey sent rough drafts of chapters to Fr. Seraphim, which the latter revised and augmented with his own material, even sending it to a professor of natural sciences for review. Fr. Seraphim, meanwhile, continued to write notes and outlines for his own sections. Then, in 1981, only a year before his death, he took up the subject again in earnest. During the “New Valaam Theological Academy” course [\[g\]](#) in the summer of that year, he gave a series of classes on the Patristic interpretation of the first three chapters of the book of Genesis. He put much effort into this course beforehand, writing out an extensive manuscript of a verse-by-verse commentary filled with Patristic quotations, many of which he translated himself. His eight years of contemplating, reading, and praying about this subject had not been in vain. His series of classes was the product of a matured Patristic mind, of one who, perhaps more than anyone else in modern times, had searched through the sum of the teaching of the Fathers in order to find and elucidate the Patristic *doctrine of Creation*. And how exalted was the teaching of the Fathers that he poured forth, how much more inspiring than the attempts of

others to conform the Holy Fathers to modern intellectual fashions!

At the next Academy course in the summer of 1982, Fr. Seraphim continued his commentary on Genesis, this time discussing the fourth to the eleventh chapters. Within two weeks after finishing these classes he unexpectedly fell ill, and within another week he reposed in the Lord. His Patristic commentary on Genesis, therefore, was the last major achievement of his life.



The Prophet Moses writing in Eden. Frontispiece to the book of Genesis in the Bible of Leo Sakellarios, Constantinople, A.D. 940.

Seeing how Dr. Kalomiros had handled the subject, Fr. Seraphim had at one point been discouraged about getting tangled up in it at all. But it is to our great benefit that he was able to overcome this discouragement, receiving inspiration again directly from the Fathers. And in overcoming the temptation — bred in him from childhood — to feel he “knew better” than the ancients, Fr. Seraphim revealed how *noble*, how utterly treasurable is the Patristic mind. Clearly, from his writing one can see that this is no ordinary human mind, but something Divine.

As Fr. Seraphim observed, the Prophet Moses, the author of Genesis, had

received his knowledge of the creation from Divine vision—*theoria* in Greek. The Holy Fathers who commented on the Scriptures were also partakers of Divine *theoria*, and thus they are the only sure interpreters of Moses' narrative. Fr. Seraphim, having immersed himself in the mind of the Fathers, presented to the modern world the Patristic *vision* of the cosmos, and thus raised the discussion far above the merely rational and scientific.

Many of the Holy Fathers, being visionaries, knew from experience the reality of man *as he was intended to be*. They taught that the original, incorrupt state of Adam was man's *natural state*, and that his present state of corruption after the fall is *unnatural*. <sup>44</sup> Some of the Fathers <sup>[h]</sup> taught further that, before the fall, the entire material creation was incorrupt and without death, and that it fell into corruption because of man. Like these Holy Fathers, Christians of today are given the possibility of tasting the original, natural state of man even in this life, and of glimpsing the incorruptible world for which man was created.

Fr. Seraphim believed that one of the greatest problems among contemporary Christians is that they have lost an awareness of what Adam was like before the fall, before his very nature was changed. "With the opening of their eyes through the transgression," Fr. Seraphim wrote, "Adam and Eve have already lost the life of Paradise.... From now on their eyes will be open to the lower things of this earth, and they will see only with difficulty the higher things of God. They are no longer dispassionate, but have begun the passionate earthly life we still know today." <sup>45</sup>

It was precisely by becoming dispassionate through prayer and ascetic struggle that the saints restored in themselves, while yet in a corruptible body, some measure of the likeness of Adam. Like him, they were shown to be impervious to the elements; like him, they were masters and stewards of creation, and all creatures obeyed them. Fr. Seraphim, in reading the Lives of the desert-dwellers, was fascinated by these almost contemporary images of what man was in the beginning, and likewise of what he will be in the future age, when the creation will be transfigured and when man will be raised up in a body

incorruptible.

“Even in our fallen state,” Fr. Seraphim asked, “can we not be reminded of Paradise and our fall from it in the nature that surrounds us? In the animals it is not difficult to see the passions over which we should be masters, but which have largely taken possession of us; and in the peaceful murmur of the forests (where so many ascetic strugglers have taken refuge) can we not see a reminder of the Paradise of vegetation originally intended for our dwelling and food, and still existing for those able to ascend, with St. Paul, to behold it?” [46](#)

**D**URING the first half of the twentieth century, scientists were loath to question the evolutionary model. They would test every hypothesis save that one, for it provided the foundation for their naturalistic worldview. Those few scientists — including some very important ones — who dared to undermine this “dogma” were considered “heretics” and were blacklisted. When Dr. Kalomiros was going to school in the 1950s, it was not only unfashionable but positively anathema not to believe in evolution; and hence his attempt, as a “Patristic scholar,” to make the ancient Fathers believe it as well. Later, as we have seen, this situation began to change. More and more reputable scientists began to come into the open with their conclusions that the evolutionary model did not account for the data they were finding. During Fr. Seraphim’s lifetime, such discussion had been largely confined to the scientific community, so that people wishing to learn what was happening would, like Fr. Seraphim, have to familiarize themselves with specialized books and journals. In the years following his repose, however, the growing “agnosticism” of scientists toward evolutionary theory has leaked out more to the general public; and this has been in conjunction with yet more findings — particularly in the “hard” sciences of genetics and biochemistry— which have made evolutionism appear less and less tenable. [i](#) Some scientists are looking for a new model, though they hardly know where to turn. Of course, one cannot expect that they will necessarily turn to the “Creation Model,” since, as Fr. Seraphim pointed out, neither creation nor

evolution can be conclusively proved: both are a matter of faith and philosophy, of a choice of presuppositions. One thing, however, is certain: today's disbeliever in evolution, if he bases his arguments on the weighty doubts of leading scientists themselves, will be far less likely to be classified among those who still maintain that the world is flat than the same disbeliever forty years ago.

Thus, it is plain that while Dr. Kalomiros and others were behind the times in their fear that evolution was a “fact” or might still be proven so, Fr. Seraphim was clearly ahead of his times. This was seen in 1998, when the popular Orthodox newspaper *The Christian Activist* published an article by Dr. Kalomiros (who by that time had reposed) setting forth his “Orthodox evolutionist” ideas. Perhaps due to the growing awareness among Orthodox Christians of the holes in evolutionary theory, or perhaps due to the growing awareness of the actual teachings of the Fathers, Dr. Kalomiros’ article evoked a tremendous number of responses from Orthodox readers — all of them negative. Such a strong and unanimous response would not have been seen in the 1970s, or even in the 1980s. As a result of it, in the next issue of the newspaper the editor printed most of Fr. Seraphim’s lengthy letter to Dr. Kalomiros, with the statement that Fr. Seraphim’s presentation of the Holy Fathers on the subject of evolution was indeed the traditional, Orthodox one. Since that time, Fr. Seraphim’s letter has been quoted in its entirety or in part in numerous journals and books in Russia, Serbia, and America. <sup>47</sup> Today it is widely regarded as a definitive exposition of the Patristic doctrine of creation, and the clearest Patristic refutation of evolution ever written.

Finally, in the year 2000 the St. Herman Brotherhood completed the work that Fr. Seraphim had begun. Under Fr. Seraphim’s proposed title, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, it published an exhaustive collection of all the relevant material — from manuscripts, letters, notes, and transcriptions of tape-recorded lectures — that Fr. Seraphim produced on the subject of creation over the course of nine years, up until the time of his repose. The resulting seven-hundred-page volume, introduced by the renowned critic of Darwinism Phillip E. Johnson, <sup>[1]</sup>



has already had a profound effect on many souls and has attracted the interest of scientists, philosophers, and theological writers. It has been reviewed by Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant thinkers — both those who believe in the Biblical creation account “as it is written” and those who believe in evolution. [48](#) Russian, Serbian, and Romanian editions of the book have been published. The book has found an eager audience especially in Russia, where a movement has arisen within the Orthodox Church to teach and defend the Scriptural/Patristic doctrine of creation, using Fr. Seraphim’s writings as one of its main sources. [\[k\]](#) Out of this movement, the Orthodox missionary/educational Center “Shestodnev” (Six-Days) was established in the year 2000 with the blessing of Patriarch Alexey II of Moscow and All Russia (†2008). Comprised of Orthodox theological writers and scientists, the Center considers Fr. Seraphim’s ground-breaking study of Genesis and creation to be foundational to its own work. [\[l\]](#)

Fr. Seraphim, having climbed out of the shifting sands of intellectual fashion, knew that man must know the truth about where he came from before he can know where he is going. “Our key,” he wrote not long before his repose, “is sticking to the wisdom of the Church, trusting our own Fathers and the Holy Fathers who lived before. *People are ready to hear this.*” [49](#)

# PART VII







With the Anderson boys in front of the monastery church, ca. 1978. Left to right: Sergei, Fr. Seraphim, Fr. Herman, Thomas, and Basil.

## Children

*She is not dead,—the child of our affection,—  
But gone unto that school  
Where she no longer needs our poor protection,  
And Christ Himself doth rule.*

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow <sup>1</sup>

**A**MONG the people whom Vladimir and Sylvia Anderson took into their care was an unwed, poverty-stricken, and mentally unbalanced mother named Julia, <sup>[a]</sup> with her three sons from different fathers. A convert to Orthodoxy, she stayed with the Andersons for over a year, beginning in 1971. Her second son, a handsome mulatto boy named Theophil, <sup>[b]</sup> was then seven years old. He became the constant companion of Vladimir's daughter Margaret, a beautiful yellow-haired child who was his same age. When she had come to the St. Herman Hermitage for the first time in 1970, Margaret had been the first female to step through its gates.

In 1972, little Maggie began having seizures and was diagnosed with a rare disease called Dawson's encephalitis. The doctors said that nothing could be done about it, and that Maggie would die in anywhere between six weeks and two years. As Maggie began to waste away, Vladimir realized that he could no longer commute to San Francisco every weekend to run the bookstore. Thus, after three years of this self-sacrificing labor, he was forced to close the shop. In the years to come, however, his publishing house in Willits never ceased to print and distribute priceless Orthodox literature. <sup>[c]</sup>

During the painful period of Maggie's decline, Vladimir and Sylvia's eldest son Thomas (Fr. Seraphim's godson) told his parents that he wanted to stay at the Platina hermitage. Thomas was only twelve years old at the time. Recalling his reasons for wanting to go, he later said, "Platina was an adventure — like camping out. But the main reason I wanted to stay was because I felt there was love there." <sup>2</sup>

Vladimir and Sylvia were glad to grant their son's request. "We felt it was the ideal place to send our sons to stay for a while," Vladimir recalls. "Despite the fact that there was no running water, insufficient heat, and going to school involved a two-mile walk each way down an unplowed, snow-covered road in winter, it was like heaven on earth." <sup>3</sup>

While at the monastery, Thomas helped Fathers Seraphim and Herman with many chores. Every morning he would walk down the mountain and meet the car pool to the public elementary school: a one-room schoolhouse about a mile the other side of the town of Platina. Fr. Seraphim, as Thomas' guardian, would attend the parent-teacher conferences at the school. "Is that your father?" the other students would ask Thomas, staring at the long-bearded monk. "No," the boy would reply, "he's my godfather."

On the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God in August 1972, Vladimir and Sylvia came to the monastery with their other children, including Maggie. "Maggie was pretty far gone by that time," Sylvia recalls. "Much of her brain had been destroyed by the virus. As we were descending the hill after leaving the monastery, we came to a tricky hairpin turn. At that moment our nine-year-old daughter Cecilia, who was a year older than Maggie, said to her little sister, 'Maggie, say a prayer!' Maggie said, 'I love you, God!' Those were the last words she ever said; after that she could not speak." <sup>4</sup>

In November of 1972, when Thomas had been at the monastery for about four months, the fathers received the sad but expected news that Maggie was dying. The next morning very early, the two fathers and Thomas drove to San Francisco to meet the Anderson family. On the way they stopped at a gas station,

and Fr. Seraphim called Abbess Ariadna's convent where the Andersons were staying. When he hung up the phone, Fr. Seraphim began explaining to Thomas how the souls of innocent children like Maggie are taken by God into heaven. Guessing why Fr. Seraphim was telling him this, Thomas asked, "Did she die?"

"No," said Fr. Seraphim gently. "She went to heaven."

As Thomas recalls, "I remember feeling: I'm a big boy; I'm not supposed to cry. I was getting choked up. Fr. Seraphim put his arm around me and said, 'It's OK to cry.' He started to cry himself, and that gave me the go-ahead. He was so compassionate; he knew what I was feeling. Since he was crying, I could cry." [5](#)

When the fathers met the Anderson family, Sylvia had one request of them. Having been given the idea by Thomas, she begged them to allow Maggie to be buried at the monastery. It would, she said, be a great consolation in her grief to know that she could always go to the quiet forest refuge and sit beside her daughter's grave in prayer. Wishing to fulfill her request, the fathers received both a blessing from Archbishop Anthony and a permit from the county authorities to bury the young girl at the monastery.

Maggie's funeral occurred at the "little convent" on Fell Street in San Francisco, where Vladimir and Sylvia had first come into direct contact with Orthodoxy. All the nuns gathered together to pray next to Maggie's wooden coffin. Seeing the child dressed all in white, with a look of peace on her beautiful and innocent face, many of the Russian women wept. They said she looked like an angel. Vladimir's six other children solemnly stood with candles as prayers were being read over their reposed sister.

Waiting by the coffin with the nuns, Fathers Herman and Seraphim were approached by Maggie's friend Theophil. "Can I come and live with you?" the boy asked.

"Why?" asked Fr. Herman.

"I want to live in the woods, not in the city. My mom says it's all right, if it's all right with you."

"Well, right now we already have Thomas with us," Fr. Herman explained.

“But when he leaves, then you can come and stay.”

“Promise?”

“Promise!”

After the funeral, the coffin was placed in the monastery truck. The fathers drove to Platina along with Vladimir’s sons Thomas and Basil. During the five-hour trip they sang “Christ is Risen” and other Orthodox hymns, which served to exalt their spirits and remind them of Paradise. They arrived at the monastery before anyone else and carried the coffin into the middle of the church. When the rest of the Anderson family came, Fr. Herman told them: “Now we have to keep vigil day and night. Everyone should take part in reading from the Psalter.”

Meanwhile, everyone took turns digging the grave, located partway up the hill on a site Sylvia had chosen. As Thomas recalls, “Fr. Seraphim worked the hardest.” In the evening Valentina Harvey, in the company of her eight-year-old daughter Alexandra, came to the monastery for a visit. The Harveys did not know the Andersons then, let alone that their child had died. Walking into the church, Valentina and Alexandra were surprised to see a coffin in the middle of it, watched over by children with candles. Their coming at this time was an interesting “coincidence,” for many years later Alexandra was to marry Vladimir’s son Basil.

Maggie was not left alone during the entire night; the Psalter was read unceasingly by the fathers and the family. On the following morning the coffin was carried to the grave site. One of the boys walked in front of the procession, carrying a cross that Sylvia had made out of roses. From behind, the fathers watched the solemn group ascend the hill. The gentle faces of the children were illumined by their flickering candles, bringing yet more peace to the woods which, at the end of autumn, were cast in shades of gold. A doe and her fawn sat nearby, quietly watching the procession and burial.

When Maggie’s grave had been covered with earth, Fr. Herman gave a sermon to the family. “You are fortunate,” he said, “that your daughter, your sister, can die and be buried here in freedom. No one persecutes you, as in the

Soviet Union, for giving her a Christian burial, for coming to pray here.... And you're also fortunate that one who just recently lived among you now goes to heaven to pray for us. We have her as our own heavenly protectress, and we give her now to God."

With this thought in the hearts of all, the atmosphere at the burial was one not of sadness, but rather of rejoicing — rejoicing in the knowledge that, through Christ's sacrifice and triumph over death, His departed followers are raised to Paradise and their bodies await resurrection. "All sorrow seemed to be swallowed up in joy," Fr. Seraphim noted soon afterward, "and the whole time it felt like Pascha. The children were positively radiant with joy! How unfathomable are God's ways with us, and how merciful He is!" <sup>6</sup>

Standing beside the grave of her daughter in joyful tears, Sylvia told the fathers, "This is the happiest day of my life." The fruit of her own womb, she knew, was already in heaven and was praying for her on earth.

Right after the Andersons said their last farewell and left for their home in Willits, it began to rain — another sign of grace. The fathers reflected on the Providence of God, how the first girl ever to enter their hermitage had found her final resting place there.

"After Maggie was buried at the monastery," Thomas recalls, "I didn't feel so homesick, because now my sister was there with me, in Platina, and that gave me comfort. I remember going up to her grave and talking to her when I would miss my family." <sup>7</sup>

**L**ATER that winter, when Thomas was still staying at the hermitage, he experienced a healing through the prayers of Fr. Seraphim. As he later recounted: "I always had problems with my hearing. Periodically a mobile unit would come to school to test the students for hearing. I would always fail the test, and the other children would tease me about this. Not wanting to be teased any longer, I started cheating on the test. The test consisted of raising our hands when we heard a sound from the testing device. As the test was being

administered, we were supposed to put our heads down on our desks so as not to see when the other students raised their hands. I would peek at the other students from the corner of my eye so that I could raise my hands when they did.

“During the winter of 1972, I had bad earaches. One night I woke up with a pounding earache. I was crying and could not sleep. Fr. Seraphim took oil mixed with myrrh from the relics of St. Nicholas, said a prayer, and anointed my ear with it. My ear started feeling better, and I went to sleep. My earache was cured, and so were my ears. After that my hearing improved remarkably. Since that time I’ve had no more problems with my ears, and today my hearing is perfect.”

Thomas stayed at the hermitage until April of 1973, and then returned in 1974 and stayed throughout the entire school year. By that time he was in the ninth grade, and so had to go to school in the town of Hayfork, one hour away. Every morning he would have holy bread (*antidoron*) and holy water with the fathers, and then walk down the mountain to catch the school bus. Fr. Seraphim would write the excuses when Thomas would be absent from school for Church feasts.

Concerning his stay at the hermitage, Thomas has later said: “I felt like I mattered to the fathers. The time I stayed there strengthened me.

“The fathers eliminated distractions, so that they were never too busy to spend time with me. Whenever I wanted to talk about something, they made time for me. I would write down questions, and would ask Fr. Seraphim these questions while we were working on the Linotype machine. It seems I could ask him anything, and he would know the answer for it.

“At the same time, though, Fr. Seraphim knew how dangerous it was to think one knows a lot. He had a deep humility. He wouldn’t butt heads with you intellectually. When possible, he would not let on how much he knew, but would let you do the talking.... [8](#)

“Fr. Seraphim was a person that was never impressed; he was never depressed, either.... He had so reeled in his passions. When it was hot, he never said it was hot; when it was cold, he never said it was cold.

“He taught me how to walk in snowshoes. One day we went down together in snowshoes to get the mail, and I remember having difficulty, but he never got frustrated with me. Even when I did something bad, I can’t remember ever getting punished. I didn’t want to do anything bad, but when you’re twelve sometimes you do bad things, or stupid things. But I never got yelled at.” [9](#)

While he was at the hermitage, Thomas was given the assignment of reading *David Copperfield*. He found the reading tedious, so on Sundays Fr. Seraphim would take him on walks, and they would alternate reading pages from the book.

Fr. Herman, meanwhile, encouraged Thomas’ interest and talent in art, going so far as to set up an exhibit of Thomas’ work in the monastery. “Fr. Herman made a big deal about the exhibit,” Thomas remembers, “helping me to carefully display the pieces and put placards underneath them. There was a reception with music. The fathers made tea and served cookies that someone had brought. It was just the fathers and myself, but I felt like I had an opening in New York City — I felt so good! They made me feel so good about it.” Thomas says that Fr. Herman also taught him how to use the printing press. [10](#)

**L**OOKING back on the time he spent with Fr. Seraphim, Thomas says he learned from him priceless lessons which he has treasured throughout the years. “From Fr. Seraphim,” he says, “I learned integrity and honesty. He taught me to be good even when no one is looking. In other words, if someone mistakenly gives you a twenty-dollar bill instead of a ten, you say some-thing — you don’t just get away with it.”

This observation is seen to be all the more significant in light of a short piece Fr. Seraphim wrote for *The Orthodox Word* in 1974, when Thomas was staying at the monastery. At that time, having been asked by Fr. Herman to write something on the acquisition of Orthodox piety in childhood, Fr. Seraphim chose to focus on the virtue of honesty. “The fragrance of true Orthodox piety,” he wrote, “is most thoroughly absorbed in the formative years of childhood, before



the soul has become hardened in a wrong understanding of life, or become involved in the atmosphere of fakery and lying so characteristic of the present-day world on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Nothing is so essential to the gaining and keeping of this fragrance as *truthfulness*, for God is Truth and Satan is the father of lies. Lying, dishonesty, deception — disfigure and wound a child and cause him to lose this fragrance.

“A child who is taught the habit of truthfulness can preserve the precious fragrance of Orthodoxy for his whole life and bring forth abundant spiritual fruits unto eternal salvation.” [11](#)

Thomas also recalls that he received “unconditional faith” from Fr. Seraphim: “When Fr. Seraphim encountered obstacles he would say, ‘What we’re doing must be good, because the devil doesn’t like it and is trying to get us.’ For example, one time Archbishop Anthony and Bishop Nektary came to the monastery and served the Divine Liturgy, and the day was filled with grace. When the bishops were leaving, we discovered that, when they had last had their gas tank fueled up, the gas station attendant had accidentally put the wrong locking gas cap on. The wrong gas cap now had to be taken off very carefully with tools, in such a way as not to cause a spark and thus an explosion. It was a painstaking procedure that took hours. ‘You see,’ Fr. Seraphim remarked to me, ‘something good happened today, and the devil is angry at it.’ He was always looking at the positive side like that.” [12](#)

When the school year was over in 1975 and Thomas was to leave the hermitage, he did so with tears in his eyes. “May God preserve him a true Orthodox Christian!” Fr. Seraphim noted in his Chronicle at the time. [13](#) Thomas later went on to attend seminary and raise a family of his own, becoming a lifelong friend of the fathers. Interestingly, over the years he has supported himself and his family first as a printer and later as an artist: two professions in which he was first trained at the monastery.

**T**OWARD the end of Thomas’ stay, Julia’s oldest boy Matthew, [\[d\]](#) then

thirteen years old, stayed for three months at the hermitage. But it was eleven-year-old Theophil who was truly to make a home there. The fathers later felt that Maggie had sent him, since it had been at her funeral that he had asked to live at the hermitage. The little friend she had left behind on earth was a very troubled boy, one who had been deeply wounded by life. He had never known his African-American father, and had been made to feel that something was wrong with him because he was the only black person in his family. His upbringing by his unstable, white mother had been dreary and oppressive — which was the real reason why he wanted to come to the hermitage.

In June of 1975, Fr. Seraphim picked up Theophil in San Francisco, and from that time forward he became a father to him. Along with his brothers, Theophil exhibited serious behavioral problems; and there were times when Fr. Seraphim feared, as he told Fr. Herman, that they had “got him too late.” And yet the fathers knew that beneath all the emotional scars lay a loving heart.

Having stayed at the hermitage for a year, Theophil was, according to the initial agreement with his mother, to be returned to his home in San Francisco. Fr. Seraphim took him on this trip, but on the way Theophil began to cry, begging to be allowed to stay at the hermitage. Fr. Seraphim told the boy’s mother, and she gave her consent.

As it turned out, in all the years they were together the fathers never had a more valuable helper than Theophil. The boy put all his energy into the common work: lighting stoves early in the morning, cooking, chopping firewood, printing, etc. And in the meantime he was receiving his education from Fr. Seraphim, who took time out to instruct him in the necessary subjects, from history to world literature. With his great love for the stars, Fr. Seraphim bought a telescope so he could teach astronomy to Theophil and other boys. Over the years Fr. Seraphim was even to teach Theophil how to read and translate the Divine services from Church Slavonic.

In Old Russian culture, orphaned and unwanted children are always looked upon as God’s children, being under His special protection and guidance.

Having come to the hermitage by God's Providence, Theophil found the love and warmth that a child's heart requires. And the responsibilities of taking care of one of God's children brought yet more warmth into Fr. Seraphim's life, also. It is true that in succeeding years Theophil gave Fr. Seraphim cause to weep much and experience sleepless nights; but even if this was not seen or appreciated by the boy himself, it was seen by God and was unto Fr. Seraphim's salvation. As he drew closer to love's heavenly source in the desert, Fr. Seraphim was deepening his capacity for love — and thus his capacity to suffer over others.

Over the years other troubled boys stayed at the hermitage for extended periods of time, in order to benefit from the simplicity, wholesomeness, and tranquility of the monastic environment. In 1978 a Russian boy named Sergei, who was having difficulty adjusting to life both at home and at school, came to the hermitage by special arrangement of his parents and teachers. Fr. Seraphim helped him with his schoolwork, and after some time received this letter from the boy's father:

... On my part I don't know how to thank you, Fr. Seraphim, for what you are doing for Sergei. Sergei is happy and has acquired stability inside and peace, and he loves the work. He has changed from an unhappy child to a blossoming human being. Thank you to both you and Fr. Herman.

**T**HE presence of children has a softening effect on the heart. Although some might claim that it is not the business of monks to be taking care of children, St. Herman himself had taken in God's children — the unwanted, half-Aleut offspring of the Russian fur-traders in Alaska. They had come to live with him in his desert silence, and he had raised them in Christian love and piety. The Platina fathers, through no doing of their own, now found themselves following in some small measure in their patron's footsteps. Over the years they found that the children who came to them often fared better in the hermitage than did the

adults, since the former had not become as dependent on the comforts and distractions of the world as had the latter. Fr. Seraphim appreciated the children for their simplicity, directness, and purity; and for this reason he once said of them: “They are our consolation.”

## *Brothers*

*The first and most important thing in monastic life is trust, which is acquired by experience.*

—Fr. Seraphim [1](#)

*Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

—Galatians 6:2

**I**T is interesting that Fathers Seraphim and Herman, having modeled their monastic life after the mutual obedience of Blessed Paisius and his fellow-laborer Bessarion, were able to live alone together for just four years before being joined by other brothers. This was precisely the amount of time that elapsed before Paisius and Bessarion had brothers coming to them. As the Life of Blessed Paisius states:

Only for four years did they enjoy such a quiet, silent life, sweet in God and consoling to the soul. “For other brothers,” wrote Paisius later, “coming from the world into monasticism, seeing the loving life which I lived with my brother, became inflamed with zeal to unite themselves to such a life.” [2](#)

In 1973 a wave of monastic aspirants began to arrive at the St. Herman Hermitage, beginning with Fr. Seraphim’s godson, Br. Laurence. As we have seen, the fathers had made no attempt to attract anyone to share their life: “above all,” Fr. Seraphim explained, “because the life of *oneness of soul and mind*, which is lived here under conditions of material inconvenience, can only be

undertaken by someone with a free and even an eager will.” <sup>3</sup> When people *did* come, however, the fathers looked on this as God’s Providence. Having received news that another aspirant would soon be coming, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “There is more than enough to keep four people busy. We rejoice that God is sending us more hands; but we know well that with each pair of hands there is a soul, whose depths are unfathomable, and we only pray to God that we will not misuse or misguide what He sends us, but that He will forge in us all bonds of true love and brotherhood.”

**A**s the Brotherhood grew, Fr. Seraphim looked to Fr. Herman as the one who, as he wrote, “can lead us in oneness of soul and mind (something we poor Americans can’t do, as long as Orthodoxy is so frail in us).” <sup>4</sup> Once when his co-laborer was away, Fr. Seraphim told the brothers, “We should value Fr. Herman. He has vision.”

But while Fr. Herman’s vision got things started, Fr. Seraphim’s patient persistence kept them going, just as it had earlier in San Francisco. Alexey Young has described how this arrangement worked with regard not only to the monastic community but also to the lay people who were spiritually connected to the hermitage: “The fathers operated as a team, each one’s character balancing and complementing the other’s. Fr. Herman was the one whose enthusiasm inspired and stirred us to action; Fr. Seraphim was the one who showed us, step by step, how to carry through on the ideas Fr. Herman gave us.” <sup>5</sup>

Thomas Anderson has his own, humorous reminiscences of this arrangement: “Fr. Seraphim and Fr. Herman worked well together. I never saw them argue or get angry at each other. Fr. Herman came up with the ideas, and Fr. Seraphim figured out how to carry them out. For example, when we had hardly laid the foundation for a building, Fr. Herman was already talking enthusiastically about what color it was going to be, how there would be a double-eagle above the door, etc. And Fr. Seraphim said, ‘Look, we need to get some more lumber.’”

The outgoing Fr. Herman functioned as the leader of the hermitage, being officially appointed as the Superior (*Nachalnik*) by Archbishop Anthony in the latter's Paschal epistle to the Brotherhood in 1975. <sup>6</sup> The quiet Fr. Seraphim, meanwhile, served as the spiritual guide, dealing with people on a one-on-one basis. Every evening after services, Fr. Seraphim remained in church to hear the brothers unburden their souls privately to him. Again, the fathers took this monastic practice from Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky, who had continued it when he had become the head of a monastery. Blessed Paisius had instituted "revelation of thoughts" as a way of cutting off hidden bad inclinations before they could be magnified by the devil. In Blessed Paisius' Life it is said:

Everyone, and above all beginners, was to confess his thoughts each evening to his spiritual father. For confession is the foundation of true repentance and the forgiveness of sins.... And if some disturbance were to occur among the brethren, there must be reconciliation on that very day, according to the Scripture: *Let not the sun set on your anger* (Eph. 4:26). <sup>7</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the right use of "revelation of thoughts" can preserve the vital "oneness of soul" of a true monastic community. However, if the community initially lacks oneness of soul and a clear, common aim, this practice may have the adverse effect of causing people to inflict sinful thoughts on each other. Bishop Nektary, who had seen both outcomes in the course of his life, warned the fathers to be very careful with "revelation of thoughts"; and they approached it with fear and trembling. In general, the advice that Fr. Seraphim gave to the confessing brothers was straightforward. "See your weaknesses," he would tell them. "Look closely. *Know yourself*."

One young man, who came to the monastery in 1975, recalls the counsel he received from Fr. Seraphim:

"I had been newly baptized that February in Los Angeles and, like most converts, desired the *best* in Orthodoxy. That seemed to be monastic life. So in

the early summer I moved to St. Herman's Monastery. Fr. Seraphim was assigned by the Superior to hear my thoughts each evening after Vespers. I must say that I was afraid of him for the first few days. He seemed to look right through me, and know all my secret thoughts! Yet he treated me with great care and compassion. Protestantism did not give me a background to know how to confess my sins, so I did not receive as great a gift from Fr. Seraphim as I could have. Our talks were quiet, measured, and always centered on the inward life of the soul. I know that without the foundation I received that summer I would have floundered in the stormy days ahead of me."

**O**N September 1/14, 1973, the celebration of the Church New Year, Fr. Seraphim wrote optimistically: "The new year begins with the brethren dwelling together in harmony and deriving inspiration from the coenobitic life in the wilderness.... The very idea of such a life of *yedinodushie* [oneness of soul], based on complete openness and obedience, has been lost in the Russian Church in this century, and it is a miracle of God's mercy that we have been able to begin it in peace.... Archimandrite Spyridon's visit to us last week and his twice serving the Divine Liturgy gave all the brethren much spiritual joy and strength."

[8](#)

Monastic aspirants began life at the hermitage as "laborers" (*trudniki*) and after an indeterminate preliminary period were clothed in black robes as novices. In Russian the word for "novice" (*poslushnik*) means "he who is obedient." After the novitiate period of learning, obedience, and testing (traditionally three years), aspirants could take vows and be tonsured as monks. At the St. Herman Hermitage as in other monasteries, novices were to speak as little as possible to each other and to visitors. The emphasis was on the inward focusing of attention rather than on outward dispersion. "Special attention," wrote Fr. Seraphim, "is given to the Orthodox formation of the mind and heart by means of the written word of Patristic and hagiographical texts. Lives of Saints and spiritual instructions are always read at mealtimes; each brother has always a book of



assigned spiritual reading.” [9](#)

At one point there were fourteen people living at the hermitage, each with his own difficulties and needs. In serving as a spiritual guide to the brothers, Fr. Seraphim at times felt discouraged under the weight of their problems. “I must struggle for greater love and faith to fight against this,” he wrote in his spiritual journal, “and bear my brothers’ burdens, and also approach them less intellectually and more with the heart. May God be my aid!” [10](#)

Before Fathers Herman and Seraphim lay the task of passing on to the brothers a way of life totally different from that of the world. Now that new brothers had chosen to serve God, the fathers had to teach them how to no longer live for themselves. They wanted to be able to provide the solid meat of spiritual teaching, but at the same time they did not want to teach from themselves. In the words of Blessed Paisius: “One who has brethren under his guidance must not instruct and teach according to his own understanding and discernment, but rather according to the true and right understanding of Divine Scripture, as is taught by the divine Fathers, teachers of the inhabited world, and likewise by the teachers and instructors of the monastic life.” [11](#)

With this in mind, Fr. Seraphim began translating classic Patristic expositions on the spiritual life. One of these was *Answers to the Questions of Disciples* by the sixth-century Desert Fathers Barsanuphius and John. Fr. Seraphim selected passages from it which he felt were most pertinent to the needs of the particular brothers then at the hermitage. [\[a\]](#) He found that many of the questions posed to Saints Barsanuphius and John were not unlike the questions asked by Christian strugglers today, and that the answers of the Elders cut right through common fantasies and misconceptions. They exposed the nature of the vices — feigned humility, cold-hearted calculation, judgment, idleness, carnal imaginings, lack of inward vigilance — and indicated practical ways to overcome them and acquire virtue.

In the Romanian monastery of Dragomirna, Blessed Paisius used to gather the brothers in the refectory in the evening and read to them the Patristic texts he

had translated into their native language. Fr. Seraphim now did the same with his own brothers. In reading to them in the refectory his translation of Saints Barsanuphius and John, he spoke slowly so that each word would sink in.

Fr. Herman was elated. What a good, solid text is coming out, he thought. Turning to Br. Laurence he said, “This is an historic moment! Just think: ancient Desert Fathers—*from the sixth century*—brought to a new land, translated for the first time into its language. It can make the people here into spiritual giants.”

In the month that followed, however, the brothers floated out of the hermitage one by one. The next time Fr. Seraphim read from his translation, there were only three people sitting in the refectory.

“Well, I guess Barsanuphius and John didn’t do any good,” Fr. Herman remarked. “Why not?”

“Because the ground is too shallow,” replied Fr. Seraphim.

Fr. Seraphim believed that, in the Scriptural parable of the sower, the American land was represented by the shallow ground, the *stony places* (Mark ch. 4). Unlike the Old World, American society has no deep roots, no *depth of earth*. Its people *immediately receive the word with gladness*; yet they *have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended*. The sun scorches them, and they wither away.

Fr. Seraphim was convinced that the antidote to this characteristically American problem was *constancy*—and that was why he stressed it over and over, why he spoke to monastics and laymen alike about the need for daily prayer, daily services, and the daily reading of sacred writings. “Truly,” he wrote, “*endurance* is one of the central virtues for our times. Without it one will scarcely survive at all.” [12](#)

More monastic aspirants were still to come to the hermitage, and Fr. Seraphim’s experience as their spiritual father taught him the main criteria for their success or failure. In an article on monasticism in ancient Gallic times, he observed: “Then, even as today, a large part of the interest in monasticism was a

product of idle dreaming which would rather not face the daily struggles and humiliations necessary for the forging of true spiritual life according to the Gospel.” Both the Eastern and Western monastic Fathers, he noted, “placed much emphasis on the necessity of just plain *work*,” and saw “a definite correlation between willingness to work and a genuine striving for spiritual attainments.... Zeal for work, in fact, is a measuring stick for spiritual advancement.... Awareness of this basic principle of spiritual life is what produces the ‘down-to-earth,’ even ‘rough’ quality of a genuine Orthodox monastery even today. A novice being formed in such a spiritual atmosphere often finds himself in hectic circumstances that test his natural love of idleness and repose.” After giving accounts of the hectic and difficult novitiates of the sixth-century Egyptian Abba Dorotheus and the more contemporary Optina Elder Joseph, Fr. Seraphim wrote that “the idle dreamers among monastic aspirants today do not survive under such conditions; they often leave because the monastery is ‘not spiritual enough’—not realizing that thus they are depriving themselves of the spiritual ‘anchor’ without which they will wander in vain dissatisfaction at not finding their ‘ideal monastery.’ Laziness is not the worst sin of monastic aspirants; but without love of labor they will never even enter into the struggle of monastic life nor understand the most elementary principles of spiritual combat.” [13](#)

Although immoderate ascetic endeavors were forbidden at the monastery lest people fall into delusions about themselves, the simple life of monastic discipline without modern comforts tested the fortitude of young aspirants to its limit. Fr. Seraphim understood how difficult it was for young people to make the transition from the life of a typical modern American to that of a genuine monastic struggler. “Monasticism,” he wrote, “despite its otherworldly goal, is still in the world, and its state cannot but reflect the state of the world contemporary to it. The pampered, self-satisfied, self-centered young people who form the vast majority of those who come to monasticism today (at least in the free world) cannot but bring with them their worldly ‘baggage’ of attitudes

and habits, and these in turn cannot but affect the monastic environment. With a fierce and conscious battle against them, their influence can be minimized; without this constant battle, they can come to dominate even the best organized monastery, often in hidden ways.

“True Orthodox monasticism by its very nature is hostile to the principle of modern *comfort*. The constant activity of the monk is not giving ease to himself, sacrificing himself, giving himself over heart and soul to something above himself; but this is exactly the opposite of the first principle of modern life, which is based on the chiliastic dream of making life easy on earth. To commit oneself to a conscious battle against the principles and habits of modern comfort is a rare and dangerous thing; and thus it is no wonder that our monasticism [today] is so weak — it cannot but reflect the feebleness of Orthodox life in general today.” [14](#)

**H**AVING come to love and care for the brothers who came to them, the fathers were often deeply pained to see them uproot themselves and abandon the idea of monasticism when they had only begun to lay a foundation. Many of the aspirants came with the most serious intentions to struggle and were able to produce considerable spiritual fruit at the hermitage. But “although the spirit indeed is willing, the flesh is weak.” [1b](#)

One of the monastery’s novices, tempted by thoughts of the “good life,” decided to go away without telling anyone, leaving his cassock in the outhouse. Later he came back in repentance, but he went on to repeat this process of running away and returning several times. Feeling sorry for him, Fr. Seraphim wrote in his Chronicle: “How fragile the love of Orthodoxy and determination to stick to it — are in our youth today!” [15](#) In another place he stated: “If our converts will only keep the fear of God in their hearts and resolve to serve God *no matter what*—then all trials and temptations can be surmounted and they can save their souls.” [16](#)

Although Fr. Seraphim was acutely aware that he should not act like a

“God-bearing elder” to the young novices, he knew that it was necessary for them to form a relationship of basic *trust* and openness with him, their spiritual father. As he indicated in one place, “an important part of monastic training is learning *not to trust one’s own judgment*.” On this point he quoted from the *Institutes* of St. John Cassian: “If we wish to follow the commandments of the Gospel and be imitators of the Apostles and the whole of the early Church, or of the Fathers who in our times have followed their virtues and perfection, we should not trust our own opinions, promising ourselves evangelical perfection from this cold and pitiful condition; but following their steps, we should strive not to deceive ourselves, and thus we shall fulfill the good order and the commands of the monastery, so that we might renounce this world in truth.” [17](#)

This monastic principle had been tried and tested by centuries of experience, and Fr. Seraphim was to see ample corroboration of it in his own monastery. Those who failed to follow it seemed destined to be thrown off the monastic path.

One example was seen in a young monastic candidate whom the fathers had helped bring to Orthodoxy. After having visited most of the Orthodox monasteries in America, he came with the idea of spending a whole year at the Platina hermitage. Within a week, however, he changed his mind and decided to go to Hawaii instead. When told how unintelligent this was, he agreed to stay a while longer, but said, “My mind is made up, and I am peaceful.” Fr. Seraphim saw this as a “typical example of a person who trusts no one and nothing except his own ‘opinions,’ which pop into his head from he knows not where.” [18](#) This brother helped greatly with the printing in the following few weeks, but then went on to pursue his plans. Once, as the fathers were working in the drizzling rain, he walked up to them and said, “You go on la-boring — you’re doing a good work. But I — I need to enjoy life.” A letter he wrote shortly after he left showed that his “opinion” of what life would be like in Hawaii was very mistaken: everyone was cold to him there, and his problems remained the same as they were when he was at the monastery. Obligated to accept the adage, “You

can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink," and yet concerned for the soul of his spiritual son, Fr. Seraphim could only wish that God would "guide him to fruitful suffering." [19](#) When this brother had first become Orthodox, he had been fresh, innocent, and full of ideals. But during his attempted spree in the world, the spiritual change wrought in him actually produced a physical change, so that when the fathers went to pick him up at the bus depot on his next visit, they literally did not recognize him.

Fr. Seraphim wrote of another brother who had been making real progress along the monastic path. On the Feast of the Transfiguration, after attending a Vigil on the mountaintop after dark and hearing an elevating sermon by Fr. Seraphim, this brother could barely stumble down the mountainside for his tears of joy. "May God grant him to guard this good feeling and not grow careless!" noted Fr. Seraphim at the time. [20](#) Scarcely two months passed before the brother was attacked by a fit of despondency. He had criticized the fathers for singing hymns to an uncanonized holy man (Blessed Abbot Nazarius of Valaam), and had been agitated over the very services which had previously given him such spiritual joy. As Fr. Seraphim recorded, he left a few days later, "offering of himself a classic example of how to lose God's grace — by criticizing and 'knowing better.' After several days of extreme spiritual coldness, he found that there were immense 'differences' between his opinions and the Brotherhood's — and he returned to the world, with no prospect of spiritual guidance or help there. May God teach us from this how to wage warfare against our hidden passions, and to have fear!" [21](#)

The fathers were to witness how several other brothers proved fruitless in the world. One returning brother reminded Fr. Seraphim of the barren fig tree in the Gospels. "Lord!" Fr. Seraphim commented in his Chronicle. "May we bring forth fruit and not lose our green leaves." [22](#)

Fr. Seraphim understood that "trusting one's own opinion" was most often the result of insensitivity to the will of God. One has only to humbly consider the circumstances of one's life to get an indication of this will, to see it with the eyes

of faith. When one brother, for example, returned sick and hungry after nearly two weeks of wandering in the world, Fr. Seraphim noticed something remarkable: “The Gospel we read the day after he left was: *No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God*; the Gospel we read the night before he returned: the Prodigal Son.” [23](#)

The Patristic caution against trusting oneself applied not only to monastics. Once, after the fathers had served lunch to nineteen guests, including Orthodox pastors and lay people, Fr. Seraphim observed: “How many different spiritual orientations and problems among them all! And how bleak the spiritual future for those who trust themselves! Only those who deep down do *not* trust themselves, nor think themselves wise, have the possibility of flourishing spiritually.” [24](#)

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM placed such value on monastic oneness of soul that it was very difficult for him to have people in the monastery who were not even interested in it. As one who was constantly sacrificing himself for the common work, he disliked to see people standing around and talking idly, leisurely waiting for someone to come and “tell” them what to do next. Much worse was when they would get into passionate disputes over things which, beside the monastic vision, were hopelessly petty. Once, after Fr. Seraphim heard an older brother loudly berating Theophil for “using up the ice water” to brush his teeth, he noted that such incidents “breathe the spirit that destroys monasteries.” Abba Dorotheus, exhorting his fellow Egyptian monks of the sixth century, had spoken of this very problem: “Each one of us has given up something — perhaps great possessions, or perhaps very small — at any rate, each one has given up what he had to give. Then we come to the monastery and satisfy our own desires through trivial things which are worth nothing. We ought not to do this, for as we are set apart from the world and its affairs, so we ought to be set apart from the desire for material things, and to know what renunciation is and why we came to the monastery, [to know] what is the objective we have set for

ourselves, and so adjust our conduct to correspond with it, and throw ourselves into the contest as our fathers did.” [25](#)

For there to be true oneness of soul in a monastery, then, it is necessary for the brothers to grasp the whole picture, to believe in and freely embrace the common aim, rejoicing in the chance to work for it in whatever way possible. The opposite of this is “idiorrhhythmic” monasticism: an illegitimate form in which there is no common aim and everyone does as he pleases, like old maids and bachelors. About one man who was hoping to find this at the hermitage, Fr. Seraphim wrote with sadness: “He only wishes a cozy corner where people will tolerate him and he will do what he likes with his own life.... He obeys only outwardly and to the extent necessary so that he can continue to occupy his cozy corner with no heartfelt participation in the brotherhood.... By now it is obvious that he just isn’t after what we’re striving for, but is just tagging along, and is emotionally attached to us; we hate simply to tell him to find someplace else where he can be of one mind and soul (knowing he will never find such a place), and we also hate just to ‘drag him along’ with us, *requiring* him to act in a way which must be voluntary in order to work. His ‘fits’ sometimes make an immense drain on me, and Fr. Herman also, for actually what he does is call in question our whole way of life, not seeing or valuing it; and this way of life is already so difficult, requiring great struggle and sensitivity, that it *can* be destroyed.” [26](#)

**O**VER the course of a decade, no less than fifty monastic aspirants came and went at the hermitage. With all the supervision that was required, and with all the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs that had to be met, the fathers came to the conclusion that “the more people there are, the less work gets done.” The brothers competed with the monastery’s old trucks in the frequency of their “breakdowns” and need for “repairs.” This elicited the following observation from Fr. Seraphim: “The devil attacks first through cars, then novices.”

The “idiorrhhythmites” were a heavy cross to bear, but heavier still was the



sight of the real strugglers who, out of lack of constancy, robbed themselves of God-given opportunities. “Our brothers help some,” Fr. Seraphim wrote in a letter, “but unfortunately, so far we have no one who is ‘one in soul’ with us among the brothers, and it is very difficult to teach them about this — the American soul is very dense and only goes deeper into Orthodoxy after many years.” <sup>27</sup> This, as we have seen, had been foretold years earlier by Archbishop John in the vision of Fr. Seraphim. <sup>[c]</sup>

And yet the fathers’ cross was not carried in vain. “By experience,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “we have seen that anyone who comes here with good intent, and especially with warm faith in St. Herman and Archbishop John, does not leave without some spiritual consolation, according to his faith.” <sup>28</sup>

Some brothers even blossomed in the monastery: their true personalities emerged. There was one young man who, when he first came to the St. Herman Hermitage, was almost like a moron. The transformation that the monastic environment effected in him was amazing. Away for the first time from the fast-paced, electric world and television hypnosis which his simple nature could not handle, he became a self-confident, normally functioning, and productive individual. With wonder the fathers beheld the physical change that occurred. His gloomy face became open and candid; and his blue eyes, which formerly could not be seen under his lowered brow, now opened up and became bright and smiling.

It was obvious to the fathers that God had touched this young man. Once he ran to Fr. Herman with a pale face and told him the following: While working on a large engine in front of the monastery, he had heard an audible voice say clearly, “Take a step back.” In his simplicity he did not even think, but immediately obeyed. At that moment, the heavy engine broke its supports and fell with a crash. Had he not taken that step back, the brother would have been crushed and perhaps killed. In relating this incident he concluded that now he *knew* there was such a thing as a Guardian Angel.

**F**OR two people who had never intended to “establish a monastery,” Fathers Herman and Seraphim certainly had their hands full. Every person who came to them they saw as a gift from God, even if this happened to be totally inconceivable from a human point of view. They accepted everyone who came for the purpose of living the monastic life with them, thus following in the tradition of Blessed Paisius who said, “One who comes to me I will not cast out.” They also had a rule of never expelling anyone — except on rare occasions when someone would actually become violent or threatening. Since God had sent a brother, it was not theirs to determine when and if he should leave. They worked on the faith that if the brother really did not belong there, he would eventually come to that conclusion himself. In the meantime the fathers felt that they had to give as much spiritual input as possible to those who came to them, in spite of any hardship, inconvenience, or inward suffering this might cause them. In the words of Blessed Paisius, “Another brother is another prayer.”

## *The Desert for American Women*

*Away from the tumult and noise of the world, in quiet monastic refuges, in deserted landscapes which evoke thoughts of eternity, women of Holy Russia worked out their salvation for a thousand years, striving to acquire first of all humility of wisdom.... They strove to be unseen, unnoticed, concealed in quiet cells behind monastery walls, located beyond distant lakes and rivers, in forgotten sketes hidden in green thickets, in the shadow of weeping willows and birch groves, which alone heard their quiet prayer and soft chanting and saw them beholding the bridal chamber of their Divine Bridegroom, Christ.*

—Fr. Herman, from the Life of St. Dorothy of Kashin [1](#)

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM,” writes Fr. Herman, “would often get into such a deep state of silence and tranquility that it seemed almost impossible that he would emerge from it. Appreciating nature as a source of mystical contact with God, he would take in his surroundings while at the same time observing his own inward world. It was consoling to me to see on what a profound level he was receiving fulfillment from the desert. And I often wondered why there could not be other young Americans who, perceiving reality on the same level, could fully share in this state of being filled.”

From his very first visit to Fr. Adrian, Fr. Herman — then the twenty-year-old Br. Gleb — had been confronted with the phenomenon of young American converts to Orthodoxy. Fr. Adrian had introduced him to three such Americans who were developing under his direction and staying in the little hamlet next to

New Diveyevo Convent. Before parting with Gleb on that first visit, Fr. Adrian made a special point that Gleb be close to these converts, not only in order to translate from Russian into English for them, but also in order to learn from their fervor and new growth in the Faith. He said that converts view Orthodoxy with new eyes, which is of benefit to souls hardened through taking it for granted. “It is not known,” Fr. Adrian concluded, “how long God will tolerate the gradual growth of unrighteousness in America. We must not lose time in transmitting to new people the Orthodox way of life, which due to cultural differences is not easy to graft onto a new branch.”

Fr. Herman’s friendship with these converts lasted for life. One of them was the aforementioned Nina Seco, who became especially close to the St. Herman Brotherhood due to her similar longing for the Orthodox way of life as indicated by Fr. Adrian. During her years of correspondence with the Platina fathers, she too was led to seek monasticism.

**I**N 1973 Nina came to San Francisco from the East Coast. Knowing her monastic inclinations, people told her to go to the Russian convent in the city, but as an Orthodox American she felt unsuited for this. Sending her a note of encouragement, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “Keep your ‘secret,’ [\[a\]](#) live in peace with everyone, help those who ask for it (and beware of ‘helping’ when you’re not asked!), and *beg God and Vladika John to show you the way out of the world as fast as possible*. About the last point, it isn’t essential yet to have a concrete ‘plan’ in mind; it’s enough right now to nourish the desert seed in the heart, with which we’ll try to help.” [2](#)

When Nina wrote that she was becoming depressed about living in the world, Fr. Seraphim replied:

Dear Sister in Christ, Nina,

Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ.

From the sound of your letters, you are in need of an ‘epistle.’ I really

can't give it, but being a like-minded American Orthodox dreamer, I must give you at least a paragraph or two.

Yes, the Church situation in San Francisco is gloomy, and you can't even pretend that you 'fit' into it. You can't help but feel discouraged by this — and so here is where your virtue begins to be tested. You're not about to relapse into being a “moody, immature convert” — but how strong is your *positive* attitude? You know that it is not by “chance” that you are where you are, even though it may not be so much by deliberate plan, either. Perhaps you begin to think that deep down the whole thing is “crazy” after all. When such ideas arise, my favorite question is: What's the alternative? Does anything else make sense? It doesn't seem so. Then *endure*, and thank God that you are being tested.

In order not to be submerged by the petty “Church” world, YOU MUST BE LIVING IN A WORLD OF YOUR OWN — and that is the *real* Church world of ascetics and desert-dwellers,... who inspire and keep the spark alive inside us. Especially the desert-dwellers speak to us today, when the desert has all but been banished from the Church. Does that mean that we think we can be like them? No, it just means that we *love* them and more than anything else we want to have even the tiniest reflection of their kind of life, if only God will have mercy on us and not destroy us in our sins, our self-opinion, and the rest of our darkness. [3](#)

As Fathers Seraphim and Herman knew, in pre-Revolutionary Russia there had been *three times* as many women monastics as men. For American women in their native land, however, Orthodox monasticism had hardly been established in the coenobitic sense, and there were as yet no places where they could pursue the desert ideal. The Northern Russian forests had known great and holy women desert-dwellers; and the Platina fathers saw no reason why American women could not have the desert also. The fathers could not foresee, however, that they themselves would be called upon to make it happen.

**I**N February of 1975 Nina came to the Platina hermitage and told the fathers that she was thinking more and more of establishing a quiet life in the country. She had found another young woman with the same interest, a student of opera singing named Barbara McCarthy. “Both she and Barbara,” noted Fr. Seraphim, “dream of a ‘hesychast’ life, within moderation — but how much humility and trust and struggle, and real self-distrust — must come first!” <sup>4</sup>

Barbara, who had converted to Orthodoxy in 1968, had been inspired by desert monasticism ever since reading the early *Orthodox Word* issue on the wilderness sketes of Canada. Giving up her opera career, in 1972 she had made a pilgrimage to these sketes, and in 1974 had gone to a convent on the Greek island of Chios. She had stayed at the convent for over a year before returning to the United States.

On July 5, 1975, Barbara came with Nina to visit the St. Herman Hermitage for the first time. “After several monastic experiences,” Fr. Seraphim recorded, “Barbara still seeks her quiet place for monastic labors; she fell in love with our skete.” <sup>5</sup> Fr. Herman recalls that, on this first visit, she emphatically told him, “I want what you have here. I want the desert!”

Less than two weeks later Barbara returned to the hermitage by herself, soaking wet after having walked halfway from Redding and having spent the night in the wilderness. Her arrival was a surprise to the fathers, but more so to a young man who had arrived at the hermitage only five days before. Fr. Seraphim described an ironic moment: “It so happened that our latest summer laborer from Jordanville, who is staying with us for a month, is precisely the young man who proposed to Barbara some months back, and he thought he was seeing a vision! But Barbara seems to be quite oriented toward monasticism.” <sup>6</sup>

Barbara stayed for three days in the guest house outside the monastery, reading the spiritual counsels of Abba Dorotheus and doing a little work. “She wants to ‘go to the wilds,’” Fr. Seraphim wrote in his Chronicle. <sup>7</sup> Fearing that she might get carried away and lose sight of the sober realities of Orthodox

living, the fathers tried to moderate her zeal. She left the hermitage with the idea of going to Etna with Nina to begin a quiet semi-monastic life.

In Etna, Nina lived close to the Youngs, while Barbara lived by herself in a gold mine belonging to Susan Young's aunt. When the two women next visited the hermitage, Fr. Seraphim gave them a talk, as he later recorded, "on the Orthodox life lived in fear and trembling, quiet, filled with labor and prayer and, if possible, modest missionary labors, and oneness of mind with others who may join." <sup>8</sup>

In October Barbara, still living in Etna, fell seriously ill, and had to return to her hometown in Ohio to recover. On her farewell visit to the hermitage, Fr. Seraphim recorded, "she was able to talk little owing to her illness, but she left in tears, evidently much moved. Fr. Herman made a special effort to give her a dose of inspiration. She seems to have learned much from her visit to California, and is very much loved by the community in Etna." <sup>9</sup>

The following summer, she returned. Nothing had changed in her orientation: her desert longings were stronger than ever. She remained for a week in the monastery guest house, and, as Fr. Seraphim recorded, was "very pleased at her obedience of digging the foundation for a cabin [on the other side of the ridge], <sup>[b]</sup> attending our services and refectory very unobtrusively, being inspired by the digging and the view of the gorge below." <sup>10</sup>

Commenting on the Brotherhood's help in fulfilling Barbara's desert longings, Fr. Seraphim wrote: "Is this 'playing' on our part, or is there foundation for something serious to come from her? God knows. It seems to be our lot to do what is out of the ordinary, for the sake of keeping alive a spark of genuine spiritual struggle and orientation. Those few souls who 'catch' what we are after — can we not support and encourage them?" <sup>11</sup>

Elsewhere he wrote: "Barbara is well and is writing a letter to her mother. Of course, it is a little 'dangerous' (politically) for her to remain so long close to us. 'Officially,' if there is any question, our position in regard to her is: we are moderating her enthusiasm by giving her a little taste of wilderness life while

restraining her from just going off to the woods by herself. Fr. Herman has blessed her to be totally by herself for no more than three days at a time, and we knew where she was. God knows what will come of her desire for the desert, but we don't want to quench it or apply a 'formula' to it either. As things have worked out, we are totally alone during this part of the summer, so there are no younger ones to suffer unnecessary temptations by her nearness. Historically (as we know from nineteenth-century Russian examples) those who encourage such 'crazy ones' usually end up being persecuted themselves, but that is already nothing new!" [12](#)

Bishop Nektary, in the meantime, warmly blessed Barbara and counseled her to endure, saying, "Place all your hope in God, and it will be light." [13](#)

**“T**HE spiritual makeup of Sister Barbara,” writes Fr. Herman, “was basically artistic. Like Fr. Seraphim, she had an earthy sense of man’s closeness to nature. Her favorite book, with which she almost never parted, was the *Fifty Spiritual Homilies* of St. Macarius the Great, wherein a lofty aim is clearly united with a practical, realistic application. Her reading of Patristic sources together with her love of music made her see the dramatic setting of the Platina wilderness as God’s work of art, of which she was a living partaker. But it was not enough for her to keep this feeling to herself. She wanted to transmit it to others, just as a singer who feels through her whole being the pathos of music, gains inspiration from above, and pours it forth to those who will listen. Her time between prayers, therefore, was occupied in translating Patristic texts from Greek, transcribing Russian texts on desert monasticism for *The Orthodox Word*, and at times even printing them at the press when Fr. Seraphim and I were overburdened with other activities.

“At every opportunity, however, Barbara would disappear into the severe ‘inner desert.’ Later, she began to stay there for weeks and even months at a time. She would pray whole nights through; and sometimes, as the sun would set, her voice would echo through the hills, carried by the wind.



“There was an incident that occurred at a time when the Brotherhood was disquieted by strife in the Church. [c] The atmosphere was charged with tension and uncertainty, about which Sister Barbara knew. She appeared at the gate at a wrong time, and I conveyed to her our tenseness, suggesting that she go away for awhile. She humbly obeyed and went back to the woods; and only then did I consider that perhaps she had come for food and supplies, that perhaps she was hungry. I wrote a note of apology, packed some food, and went down into a forest gully where she would pick up the supplies in a designated box attached to a tree.

“It was dusk. I went down and up the hill, looking for the tree, but couldn’t easily find it. Then, from across the hill, I heard her beautiful singing. It echoed through the gully and died away somewhere below, while above shone the first evening star and the half-moon. And I thought: ‘How appreciative is this soul of our life, even though in this case she had been deprived of the essentials of food!’ None of the early brothers had exhibited such a love for the desert nor such earnestness in putting Patristic teachings into practice.

“As the warm summer night descended, Sister Barbara’s singing of melodic Byzantine hymns evoked contrition of soul. Hearing these Greek melodies, I said to myself: ‘How can I share my little bit of Mount Athos with her?’

“Within a few years it would happen. Mount Athos, through my spiritual father there, Schemamonk Nikodim, would bestow a blessing and a monastic mantle on this American girl who had given herself and her magnificent voice to God the Creator.”

## *Adam's Friends*

*O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our little brothers to whom Thou hast given this earth as their home in common with us. May we realize that they live not for us alone, but for themselves and for Thee, and that they love the sweetness of life even as we, and serve Thee better in their place than we in ours.*

—St. Basil the Great

**V**ERY early one morning, not long after the fathers had moved to the wilderness, there resounded throughout the monastery the loud crowing of a bird. The fathers jumped up, only to discover a rooster standing on the table in the middle of the refectory. They had no idea where he came from or how he got inside. The rooster continued crowing several more times.

Soon a laugh was heard outside the gate. It turned out that the fathers' friend, Deacon Nicholas, while traveling had been attracted by the bright colors of the rooster and had bought it for the fathers as a gift. He arrived at night and placed the rooster in the refectory.

When the sun rose, the morning light revealed the rooster to be a bird of unexpected beauty, of some exotic breed. He literally shone and glistened in the sun, with golden, red, blue, and bright green hues. His golden feathers somehow changed colors when viewed from different sides. "I had never seen such a bird before," Fr. Herman recalls, "—like a creature from another world."

Bravely parading in the monastic terrain, the rooster seemed to like his surroundings. He became the first "third brother" of the monastery, whose

monastic obedience was to wake up the monks for prayer. He trained the fathers not to rely on alarm clocks, but on him. The image of his rousing people for prayer served as a reminder of the Apostle Peter's repentance at the cock's crow. For this reason all roosters in Russia are called "Petya," a diminutive of Peter.

Fr. Seraphim, whose family had kept chickens when he was a child, built a coop for the rooster. When winter approached he went to town and bought four snow-white hens, so that the fathers would have their own eggs. Since the coop was kept next to the kitchen during that winter, the chickens could be observed closely. The fathers noticed the orderliness of their sleeping habits: how they would watch the sun go down and would roost only when it was completely set, and how they would leave their house no earlier or later than sunrise. Fr. Seraphim also noted that the hens had absolutely different personalities. They walked and foraged for food in different ways, and their voices and behavior were very distinct. One of them, which walked around singing all day, Fr. Seraphim named "Songbird"; another, which constantly pecked at the others, he called "Bad Girl"; and the main victim of this treatment he called "Cinderella." Even with their chicken brains they had some personal devotion. Fr. Seraphim's favorite hen, which he named "Rumyanetz" (Russian for "Rosy Cheek"), often followed him around.

**F**OR years after their move, the fathers had no cats or dogs, thinking in their zeal that it was not monastic to have cuddly pets in the skete. Then one day Nina Seco brought them a present. As Nina stood with Fr. Herman on the porch, she told him to close his eyes and hold out his hands. When he opened them he found himself holding a gray kitten. He said that he didn't want the kitten, but then Nina asked him if he had some troublesome mice around. "All right," Fr. Herman said, addressing the kitten. "If you catch a mouse within an hour, you can stay. If not, you have to go."

The kitten then trotted off under the building. Within fifteen minutes, while Fr. Herman and Nina were still talking, the kitten brought a mouse to the porch

and laid it at Fr. Herman's feet, having promptly fulfilled his first monastic obedience. The cat stayed, and others were taken in later.

Before the cats had arrived, the fathers had seen rattlesnakes often in the skete area. Fr. Herman would sometimes even enter his cell to find this deadly reptile coiled inside his klobuk or stretched out on his bed. With the coming of the cats, however, these snakes were seldom seen. The fathers deduced that the snakes had been attracted to the buildings by the mice, but now that the cats had reduced the mouse population the snakes no longer had reason to come around. The cats had thus become, not the cuddly playthings that the fathers had been unwilling to have around the hermitage, but irreplaceable workers for public safety.

Since it is not proper to give an animal the name of a saint, the fathers would name their cats after something — usually a place — connected with a saint on whose commemoration day the animal arrived. Thus, a cat that came on the day of St. Herman of Alaska was named “Alaska,” one that came on St. Theodore the Tyro's day was called “Tyro,” etc. A sad-eyed, smoky gray cat happened to come on the feast of the Mother of God “Joy of All Who Sorrow”: he was appropriately named “Sorrow.”

Fr. Seraphim's personal companion was Tyro. Although small, this calico cat was the matriarch of the feline clan, and no other cat dared cross her. Even in Fr. Seraphim's cabin she was something like a queen. She would sit quietly on his lap while he would be typing some article, and he would not want to get up so as not to disturb her. One day he came into one of the monastery workrooms to find that she had given birth to kittens amidst the papers on his editorial desk!

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM appreciated dogs the most. He had never had a replacement for his beloved childhood dog, Ditto. One day, however, a handsome, orange-and-black male dog, part German shepherd, came trotting through the monastery gate. He quickly made friends with the fathers. “Wouldn't it be nice to have a dog?” Fr. Seraphim softly ventured to suggest.

But the dog had a collar and obviously an owner, and so the fathers felt they should put up a notice at the Platina General Store. Shortly thereafter, a man drove up in a truck. He had come to pick up his “Murphy.” The dog cringed and looked at his master with fearful eyes, which seemed to indicate that he had been poorly treated in the past. The man was angry and obviously cared little for Murphy. Fr. Seraphim was very sorry to see his friend go.

A few days later, Murphy was back at the hermitage, having walked there himself. Again the owner had to come to get him. “Get into that truck!” the man yelled at the dog, striking him with his hand. “If he does this again,” he told the fathers, “you will have to keep him!”

This time only fifteen minutes passed before Murphy returned. Fr. Seraphim secretly rejoiced. Murphy had been the dog’s name “in the world,” but in the hermitage he would henceforth be called “Svir,” since he had first arrived on the day of St. Alexander of Svir. The fathers asserted that they had never known such a noble creature. There was no goofy “dogginess” in this beast! He looked at people with bright eyes, and with a kind, humble expression. Affection, play, companionship, protection: everything was done in its season. He kept bears and mountain lions away (but without needless incessant barking), and was even known to help lost brothers find their way back to the hermitage.



“Svir.”



“Sorrow.”

Fr. Seraphim seldom if ever petted Svir; between them there existed a kind

of silent fellowship. As he had done with Ditto, he would communicate with Svir by looking deep into his eyes.

**I**N the artwork of ancient Byzantium it was common to see depictions of peacocks, since from early Christian times peacocks were seen as an image of the Resurrection, and the designs on their tails as an image of the many-eyed Cherubim. Following the practice of some Byzantine monasteries, the Platina monastery kept peacocks on its grounds. One of the monastery's pilgrims gave the fathers two of these birds, which soon multiplied. The peacocks roamed around the forest pecking for food, and every spring they grew out new tails of resplendent colors — a striking display of God's artistry.

The local deer became almost as close to the fathers as did the domesticated animals. The deer liked the hermitage, especially since it was a relatively safe place from hunters. "Hunting season is on," wrote Fr. Seraphim one autumn in a letter, "and our deer are staying close to us — in fact, as I type this outdoors I am surrounded by five deer, three of them drinking out of our 'spring.'" <sup>1</sup>

The fathers watched one baby deer they had befriended grow up to be a young mother. In June of 1972, Fr. Seraphim wrote: "Our summer season is beginning, and just two days ago our 'baby' deer gave birth to twin fawns, apparently right in front of our church! They were under twelve hours old when we first saw them, but already running (and stumbling) around. To our surprise, we note that 'Baby' has no nest or anything of the sort, but just moves the fawns about from place to place, letting them sleep wherever they fall, and then taking up her station some distance away. This is the third day, and they haven't departed yet from the monastery area — which shows we are 'trusted.' We look around once in a while, and once we found one fawn curled up under our 'St. Gerasim tree' with an icon looking over her. A very touching sight." <sup>2</sup>

Of all the deer, Fr. Seraphim was most fond of a light-colored buck named "Whitey." Big, regal, and handsome, with a tuft of fuzzy white fur on his chest, Whitey walked around like the king of the forest. He knew the monks were his



friends. Completely tame around them, he would approach them, allow himself to be petted, and eat out of their hands.

One day during hunting season, when Whitey was roaming the monastery grounds, a jeep was heard driving up the road. Whitey, not sensing the possible danger, began to walk toward the church, beyond which was the approaching jeep. One of the brothers began following Whitey, yelling, “Whitey, stay here! Whitey, don’t go!” The jeep slowed down; the hunters inside it had seen Whitey and also undoubtedly heard the frantic shouts of the brother. But Whitey kept walking. Hardly had the deer walked ten yards past the church before a shot was fired. Whitey fell down dead. By this time Fr. Herman was running to the scene. “What are you doing?” he called to the hunters, pointing to the No Hunting sign. “This is private property!” The hunting party, it could be seen, was drunk. The man who had fired the shot pointed his still-smoking rifle at Fr. Herman. “*What* did you say?” the man asked in threateningly measured speech. Fr. Herman of course said nothing at that point, and after a while the truck backed down the road.



“Afosya,” born at the St. Herman Monastery on the commemoration day of St. Athanasius of Mount Athos.



When Fr. Seraphim learned of Whitey's needless and cruel death, he went into the church and wept.

**W**HILE living in their skete, the fathers learned about an experiment, conducted by the Soviet government, which had to do with animals. The Bolsheviks, believing all domesticated animals besides farm animals to be a bourgeois luxury, had all such animals killed in certain areas of Russia. Years later they did a psychological study, comparing the people in these areas with people in places where animals had been allowed to remain. They discovered that the people who had been deprived of animals had a much higher rate of depression, anxiety, and suicide than those who had not. The obvious conclusion was that animals somehow have a therapeutic effect on human beings.

The fathers saw the truth of this borne out by their own experience at the monastery. Amidst the constant pressure of work that lay upon the fathers, the animals were a source of rest and relief to them. A cat would push a door open and walk into the printshop while the fathers were working, or a robin and his wife would be seen building their nest outside the window — and suddenly the whole burden of man's world would crumble before the reality of God's creation of which man is a part. These animals had nothing to do with broken trucks, printing presses, and typesetting machines, nor with the various other problems with which the fathers had to concern themselves.

“In our rustic atmosphere,” Fr. Herman observes, “animals have a place. In the contemporary worldly atmosphere, on the other hand, they are as if robbed of their power, being at odds with the man-made world. When you look into the eyes of animals, you see that they are not just cute, furry playthings, but are an exceedingly serious phenomenon, creatures that take life in earnest. Animals bring in their own world, and they almost say to us: ‘Enter into God's world. You belong to eternity.’”

Fr. Herman recalls a quiet moment when he was with Fr. Seraphim and their animals came up to them: Svir looking up devotedly and wagging his tail,

and a lovely, white-pawed cat named Kisa standing quietly by.

“From your point of view,” Fr. Herman asked in a reflective mood, “what are animals all about?”

Fr. Seraphim replied: “They have something to do with Paradise.”

## *An Orthodox Corner of America*

*One must study the Church services and the Church statutes, because the beauty and profundity of Christian worship is higher than that of angels; it is the link between earth and heaven. It is a choir of angels and men striving toward the union of their hearts with God, and of their wills with the will of God.*

—Elder Zachariah of St. Sergius Lavra, Russia (†1936) [1](#)

**D**URING one of his early visits to the St. Herman Hermitage, Bishop Nektary looked around with eyes filled with thankfulness and awe. Crossing himself, he said, “It’s a miracle!”

In Russia Bishop Nektary had witnessed the closure of his beloved Optina Monastery by a regime of godless hoodlums who had taken over Russia like a plague. Living in the decadent city of San Francisco during the 1960s and 1970s, he had perceived firsthand the rapid rise of what St. Ignatius Brianchaninov had called “the elemental tide of apostasy.” In the midst of all this, there existed the St. Herman Monastery, lost in the woods, unknown to the world, with two monks of the new generation, one of whom was even an American convert. This to him was a miracle. “In Platina,” he told Fathers Herman and Seraphim, “the spirit of Optina dwells.”

At the same time the Bishop warned the fathers not to fall into pride. When they visited him in San Francisco in 1975 he told them: “Don’t think that anything you have is by your own efforts or merit. It’s a gift of God!”[2](#) In Optina, his brother Ivan Kontzevitch used to say, the monks walked as if on

tiptoes before God. There was some joking and kidding, but no one ever said anything to hurt another. They guarded themselves against judging and idle talk, against anything that would disturb their inward quietness and God's presence among them. As Bishop Nektary explained, "They were *treasuring the grace*." This was perhaps the most important lesson that Bishop Nektary had learned at Optina, and therefore he often told the Platina fathers: "Do not spill the grace of God." In a sermon he gave at the monastery, he broke into tears as he begged: "Treasure your solitude and oneness of mind — and never let the sun set on your anger for each other."<sup>3</sup>



Optina Monastery in Russia, during the flooding of the Zhizdra River. Photograph taken on June 9, 1909.

On the day of Mid-Pentecost, 1974, Bishop Nektary visited the skete on his way back from Seattle to San Francisco. "As always," Fr. Seraphim recorded, "he brought consolation to the brethren. His advice: Do not let difficulties, lack of understanding, etc., overwhelm you, but live each day with trust in God, not worrying about the problems of the morrow. Whether there are ten of you or one, rejoice and serve God; you are in the right place."<sup>4</sup>

Even Fr. Herman's mother, formerly so opposed to her son's monastic aspirations, realized that he was where he belonged. On one of her visits she told him, "Here I feel you have the grace of God."

When Fr. Herman returned from a trip to Jordanville in December of 1973, Fr. Seraphim was shown just how much God had given their Brotherhood. On the day of the feast of St. Herman, Fr. Herman had given a lecture before two hundred young people at the Jordanville monastery, thus starting a tradition of annual "St. Herman Pilgrimages" there. Reflecting on the effect Fr. Herman had produced, Fr. Seraphim wrote in his Chronicle: "His talk to the youth at Jordanville moved many... and planted a seed for future sprouting. The young people are hungry for *real*, zealot Orthodoxy; but immigrant Orthodoxy will just die out. How few even of our bishops realize this! Those in the Church with awareness look to our Brotherhood with great hope for the future. And in truth, our position is much freer and more hopeful than anyone else's, despite the obstacles. We must do much, both in English and Russian — and above all, in inspiring and setting the right tone." [5](#)

Fr. Seraphim was also glad to hear Fr. Herman bring back encouraging words from archpastors on the East Coast: "Archbishop Averky blesses 'everything' that we do," Fr. Seraphim recorded. "Metropolitan Philaret likewise approves our path, saying: 'Your path is laid out, and well.' Archbishop Andrew [\[a\]](#) likewise blesses. The message: we should not be upset by misunderstanding on the part of some authorities, by 'Synodal mentality' which thinks only of organization and politics; but we must go boldly forward on the path Vladika John blessed us on." [6](#)

**O**N February 12/25, 1975, the commemoration day of St. Eugene of Alexandria, Fr. Seraphim made the following entry in his Chronicle:

"Fr. Seraphim's nameday in the world, and the thirteenth anniversary of his reception into Orthodoxy. Fr. Herman gives an important sermon in church in connection with St. Alexey the 'builder of Moscow,' [\[b\]](#) telling us that we too

must build and not destroy the Orthodox building of our souls and our community. This means no gloominess, no ‘knowing better,’ when Fr. Herman takes great pains to tell us the laws of spiritual life, no taking for granted what we have or any unconscious attitude to our own spiritual life. There are no accidents in our life — everything happens to us by God’s will or allowance for our salvation, and reflects our inward state and needs. How much we need to walk in fear of God and *consciously build* this Orthodox corner of America, not for our ‘private’ use, but for the good of true Orthodoxy in America!” [7](#)

In building their Orthodox corner of America, the fathers strove to make everything in their surroundings remind them of the life of holiness in Christ. To strengthen their bond with Holy Russia and its saints, they named all their living quarters after major Russian monasteries. Thus, Fr. Herman’s cell near the top of the ridge was called “Valaam”; and Fr. Seraphim’s cell, built in 1975 by Fr. Seraphim himself, was called “Optina.” Later buildings were named after the Sarov and Glinsk Monasteries.

In 1974 there was talk that the chief hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad, Metropolitan Philaret, might come to the hermitage. “But he’ll be scandalized!” Fr. Herman said. “We don’t even have a decent room to receive him in.”

“Then let’s build a new room,” the young Thomas Anderson suggested, “— a room worthy of a Tsar!” Fr. Seraphim thought this was an excellent idea.

The Metropolitan never came after all; but Thomas’ plan evolved into something even better than the original conception: a room actually *dedicated* to the memory of the Martyred Tsar Nicholas II and his family. On July 4/17, the commemoration of the Royal Martyrs of Russia, the fathers sprinkled holy water on the site of the future building. As with nearly all the monastery buildings, Fr. Seraphim was the designer and carpenter, with Fr. Herman and other brothers helping out. By November the room was completed, and rare photographs of the Tsar and Royal Family were hung on the walls. [\[C\]](#) Acknowledging how strange this might appear to an ordinary outsider, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “Framing of the

Tsar's portrait was completed and the room painted blue just in time for a triumphant celebration in the 'Tsar's Room.' A few of us are inspired by these celebrations in the wilderness — and by the very idea of a 'Tsar's Room' in the forest — and we must continue thus to be 'crazy' to the world in order to stay inspired and bring fruit." [8](#)

The fathers also covered the surrounding countryside with what they euphemistically called "sketes." Each "skete," named after a particular saint, consisted of a cleared area where the brethren could sing services. Some of the sites were excavated with the idea of one day building a chapel or monastic cell over them. At the sketes an icon would be hung on a tree, a wooden cross erected, or a reading stand built. In later years the fathers brought altar tables to some of the sketes.

The closest "skete" was the outdoor chapel where the fathers had performed their first service after their move to the wilderness, and where Archbishop Anthony had celebrated the first Divine Liturgy. This site, located a hundred yards up the hill from the monastery church, was dedicated by the fathers to the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord — St. Herman's beloved feast day. The fathers hoped to build a chapel there, since St. Herman had dedicated his chapel on Spruce Island to the Meeting of the Lord. On the Feast of the Meeting, February 2/15, 1975, Fr. Seraphim wrote in his Chronicle: "We had a procession around the monastery, and at the outdoor church (site of the future chapel devoted to the Meeting) we stopped to hear Fr. Herman's sermon on the significance of this feast for Orthodox America and for us. Truly, America met Orthodoxy in St. Herman, and the wilds of Northern California met Orthodoxy when the Liturgy was celebrated on this very spot."

Further away from the monastery were sketes dedicated to St. Elias the Prophet, St. John the Forerunner and Baptist, St. John the Theologian, St. Chariton the Confessor of Palestine, St. Seraphim of Sarov, and Elder Zosima of Siberia. St. Tikhon of Kaluga, who lived as a hermit in the hollow of a tree, was honored with his own "St. Tikhon's tree." Other chapel sites were named after

the great Celtic monasteries of Lindisfarne and Iona.

Mountains and hills were also given names. The monastery's own mountain — the peak of which marked the highest point on Noble Ridge — was called “Mount St. Herman,” after the tallest mountain on Spruce Island. A prominent hill about a mile west of the monastery was dedicated to Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky and came to be called “Paisian Hump.” Another point on the ridge was designated “Mount Athos.” And to the south, a mountain with the secular name of “Black Rock” was renamed after the Protection of the Most Holy Mother of God. On the Feast of the Protection in 1974, Fr. Seraphim recorded: “All five brothers and a pilgrim climb Black Rock Mountain and are inspired by the remote forest and long views. The lookout man is a young ‘good hippie’ with no visible openness to Orthodoxy. The mountain is named ‘Protection’ and the high meadow (at 6,500 feet) is named for St. Romanus the Melodist and St. John Kukuzelis [who are also commemorated on this day].” [9](#)

To all the sketes, especially on days when their saints were commemorated, processions with banners were made through the forest. Fr. Spyridon had once told the fathers, “Have more processions; they sanctify the atmosphere” [10](#) — which advice the fathers had followed faithfully. Here is how Fr. Seraphim's Chronicle describes some of these processions:

*July 10/23, 1974.* The Feast of the Konevits Mother of God, and St. Anthony of the Kiev Caves. After morning service, a procession to the graveyard, where the [Konevits Mother of God] Icon is left on the site of the graveyard chapel for the rest of the day. All brothers come at some time during the day to pray in the cemetery. In the afternoon the sun's rays strike the Icon directly, and the forest is filled with gold, a wondrous “appearance” of an Icon. On this day we remember the painter of the Icon, slave of God Tatiana, [\[d\]](#) who died one year ago.

*July 28/August 10, 1974.* Memory of St. Lupus of Troyes. Three pilgrims...



participate with us in erecting the Cross at Lindisfarne at the “skete” where the Western Saints will be remembered. Again on Tuesday we honor St. Germanus of Auxerre by a Vesper service to him and a procession to Lindisfarne.



Procession to St. Elias Skete on Bright Monday, April 18/May 1, 1978. In the background is Mount St. Herman.



Procession to St. Elias Skete with the miracle-working Kursk Icon of the Mother of God, carried by Fr. Seraphim. Feast of St. Herman, July 27/August 9, 1978.

*March 19/April 1, 1975.* At sunset there is a procession to Lindisfarne, and the first excavations are made for the “Iona” chapel. The thought occurs: we are crazy! But our dreams on this mountain *do* make sense, and we must keep going forward without being distracted by worldly common sense and “knowing better.” We are sowing the seeds; God knows what fruits will come.

*July 19/August 1, 1976.* St. Seraphim. A procession to Lindisfarne, where earth from Lindisfarne and an icon of St. Martin of Tours (brought from England by Alexey Young) are given to Fr. Seraphim. Later, an Akathist is begun at St. Elias’ Skete, but rain causes it to be finished in church. Thunder and lightning accompany the showers on the eve of St. Elias day.

*July 20/August 2, 1976.* Prophet Elias. Procession to St. Elias Skete, where all pray for rain to end the fire peril and the water shortage. [\[e\]](#) The morning is sunny.... [Later in the day] there is a thunderstorm with hail, and the

surrounding mountains are white, evidently with hail. For the next four days it rains every day (nearly two inches), and it is clear that St. Elias has answered our prayers....

*October 23/November 5, 1976.* Eve of the repose of Elder Zosima Verkhovsky [of Siberia]. The fathers have a procession in the moonlight to “Zosima Rood” at the western end of the monastery property; they pray for his repose, and for buying the piece of land to the west, if this is pleasing to God. [\[f\]](#)

Even with the services being held periodically in the outlying “sketes,” the Brotherhood’s life remained focused in the monastery church. There, in this rustic and quaint little building, icons were kept which had borne silent witness to the holy prayers of Archbishop John. The work of Pimen Sofronov, these icons had been commissioned by Archbishop John for the new Cathedral in San Francisco, and there the Archbishop had prayed daily before them for years. After his repose, the Cathedral’s iconostasis had been replaced by a new one and its walls frescoed by the master iconographer Archimandrite Cyprian. Since the Pimen Sofronov icons were no longer being used in the Cathedral, Archbishop Anthony gave them as a blessing from the Cathedral to the Brotherhood. The icons included the chief icons from the former iconostasis of the Cathedral (Christ, the Mother of God, and St. John the Baptist), and also a large icon of Christ holding Holy Communion, which the Platina fathers placed prominently behind the holy table of the monastery church. Archbishop Anthony also gave the fathers the Royal (altar) Doors of the original iconostasis before which Archbishop John had prayed. [\[g\]](#) All of these sacred objects were treasured by the fathers as remembrances of the founding hierarch of the Brotherhood.



*Take, eat; this is My body.... Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:26–28). Icon by Pimen Sofronov which was placed behind the holy table in the sanctuary of the St. Herman Monastery church.*



*The interior of the monastery church in 1982, with the main icons by Pimen Sofronov.  
Photographs by Fr. Lawrence Williams.*





The monastery church with Fr. Seraphim as he typically appeared walking through the monastery, looking down and taking long, quick strides in his heavy work boots. Photograph taken in August 1982, shortly before his repose.



The expanded monastery printshop with book-assembling rooms. *Photograph by Fr. Lawrence Williams.*

**T**HE cycle of each year at the monastery was accented by the major feasts of the Lord and the Mother of God, which the brethren celebrated in poverty, simplicity, and great joy. The events of the earthly lives of Christ and His Mother were actually re-experienced each year as events that do not pass away but are embedded in eternity.

On the Feast of the Theophany (January 6/19), when Christ's Baptism in the river Jordan is commemorated, the fathers and brothers would traverse the surrounding wilderness, "sanctifying the atmosphere" with holy water; and this would continue throughout the following week. Describing the Theophany celebrations in 1976, Fr. Seraphim wrote: "A joyous feast with procession to the 'Jordan'—a vessel of water on a stump in the middle of our unfinished 'fountain.' A little holy water is poured into the vessel to sanctify the water. Every day until the Apodosis [\[h\]](#) there is a procession around the fountain, and all drink from the vessel which was left there. On January 7, [\[i\]](#) a procession past Valaam to St. John the Forerunner Skete (east of Optina, across the ravine), discovered on the feast day by Fr. Herman and Br. Theophil. [\[j\]](#) On January 10, the feast of St. Paul of Obnora, [\[k\]](#) a longer procession all over the mountain — Mount Athos, Mount St. Herman, Valaam, St. John's Skete, Optina, with sprinkling of holy water everywhere. On Sunday, January 12, a procession to St. Elias' Skete with relics of St. Theodosius the Coenobiarch. We must thank God for the freedom we have and opportunity for struggle, and be fruitful — the week is spent with much work produced in the printshop — two issues and a brochure (on Archbishop Andrew) being printed simultaneously."

On the eve of the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6/19), when the Divinity of Jesus Christ was revealed on Mount Tabor, the monastery brethren would climb to the top of Mount St. Herman at night. On this spot, named Transfiguration Skete, they placed a reading stand and a cross, and there they would celebrate the Vigil service of the Transfiguration. After the service everyone would sit under the stars as Fr. Seraphim would open to them thoughts

of the transfigured realm for which they were all to be preparing themselves. In 1974 Fr. Seraphim described the celebration of this Feast as follows:

“Despite the strong wind and cold, all are greatly inspired, and, after the service all sit on the rock and hear some reflections on the transfigured state of man and the world in the age to come, and on the two opposed dimensions of this world: space in its vastness, which so inspires us and fills us with awe; and time, very short, in order to teach us fear at not preparing for salvation in the brief moment of life given us.” Uttered amidst the silent vastness of the heavens and the sea of verdant mountains, such words of Fr. Seraphim would descend into the hearts of his listeners, reawakening in them a longing for their Creator.

Christmas in the snow-covered forest was always a happy time. Because Orthodox Christmas falls thirteen days after the Western Christmas, the fathers were even further cut off from all the commercialism that surrounds the holiday season. They could immerse themselves in the spiritual content of the Feast, singing the ancient hymns of the Nativity of Christ all through the night. This, however, did not mean that they neglected to follow heartwarming traditions like presents and Christmas trees (and also decorating the church with pine branches), to which normal Western souls have grown accustomed. The fathers felt that such things were especially important to the children, Theophil and his brother Matthew, who had never before had Christmas trees and presents because their mother had been against such things. In 1974 Fr. Seraphim recorded: “The Nativity of Christ is spent in peace and quiet by the three brothers and the pilgrim Matthew, after several days spent in preparation, cleaning, etc. Fr. Seraphim and Matthew go through the snow to gather Christmas greens and a tree, which Matthew chops down himself (his first Christmas tree). The ‘Yolka’ is held in early afternoon in the snowbound Tsar’s Room, with gifts for all, followed by a lecture by Fr. Seraphim on the life of Elder Macarius [of Optina].... In the evening, another meal in the Tsar’s Room, with a reading of Washington Irving’s ‘Christmas in England’ [\[1\]](#) — how pale and pagan compared to the true Orthodox preparation for and celebration of this

Feast!” [11](#)

The following year, it was Fr. Herman and Theophil who went to cut down the Christmas tree. After the opening of presents, the brothers heard a cassette tape of Haydn’s *Creation Oratorio*: “Very inspiring,” noted Fr. Seraphim. “Fr. Herman labored greatly at providing a festive spirit for all.” [12](#)

**I**N the modern world, holidays such as Christmas are preceded by weeks of tremendous advertisement and preparation, but when the day is over, so is the celebration. All that remains is to clean up the wrapping paper and eat the leftovers. But in Orthodoxy, as has been seen, the celebrations go on all week, both in the services in church and in the festivities outside of it. In the case of Pascha (Easter), they go on even longer.

Pascha, the “Feast of Feasts,” was made all the more radiant at the monastery by the six-week Lenten preparation for it. During this period, called the “Springtime of the Soul,” the brethren would strive to purify their hearts from all uncleanness. This was accomplished by the long Lenten services (eight to nine hours a day) filled with prayers of repentance and interspersed with readings from Patristic texts, by fasting according to the prescriptions of the Church, by frequent spiritual reading outside of Church services (each brother was required to read at least one assigned book during Lent), and by a general increased striving toward repentance, silence, and inwardness. The books read in church were all of monastic inspiration: *The Lausiac History*, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, and *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. According to tradition, the *Homilies* of St. Ephraim the Syrian were also to be read during the services, but since no English translation was available, the fathers substituted the *Fifty Spiritual Homilies* of St. Macarius the Great, and, in later years, the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory the Great. For their private spiritual reading, the brothers read such books as *Unseen Warfare*, the *Institutes* of St. John Cassian, the *Rule* of St. Pachomius the Great, and *The Northern Thebaid*. Fr. Seraphim, as mentioned earlier, tried to reread Blessed Augustine’s *Confessions* every Lent, in addition



to other books.

Those who, like Fr. Seraphim, looked on the labors of Lent as a blessing and opportunity rather than as a “punishment” were able to taste that sweet contrition of heart that only God’s grace can provide. In 1975, after the first week of Great Lent — which is the strictest week of fasting when almost no food is eaten — Fr. Seraphim had to hike up the mountain in the snow, twice in the same day. Having climbed the nearly two-mile road alone in the dark on his second trip, he noted that he was “exhausted but deeply joyful.” <sup>13</sup> With his body weakened physically, his spirit was allowed to soar: *My strength is made perfect in weakness* (II Cor. 12:9).

During the Holy Week before Pascha, the fathers followed the Optina practice of the “Bridal Chamber” service at Matins. The royal doors would slowly swing open, revealing the glow of multi-colored icon lamps burning before the altar table, as the brethren would sing the plaintive melody of the ancient hymn: “I see Thy bridal chamber adorned, O my Saviour, and I have no wedding garment that I may enter there. Make the robe of my soul to shine, O Christ, Giver of Life, and save me.” Having experienced this moving yet rare tradition while visiting Optina as a child, Bishop Nektary taught it to the fathers as another tie binding them to that holy monastery.

After 1970, when Archbishop Anthony had asked the fathers to go to San Francisco for the Feast, the Brotherhood spent every Pascha at the hermitage. Surrounded by God’s nature, the monks could experience the joy of the Feast without distraction. The bushes and flowers usually began to bloom at Pascha time as an image of the Resurrection; and the fathers decorated their church with myriads of the bright blossoms.

The fathers were to remember fondly the first Pascha they spent alone in their skete, in the year 1971. Since no priest or bishop would be coming to them to serve Liturgy on Pascha, the fathers went to Sacramento to receive Holy Communion a few days before the Feast.

Whenever he was in Sacramento, Fr. Seraphim was eager to visit a former

choir boy and acolyte of St. John of Kronstadt, the elderly Subdeacon Alexey Makushinsky. He would ask him detailed questions about what St. John of Kronstadt was like, how he served in the altar, etc., absorbing every word of this eyewitness testimony of such a great Saint. For him it was almost like getting to know St. John personally.

Together with his wife Zinaida, Alexey had also been a member of the Catacomb Church in Russia and a disciple of New Martyr Fr. Ismael Rozhdestvensky and his blood-brother, Fr. Michael. The Makushinskys told the Platina fathers many stories about these brother-confessors, which inspired the fathers to write the first Life of them and publish it in *The Orthodox Word*. And now, as the fathers sat in the Makushinskys' home shortly before Pascha in 1971, Fr. Herman looked up at photographs they had of Fathers Ismael and Michael, pictures which were to be printed along with their Life. "Since we'll be spending Pascha alone in the woods," Fr. Herman said, "can we borrow those pictures so that we can share the Feast with these two holy men?" The Makushinskys gladly consented.

The ensuing Pascha has been described as follows by Fr. Herman: "We prayed all night in the cold church, and came out exhausted from the services. Fr. Seraphim looked green from the fasting and lack of sleep. But he was so happy! It was just the two of us; and, as we broke the fast with the Paschal foods, at the head of the table were those photographs of Fathers Ismael and Michael, with their radiant visages! Remembering Holy Russia, which was in poverty and suffering under an inhuman yoke of slavery even as we ate, we prayed to these holy confessors and felt that they truly shared our Feast of Pascha with us.

"We cut open the *kulich* [Russian Paschal breads] that Fr. Seraphim had made. Now, Fr. Seraphim was a genius in many areas — but baking bread was not one of them. Every year he would bake the *kulich*, and every year they would turn out the same: burnt on the outside, and gooey on the inside. But we didn't care. We had everything: God, the saints and martyrs, our wilderness

skete.... After the meal I took a walk up the road, and saw wildflowers jutting out of the snow. I thought then that I was the luckiest man in the world!”

In subsequent years, of course, the fathers were to share this Feast with other brothers, which made the celebrations even more full. Describing the monastery’s Pascha in 1975, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “After very rich services all week, six brothers are together for the midnight service of Christ’s Resurrection. At dawn the four grown-up brothers arise to see the dancing sun (only Fr. Seraphim is in time to see it) and then walk over the mountain rejoicing in spite of the cold wind and the snow-clad mountains (29 degrees). All day long the bells are rung and everyone is in a very joyful mood. The weather becomes warm and clear the rest of the week, for the most part, and every day there are processions after the morning service — to the top of the mountain, to St. Seraphim’s Skete, St. Elias’ Skete, Lindisfarne, the new fountain (not yet dug), and around the monastery.”

Spiritual vigilance, kept with special strictness during Great Lent, was to be maintained during and after Pascha as well. Without the guarding of oneself, there was a tendency to fall into a state of sourness after tasting too much sweetness. One young convert, radiant after experiencing his first Pascha in the wilderness, was asked by Fr. Seraphim: “Well, how did you like the Feast?”

“It was wonderful!” replied the elated pilgrim.

“Don’t waste what you’ve been given,” Fr. Seraphim said, echoing the words of Bishop Nektary. “Don’t spill the grace. Keep it *there!*” As he said this, Fr. Seraphim tapped the young man’s chest, right on his heart.

The week following Pascha, called Bright Week, was more festive than any other time of the year. At the end of this week in 1975, on Thomas’ Sunday, Fr. Seraphim recorded: “Just like last year, the day is beautiful and clear (after rain the day before), and the oak leaves are green, although still tiny — a late spring, exactly corresponding to the late Pascha. After the service of Sunday morning, the brothers make a procession to the Transfiguration Mount, where the Gospel is read and Fr. Herman once more gives a stern sermon on avoiding the convert

pitfalls and on bringing forth fruit. Then the procession continued to the rocks in front of 'St. Chariton's Skete,' where a small meal was eaten while Br. Thomas [Anderson] read from the Gospel which was just given him for his nameday, and then some Paschal greetings were read. Then the grown-up brothers... went down the hill with the banners, followed by the frolicking cat; [another brother] went to Valaam to listen to sacred chants on tape; and the younger brothers, Thomas and Matthew, remained with Fr. Herman for a 'picnic,' drawing, and music. A very touching scene, and while all were still together, the voice of our beloved Archbishop John was heard on the tape-recorder, moving the heart yet more. [\[m\]](#) May God grant that such celebrations help us bring forth fruit! It was an inspiring time."

The Paschal cycle culminated fifty days after the Resurrection of Christ with the Feast of Pentecost. As at Christmas and Pascha, the church would be filled with natural decorations. Since Pentecost was the fulfillment of the Jewish Feast of Weeks, the completion of the sheaf offering, there would be oak branches along the walls and grass on the floor. On the grass the people would prostrate themselves during the special "Kneeling Prayers," calling down the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The monastery also had its own local traditions regarding festive foods. On the feasts of St. Herman (November 15/28 and December 12/25), the monks would make sweet pretzels, which St. Herman used to serve his orphans, and also "pea-pie," since it is known that St. Herman grew peas on Spruce Island and that the righteous Bishop who sent him to America, Metropolitan Gabriel, served pea-pie to his guests during Lent, baked by St. Herman's friend Theophan. Sometimes the brothers were also fortunate enough to have Alaskan salmon on St. Herman's day.

On the day of the Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (March 9/22) it had been a tradition in Russia to make cookies in the shape of the skylarks which were then arriving with the approaching spring. At the Platina hermitage, however, the spring brought not skylarks, but lizards! And so, in addition to making skylark

cookies for the feast day, Fr. Seraphim would make “lizard cookies” — a rather curious tradition which the children loved.

Finally, on the repose of the first Optina Elder, Leonid (October 11/24), there had been a long-standing tradition in Optina Monastery itself of serving pancakes, whether or not it was a fast day. [\[n\]](#) “When Elder Leonid was dying,” relates the last Optina Elder, Nektary, “he gave a testament to the [Optina] Skete, saying that the day of his repose should be commemorated by a ‘consolation’ for the brothers and that pancakes should be cooked for them on this day.” [14](#) This tradition had not been practiced anywhere after the forced closure of Optina, but the Platina monastery revived it and followed it scrupulously, to the great joy of Bishop Nektary. Thus, on Elder Leonid’s day in 1974, Fr. Seraphim recorded: “The two days of the Optina Elders (Starets Ambrose the day before) are spent in spiritual celebration. Supper on this day is pancakes, keeping alive the Optina tradition on Elder Leonid’s day, together with an inspiring talk on the Elder by Fr. Herman. May God keep the flame of these spiritual commemorations alive in us!” [15](#)

**D**ESCRIBING the monastery’s celebration of the Annunciation of the Mother of God on March 25/April 7, 1975, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “The five brothers sang — mostly in the cold church — the beautiful and inspiring service of the Feast, combined with the Lenten weekday service and the veneration of the Cross. Just to remain Orthodox, to go through the Fast and sing the services — is a struggle, but what a reward awaits us!”

Time and again, the fathers received foretastes of heavenly blessedness: spiritual consolations which gave them strength to continue their struggle, like blissful rest at the end of a day’s toil. When the hardships of life would mount to a point which seemed almost beyond endurance, an ineffable joy would suddenly be ushered in, coming not from anything outside, but from within the daily life itself, from the divinely revealed pattern of Church services.

Fr. Seraphim loved the services because they represented an actual

participation in the life of another dimension — a dimension without the presence of which life on earth would truly be meaningless. To him, the services were a stepping-stone to eternity.

There is a natural tendency among people who have been Orthodox for a long time to fall into a rut, to allow their attendance in church to become a habitual obligation, a futile test of endurance. Not so with Fr. Seraphim. Never one to squander time, he always made maximum use of the services. As Fr. Herman put it: “Fr. Seraphim was sensitive, precise. He would go into the church, and would come out benefitted.”

Fr. Seraphim would be in church every morning at 5:00 a.m., forcing himself out of bed in his cold cell on frosty winter days long before dawn. He was adamant that not a single day go by without the performance of the complete cycle of services. Sometimes Psalter readings could be shortened, but not one service was to be skipped. In the early years, when the fathers were alone at the skete, they followed this rule even when they had to spend all day in town. At those times they would celebrate the services in the car, with Fr. Seraphim driving and Fr. Herman serving as “canonarch,” that is, reciting each verse to be sung. When more brothers came to the monastery, the fathers continued this basic monastic practice of traveling with prayer. As one brother who took several trips with Fr. Seraphim recalls: “These prayers consisted of the standard Trisagion prayers [\[o\]](#) and then a large number of troparia, mostly to various saints. The last hymn was always the magnification to the Mother of God. Coming back, we would always begin singing the troparion to St. Herman as we approached the skete. Fr. Seraphim knew all these hymns by heart, and they were sung not only on trips, but on various other occasions as well....

“When Fr. Seraphim had to go on a five-hour trip down to the San Francisco Bay area, he would take the service books in the car with him; and, if he wasn’t driving, he would read and sing all the services on the way down. He would also take with him the Lives of Saints in Russian, and would translate to the brothers aloud the Lives of the saints of that day, in order to give them a little

something.” [16](#)

Another brother recalls how, when traveling, everyone in the car would take turns saying the Jesus Prayer aloud, on their prayer ropes.

Fr. Seraphim tried to ensure that no brothers were deprived of the regular cycle of services just because they had to run errands. When a brother would for some reason miss a service, Fr. Seraphim would even go to church and perform the service all over again with him.

The music of the Church services was an integral part of Fr. Seraphim’s spiritual life. According to the Holy Fathers, music is the form of communication closest to the soul, and thus the first thing that the soul perceives upon entering Paradise. The most spiritual music, of course, is that of the Church. As Fr. Herman told the brothers, “The most refined classical music leads the soul to prayer, but the music of the Church is the music of prayer itself.” It was for this reason that Fr. Seraphim did not seek to listen to classical music during his years as a monk, even though this music had once had such a profound formative influence in leading him to God. In his first years at the skete he listened to classical music not at all. It was only later, when the children and young monastic aspirants came, that classical music tapes were played in order to refine the souls of the younger generation, many of whom had been corrupted by the carnal rhythms of contemporary cacophony.





Fr. Seraphim's cell, called "Optina." Photograph taken in February 1993.



Fr. Seraphim in his "Optina" cell in 1981. On the wall are portraits of the Optina Elders. On the stand in the corner is an icon of his patron in the world, St. Eugene of Alexandria, and on the door his patron in monasticism, St. Seraphim of Sarov.

Many American converts to Orthodoxy are attracted to the melodies of Byzantine chant, which with their minor keys sound so mystical to Western ears.



Fr. Seraphim, however, felt most akin to the simple Russian chant. He was never dogmatic about this personal preference, and in fact thought that arguments over the relative superiority of Greek and Russian chant were pointless. It was just that the pathos of the Russian chant, including its ancient “Znamenny” and “special” melodies, somehow struck deep chords in his soul. As the melodies combined with the words of liturgical poetry and were repeated over the course of many years, they became a part of his being. His soul literally became attuned to them. Like many Russians, he sometimes wept when certain hymns were sung, especially the penitential hymns of Great Lent. [\[p\]](#)

Outside the Church services, Fr. Seraphim would strive to remember God by saying the Jesus Prayer throughout the day, whether while working, resting, or taking a walk. The brothers were reminded to do likewise. From the very beginning of the skete’s existence, Fathers Seraphim and Herman had instituted the traditional monastic practice of saying the Jesus Prayer aloud whenever entering a room. This practice had been followed by the monks of ancient times in order to foil the tricks of demons, who were known to enter the cells of desert-dwellers without warning.

We have already mentioned that Fathers Seraphim and Herman, in the tradition of Bishop Nektary, carried out the private “Optina Five-hundred” cell rule of prayer in addition to the regular Church services. [\[q\]](#) Fr. Seraphim performed this rule primarily at night, before the icon corner in his cell, [\[r\]](#) with its blue oil lamp burning softly before the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God. He kept a stump in his cell, which, as he noted in his Chronicle, was “in remembrance of St. Seraphim’s stump, for Jesus Prayer.” [17](#) During his times of private devotions, he would pour out his heart before our Lord Jesus Christ, and also before His Most Pure Mother, for whom, as we have seen, he had an especially great love. Only the dwellers of heaven know how often he sighed, wept, and prostrated himself before the holy images in the silent solitude of his forest cell.

As valuable as these private devotional times were, they were never to take

the place of prayer in church for any of the monks or brothers. As Archbishop Averky pointed out: “While the Holy Fathers call the private prayer of each individual believer the ‘breathing of the spirit,’ the common service, performed by the whole assembly of the faithful, is as it were the breathing of the whole Church organism — the whole Body of the Church.” The Platina fathers always tried to make sure that everyone living at the monastery took part in the reading and singing on the kliros. While services were being conducted, people were discouraged from standing off in a corner by themselves. Once, when the brothers were laboring to praise God on the kliros, Fr. Herman went up to one brother who was deliberately standing apart and asked him to join the others. “Don’t bother me,” the brother said with irritation, “I’m praying!” Fr. Herman looked at him. “Tell me the truth,” he said. “When I walked up to you, you weren’t praying. You were judging, weren’t you?” The brother had to admit that Fr. Herman was right. This was a good lesson for him, and he went to pray with his brothers on the kliros.

**D**ESPITE Fr. Seraphim’s great love for the Divine services and his consequent study of their Typicon (rule), he never strove to become perfectly adept in Typicon “correctness.” He had seen too many cases of people who get so caught up in the technical aspect of the services that they forget to pray, or — even worse — totally lose their spiritual peace during services because they see others doing it “wrong.” Fr. Herman jokingly called such people “Typicon chewers.”

Fr. Seraphim dealt with this problem in a series of articles on the Typicon which he wrote for *The Orthodox Word*. There he stated: “One must have a clear idea of what the Holy Fathers had in mind when, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they compiled the Divine services for the benefit of us, the faithful. Mere outward knowledge of the services — their history, difference between the Greek and Russian Typicons, etc.—is of decidedly secondary importance; this knowledge can make one an ‘expert’ in the Typicon, but that is not what is

needed today. *The Divine services must be spiritual food from which the faithful can take real nourishment for eternal life.* Everything else is secondary to this aim. The situation of Orthodox Christians in the modern world is too desperate to allow us the luxury of being merely ‘correct’ in the performance of the Divine services. It is far better, while indeed knowing as well as possible the high standard which the Church offers us, to be ‘incorrect’ and deficient and, reproaching ourselves for our deficiency, nevertheless, *singing and praying to God with love and fervor according to our strength.*” [18](#)

This, of course, was what the majority of the fathers’ readers wanted to do. And the fathers, having obtained so much spiritual benefit from the daily prayers and practices outlined above, wanted to inspire these people to share their way of life, according to their strength and circumstances. In his Typicon articles Fr. Seraphim tried to raise the present standard of Orthodox participation. “In pre-Revolutionary Russia,” he wrote, “in parish churches Vespers and Matins, as well as Nocturnes, Compline, and the Hours, were served *daily*, and this is surely the *norm* against which the Orthodox practice of today must be measured. The Divine services of Sundays and feast days, and the eves of these days, are the very *minimum* of any normal church life today, without which Orthodox piety simply cannot be inculcated and preserved. And these days must be spent in a holy way. There do remain a few parishes and homes where an Akathist is regularly sung on Sunday afternoons, but the former pious Russian custom of gathering in homes on Sundays and feast days to sing religious songs or ‘psalms’ has all but been swallowed up by the tempo of modern life. And how many Orthodox Christians still keep the eves of feasts in a fitting manner, devoting them to the All-Night Vigil (or Vespers) and prayer, and not to worldly entertainments?...

“The realization of how far we fall short of the ideal (that is, *normal*) Orthodox life and practice should be for us the cause, not of discouragement, but rather of a great desire to know and seek this ideal, as far as we are able in the admittedly very distracting conditions of modern life. Above all we should know

that this ideal is a very practical one and does not require of us either tremendous efforts which are simply beyond our strength, or the attainment of some exalted ‘spiritual’ state without which one dare not begin to sing praise to God....

“For people who live in the world and are engrossed in the cares of life, great ascetic labors are almost out of the question. How important it is, then, for such people to take maximum advantage of that pleasant and inspiring labor which the Holy Church presents to their striving souls — the daily cycle of the Church’s prayer. Even a small, if regular, degree of participation in this life is already capable of making an Orthodox Christian *different* from other people, opening up to him the special way of thinking and feeling which is the life of Christ’s Church on earth.” [19](#)

Fr. Seraphim spoke these words from his own experience of consciously building an Orthodox corner of America. And why, he thought, could there not be a great many more such corners — wherever there are gathered a few Orthodox Christians who truly love God and *will* to serve Him with constancy?

## *The New American Pilgrims*

*Monasteries — for the Church, for religion, are the same as universities, colleges, clinics — for science. In our days, the foundation of a traditional monastery is more useful than the formation of, perhaps, two universities and a hundred public schools.*

—Constantine Leontiev

**I**N traditional Orthodox societies, monasteries have always been an integral part of the spiritual life of people in the world. In making periodic pilgrimages to monasteries, Orthodox laypeople would be spiritually recharged. From monasteries they would bring the leaven of otherworldliness to their daily lives in the world.

Now the ancient practice of Orthodox pilgrimaging had come to America. In the early years of the Brotherhood, the fathers had promoted this through a series in *The Orthodox Word* entitled “A Pilgrimage to Holy Places in America.” Fr. Herman had even drawn a map of these holy places for pilgrims to follow. <sup>1</sup> “The modern American pilgrim,” he points out, “does not roam the vastness of this land as a pilgrim did in days of yore, with a pilgrim’s staff and a sack containing a Bible, the *Philokalia*, and a measure of dry bread for sustenance, beholding in his heart visions of resplendent monasteries modeled after the holy abodes of the Jerusalem on high. Instead, the pilgrim of today travels in comfortable cars on soft-cushioned seats. He finds little room for *podvig*, essential to genuine pilgrimaging. But such is the reality of today, and what is he to do? Within the heart of each modern God-seeker, there is still the concept of a

divine abode and a haven for his soul. The modern American pilgrim is to create a new equivalent of ancient pilgrimaging, and that is where our contemporary humble attempts at monasteries fit in.”

Fr. Seraphim’s Chronicle is full of references to pilgrims, especially in their teens and twenties, who came to the St. Herman Monastery. Many of them came with no idea of what to do with themselves, wanting, as Fr. Seraphim himself once had, to make sense out of their lives. Through some way unknown to the fathers, their hermitage was listed in the *Whole Earth Catalog* as a spiritual community where people lived a back-to-earth type of life. This brought a number of non-Orthodox visitors who otherwise would not have known about it.



One of the crosses that the fathers erected alongside the road leading to the monastery and over Noble Ridge. Northwestern view from the lower crest of the ridge.

Fr. Seraphim would go out of his way to talk with pilgrims who were truly looking for something. In order to have the talk undisturbed and at the same time give city people a taste of nature, he would offer to take them on walks, leading them along the lower crest of the ridge — where large Russian crosses had been erected and from where the vast mountainous scenery was visible. One young

man who had the good fortune to accompany Fr. Seraphim on many such walks recalls: “On these occasions it was possible to talk about almost anything. Fr. Seraphim had a wide-ranging knowledge of the world, and he could speak masterfully on any number of subjects. But he always directed the conversation toward a spiritual end.” At other times Fr. Seraphim would sit and talk with the pilgrims individually on a log within a shady oak grove near the monastery.

More than a few pilgrims went through life-changing experiences at the hermitage. In February 1976, Fr. Seraphim recorded: “A young pilgrim, P. H., came from Burlingame [California] to spend the holiday weekend. He stays until Monday, February 3/16, and seems to respond well to the services and the silence (and the unexpected snowstorm which left two inches of snow), taking part in our labors to send out the new *Orthodox Word*. He has been Orthodox two years, is twenty-one years old, and hopes to attend seminary at Jordanville in the fall. On returning home he wrote to us: ‘I want to thank you from the depths of my heart for your kindness and help.... My choice [to attend seminary] was made for me at the skete. I prayed for St. Herman’s help and received a favorable answer. I know I am not worthy of this calling, but may God help me to fulfill His Holy Will.’ Fr. Herman presented a diary to him and instructed him on keeping a record of his spiritual life. Further, he wrote to us: ‘I found that peace can be planted into the heart when you are taken from the world and placed in a place chosen by God. I enjoyed my visit very much and learned to see what the so-called necessities of worldly life do to the soul. They strangle it and deny God. I saw when returning to Burlingame how corrupt the world really is.... May God continue to bless you. I hope you will be able to grow and continue to help the Orthodox of these last times by preaching the true Orthodox Word!’” <sup>2</sup> Later this young man became a hieromonk.

The fathers and their hermitage were also able to give strength and hope to monastics who, for whatever reason, were living in the world. One of these was a monk from San Diego who had been born without use of his arms. A kind and gentle soul, he accepted the cross of this disability with patience and humility.

On the third day of his first visit to the monastery, he was taken to a newly built cell in the woods where, as Fr. Seraphim wrote, “a bond of spiritual friendship and oneness of mind is sealed as he becomes a brother in absentia of our monastery.” [3](#)

Whole families made pilgrimages to the skete as well, just as in Orthodox lands. Throughout the centuries problems had arisen from this only when lay people “wanted to have their cake and eat it, too”; that is, to move with their families dangerously close to sequestered monastic communities, thus to enjoy the benefits and consolations of monastic life along with all the benefits and consolations of married life. Often this resulted in the monks *also* “wanting to have their cake and eat it, too” — which meant the death of monasticism through idiorrhythm, the departure of monks, and the closure of the monastery.

Fortunately, the fathers did not have this problem. The austerity of their life helped prevent it, and thus there remained a healthy and fruit-bearing relationship between the monks and the families who came regularly. On the feast of St. Herman in 1974, one pilgrim stood up at the end of the meal and spoke for his family and all the assembled pilgrims, telling of their joy on visiting the skete — that “spiritually we only live from visit to visit, and treasure each time what we acquire here.” [4](#)





Fr. Seraphim on a walk with monastery pilgrims along the lower crest of Noble Ridge, September 1972. *Photograph by Timothy Ryan, courtesy of Fr. Nektas Palassis.*

Similar feelings were expressed by the Andersons. When they came to spend a weekend on the third anniversary of Maggie's repose, Fr. Seraphim noted: "The family does not want to leave, so close has the bond become between them and our monastery." [5](#)

**A**MONG the pilgrims were people who had somehow become spiritually "extinguished." Fr. Seraphim wrote the following about two Orthodox young men who came from Sacramento to visit for a few hours: "They are typical of

the spiritual confusion of today's youth, and merely 'being Orthodox' has not helped them, since those around them have 'become accustomed' to the faith and have not taught them to treasure it. The younger boy wished to stay for several days but was afraid to. Perhaps this acquaintance with an Orthodox monastery will help them to find their way back to the true faith. Fr. Seraphim talked with them and sang with them the Supplicatory Canon to the Mother of God." [6](#)

Another pilgrim was in a similar state but for different reasons. He was a convert to Orthodoxy, having gone through Eastern religions and spending several months on Mount Shasta [\[a\]](#) before spending a year and a half in the monastery in Boston and then getting married. As Fr. Seraphim recorded in his Chronicle, this man "came to California first of all to revisit Mount Shasta in the vague hope of finding his fellow occultists of those days — in vain. He 'would like' to settle in a small town like Mount Shasta, but realizes it is unrealistic — but rather than sobriety, he gives an impression of being somehow 'quenched'— having given all his obedience to an elder, he is left with nothing himself. Our 'small-town' Orthodox families in California are much better off." [7](#)

What the wrong application of eldership had done to this convert, Vatican II had succeeded in doing to a Roman Catholic monk who visited the hermitage. The monk was kindhearted and generous, a fine Christian, and yet as Fr. Seraphim noted, he seemed "bored and extinguished, as if someone had told him: 'The war is over and you lost.'" [8](#)

The fathers did what was in their power to rekindle the spark in those who had lost it. But they did not force the issue — they did not try to put *new wine into old bottles* (Luke 5:37). When, for example, one monastic aspirant left without having shown much interest in anything, Fr. Seraphim wrote: "We did not try to give him too large a dose of inspiration, knowing by experience that a person must freely and eagerly want it before it can do him any good." [9](#)

Although tirelessly patient with those suffering souls who sought the truth in simplicity of heart, Fr. Seraphim did not like to waste time with people who

only wanted to “play” with Orthodoxy, to try out another flavor of Christianity. As we have seen, dilettantism was Fr. Seraphim’s particular bugbear. He noticed how Orthodoxy has a tendency to bounce off those who think they “know better.”

On August 29, 1975, three Anglican monastic brothers visited the hermitage. A year earlier they had started their own monastery in a rented house. “Their Rule,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “is still being formed, and is rather an Anglican-Benedictine Rule, though being ‘developed’ quite freely.

“On hearing that they felt ‘Celtic Christianity’ to be their root (they are all of English blood), the fathers spoke with joy to them about St. Cuthbert and other Western Saints — only to discover that their ignorance of them is as total as their ignorance of Eastern Christianity....

“On Saturday morning, August 17/30, Fr. Seraphim took them to St. Elias Skete and then further up the road, to discuss with them and answer their questions. They did not ask many questions and evidently were not very pleased to hear that ‘Orthodoxy is the answer to your search; obtain it and everything else can be given.’ They evidently want to have both a Christianity and a monasticism of their own making, so they can be ‘comfortable’ with it, as they said several times.”

At meals they would not eat the food, drink the water, or even use the silverware offered them by the fathers, but would only touch what they themselves had brought with them in plastic containers. In church they stood in the back, drowning out the fathers’ services with their own.

“In the afternoon,” Fr. Seraphim continues, “... they announced that they would be leaving a day early in order to receive communion in an Anglican retreat center the next morning.... It was obvious by then that they would not be ‘comfortable’ with Orthodoxy, which demands so much (it ‘overwhelms’ them, they said). On Saturday morning they did not come to services, but had their own service in the guest house. They left in their white robes (which they alternate with black and gray), with shaved heads, pectoral cross, bare feet in

sandals — evident strangers to Holy Orthodoxy, prepared to ‘do it their own way.’ Fr. Seraphim’s final words to them: Don’t mix Orthodoxy with anything else. If you want Orthodoxy, go into it deeply; if not, leave it alone and don’t take anything from it — not icons or Jesus Prayer or anything else.

“A week later [one of the brothers] sent a scolding letter, accusing the fathers of pride, sarcasm, of being ‘self-appointed fathers,’ etc. They were particularly insulted by [our veneration of] the Tsar!” [10](#)

Contrary to Fr. Seraphim’s final advice to them, they later published a pamphlet on the Jesus Prayer, one of the aspects of Orthodoxy they felt comfortable with.

**S**EVERAL of the monastery’s pilgrims were from non-canonical Orthodox jurisdictions, i.e., those that were not in lawful relationship with the Church. If the pilgrims were in this position simply because they insisted on having Orthodoxy “according to their own opinion,” there was little the fathers could do for them. If, however, their plight was the result of unfortunate circumstances or ignorance, the fathers gave them all they could.

Some of the pilgrims had been so misled by their leaders that it rent Fr. Seraphim’s heart to hear their tales. One pilgrim, a priest from a non-canonical jurisdiction, had been left with only five people in his flock. “Now he does not know what to do,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “—stay as he is and accept a well-paying job as head of some social welfare company, or ‘become a monk,’ or what. It was obvious he was starved for someone to talk to who had experienced something of what he has gone through, as he is very much alone spiritually and intellectually. He has already been to Boston and Jordanville. He discovered *The Orthodox Word* in San Francisco in 1970 at our former shop, being intrigued by the portrait of Tsar Nicholas II on the cover — now he has his portrait in his room, regarding him as a martyr. He left obviously much moved by his visit, but God knows what the future holds for him. I had a very good impression of him as one of the ‘true Americans,’ removed from fakeness, in whom Orthodoxy

could take root — but God only knows if it will.” <sup>11</sup>

Another priest from a non-canonical jurisdiction who came to the hermitage asked the fathers to find out how he could be received into the canonical Orthodox Church. Fr. Seraphim had several long talks with him. Later he wrote to Bishop Laurus in Jordanville, informing him in detail of the priest’s situation and asking what could be done for him. “We ourselves,” he wrote, “would very much like to see him received into our Church... because he seems to be a ‘normal American’... who would be able to give Orthodoxy to some ordinary people who would never think of going to a ‘Russian’ Church.” <sup>12</sup> Eventually this man was canonically ordained as a priest of the Russian Church Abroad, and became a prolific publisher of Orthodox books and magazines in the English language.

If a person belonged to a non-canonical church but was humbly searching for the right way, Fr. Seraphim generally saw more hope in him than he did in a person who belonged to a canonical body but was self-righteous about his jurisdictional membership. Regarding a pilgrim who was preparing to become a seminarian, he wrote: “After years in the Metropolia and its mentality, he has become zealous for the Synod, <sup>[b]</sup> but we found him rather full of himself and not too aware of the more sensitive problems in our Church today.” <sup>13</sup>

**B**ESIDES people seeking spirituality, there came to the hermitage people seeking just plain sanity: drug addicts, people with criminal records and serious emotional problems, confused youth who had no idea what to do in the world or how to adjust to it. The *Whole Earth Catalog* listing drew some of these people, but many came from Orthodox churches and families.

*They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick* (Matt. 9:12–13). Just as the Lord had spent much of His ministry among the outcast and the scorned, so the Platina fathers were to devote much time and energy to giving hope and support to society’s misfits.

In the earliest years of the skete’s existence, Fr. Seraphim had foreseen that

it would attract the abnormal and sick — due in part to the general sickness of the times, and also to the fact that the sick naturally flock to religion for healing. He even felt that the St. Herman Brotherhood might have a special calling in this regard. He noted the significance of the name of the Cathedral near their former bookstore, “Joy of All Who Sorrow,” and saw possible parallels between their work and that of their founding hierarch, Archbishop John, who had attracted and helped many disturbed people and had even had them referred to him by other bishops. There was a danger, Fr. Seraphim realized, of being harmed by contact with the sick, and therefore he believed the Brotherhood should do nothing to openly attract them. “But if they come,” he affirmed, “we are obligated to help as we can. Perhaps even our Brotherhood — through no doing of our own, for we have no talent in this line — may become a kind of last recourse for such people, who cannot thrive in a more ‘normal’ environment such as Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville.”

“We have no talent for healing,” he continued, “no psychology, no spiritual power and insight. All we can offer is *work* in Christ’s vineyard, and the Truth of Orthodoxy to all who will receive it. *Work and prayer* (the monastic cycle of services) to exhaustion will give the devil little chance to attack through the mind and may make him use cruder methods (fire, loss of property, etc.) which can be more directly fought.” [14](#)

The *podvig* of helping troubled people was often thankless and occasionally — as in cases of the potentially violent — downright frightening. But Fr. Seraphim’s own years of loneliness and suffering had left a deep place in his heart for those who had been hurt by life. He too had once known what it was like to be alienated from the society around him.

Those people who came to Fr. Seraphim in their pain always felt he had time for them. Long after the evening prayers would end, he would sacrifice his sleep and his beloved solitude in order to care for some troubled soul in the candle-lit church.

A catechumen once came to the hermitage to spend a few weeks, having



already spent some months in another monastery. Fr. Seraphim wrote of him: “He was obviously very disturbed and confused, deeply wounded and cold. He undertook his obediences like a robot, and several times screamed because ‘the demons are beating me.’” [15](#)

“What are we going to do with this man?” Fr. Herman wondered.

“I’ll take care of him,” Fr. Seraphim replied. Fr. Seraphim tried to talk with and get to know the guest, but was only met with a face like stone, stiff and robotic gestures, and mechanical yes-or-no answers. After two days, Fr. Seraphim succeeded in getting a little natural response out of him: a smile. But then the man suddenly ran away, leaving his suitcase and a few books behind. The fathers awaited his return, but he never came back. “God knows if we will be able to help such ones,” wrote Fr. Seraphim with a heavy heart. “But if they come we must try.” [16](#)

**S**TILL other pilgrims came through the missionary encounters that the fathers had on their brief excursions into the world. The following story is an example.

One spring day in 1974, a bearded young man named Gary was sitting in the Redding public library. He was twenty-three years old, on his way from Mexico to Washington on another leg of a five-year fruitless “search for the meaning of life.” All his worldly possessions were in his knapsack in the Redding bus depot; he had almost no money with him — just a bag of bananas which someone had given him at a grocery store. He put his head on the table in the library, in despair at finding that everything he had read about philosophy and religion was absolutely empty and there was no answer to the questions he was asking.

About ten minutes later Gary saw a tall man, with long hair and a beard, in a worn black robe, walk into the library and proceed to look at the rows of books. The man looked even poorer than Gary himself. Gary walked up to him with the bag of bananas. “Here,” he said, “for your community, or whatever it

is.”

Fr. Seraphim thanked him, and within a few minutes was already leaving the library with some books. Walking down the sidewalk he suddenly saw Gary running up to him. Little did Gary know that this black-robed figure had celebrated Pascha only four days before, that he still had the joy of the Resurrection in his heart.

“After talking for a few minutes with Gary,” Fr. Seraphim later recalled, “I could see he was sincere, and after finding out that he lived ‘nowhere,’ I invited him to come and stay with us for a while and find out about Orthodoxy. He instantly accepted, and he was with us until Sunday, attending all our services, reading and working, and sitting in a kind of wide-eyed stupefaction as we tried to open up Orthodoxy to him — about which he had never heard except through Dostoyevsky.... He had been in despair, and was overwhelmed at finding people who still believe in God, and not in a fake way. The Paschal chants touched his heart, and he asked permission to sing ‘Christ is Risen’ softly, together with us.... He left without knowing fully what had happened to him, but at least he knew that a ‘ray of light has dawned.’” [17](#)

When Gary was saying farewell to Fr. Seraphim at the bus station, he began to weep. “I don’t know what will become of me,” he said, “but you’ve given me hope. And I’m deeply grateful for the connection you’ve made between me and Jesus Christ!”

A few days later, Fr. Seraphim was to write about Gary: “Somehow I have a very good feeling about him, and he seems to be part of that ‘normal America’ which is thirsty for Orthodoxy without knowing.... [18](#) May God grant that, as I told him, in exchange for a bag of bananas he may receive the Kingdom of Heaven!

“All of this somehow reminds me forcibly that — just as our Saviour could say of Nathaniel that ‘here is a true Israelite in whom there is no guile’—so too is there such a thing as a ‘true American’: an honest, forthright, normal person for whom Holy Orthodoxy is quite ‘natural’; and the harvest of these ‘true



Americans' is only beginning. Doubtless the 'Orthodox Americans' will be few in number, but it is precisely the *best part* of America which is waiting to hear the glad tidings of Orthodoxy.... [19](#)

“Seeing an ‘outsider’ like Gary who is absolutely stunned on encountering Orthodoxy, one clings all the more tightly to the precious treasure which we unworthy ones have, and which is not for us alone.” [20](#)

## *An Orthodox Survival Course*

*The chief distinguishing feature of Orthodox thought is that it seeks, not to arrange separate concepts in accordance with the demands of faith, but rather to elevate reason itself above the usual level — to strive to elevate the very source of understanding, the very means of thinking, up to sympathetic agreement with faith.*

—Ivan V. Kireyevsky [1](#)

**I**N the summer of 1975, with the aim of giving their pilgrims a foundation in Orthodoxy, the fathers held a three-week course, naming it the “New Valaam Theological Academy” after St. Herman’s settlement in Alaska. Four college-age men attended the course, all of them converts; and Fr. Herman accordingly gave an opening talk on not becoming a “crazy convert” but receiving Orthodoxy *fully*. [2](#)

In the weeks that followed, Fr. Herman talked on Pastoral Theology and on literature — “very revealingly,” [3](#) as Fr. Seraphim noted in a letter; while Fr. Seraphim gave an in-depth series of lectures on the development of Western thought from the Great Schism to the present. At the request of the community in Etna, Fr. Seraphim’s lectures were recorded, which resulted in over seventeen hours of tapes. For all the talks, Fr. Seraphim wrote extensive outlines, organizing the vast historical and philosophical research he had done for *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*. This was the ripened fruit, not only of that early research, but also of his rich store of experience as an Orthodox Christian. He was now much better equipped than before to present his

knowledge in a way that would have a practical application to the lives of contemporary people. He called his lecture series a “Survival Course” because of his belief that, in order for people to survive as Orthodox Christians nowadays, they had to understand the apostasy, to know *why* the modern age is the way it is. In order to protect oneself, one must have an idea of the strategy of one’s enemy. Fr. Seraphim also called his classes “a course in Orthodox self-defense.”

One of Fr. Seraphim’s students recalls taking the course soon after his baptism:

“Each day the novices and pilgrims gathered in the ‘Tsar’s Room.’ When Fr. Seraphim began to teach, everyone instinctively hung on each word. He was not pedantic or flashy in his presentation. Everyone could understand him, for he spoke slowly, with much thought.

“One of the by-products of our study was to read *secular* sources. We were driven to the Shasta County Public Library to check out many books. These were our texts.”

**I**N introducing his course, Fr. Seraphim stated: “A great danger of our times and the movement of those who come to Orthodoxy is what one might call, in very down-to-earth language, the phenomenon of ‘spiritual baboons,’ i.e., people who are outwardly Orthodox and even pride themselves on being very correct in their Orthodoxy, but deep down are not really changed, do not grow in Orthodoxy, and remain very much a part of the modern world, which is rooted in anti-Christianity. Because they do not grow, they do not see how much in conflict is true Orthodoxy with the world which they have still not left behind. As opposed to this, a conversion to true Orthodoxy must be total; it must affect everything one does, the way one looks at things and the way one values everything in one’s life. Otherwise, Orthodoxy becomes just one more sect, differing only outwardly from other sects such as Mormonism. If one looks at all the sects, they are all on the same level; they are all as if one-dimensional and have nothing deeper; and they differ only insofar as they have different dogmas.

If Orthodoxy is simply one of these, then it is not the truth, but simply one sect out of many. But Orthodoxy is precisely *Truth*, which should totally change one's life. Therefore, in order to have this total Orthodox worldview, one must be constantly educating oneself, going deeper and broader....

“This course will concentrate on the most important movements and most important writers who helped form the mentality which we have today. If one is not aware of all this, one can still be Orthodox, of course, but one is running a great danger, because the movements of thought around one, which have been formed over the last eight or nine centuries, affect one directly, and one cannot know how to answer them without knowing where they are right, where they are wrong, and how they have arisen. One can be in a very precarious position, even in the position of an ‘Orthodox fundamentalist’ who simply sits in his corner and says, ‘Oh, I believe this and everything else is evil.’ This, of course, is very unrealistic because you have to have contact with the world: your children are going to school, you read newspapers, you have contact with people who believe different things and even with Orthodox people who don’t know what they believe. If you are not aware of what’s going on, your Orthodoxy will be infected, without your even knowing it, by all kinds of modern ideas. You will be going to church on Sunday, and the rest of the week living by some kind of different standard, which can be disastrous.... In order to avoid this we must follow the advice of St. Basil [the Great] and begin to learn to take from the world around us wisdom where there is wisdom, and where there is foolishness to know why it is foolishness.”



Ivan V. Kireyevsky (1806–56).

**I**N bringing his students to an Orthodox understanding of modern Western civilization, Fr. Seraphim relied on the work of his predecessor in this field, the nineteenth-century Russian philosopher Ivan V. Kireyevsky [\[a\]](#) About Kireyevsky he said: “Having himself been a son of the West and gone to Germany to study with the most advanced philosophers, Hegel and Schelling, Kireyevsky was thoroughly penetrated with the Western spirit and then became thoroughly converted to Orthodoxy. Therefore he saw that these two things cannot be put together. He wanted to find out why they were different and what was the answer in one’s soul, what one had to choose.” More than just a thinker, Kireyevsky was a transmitter of living Orthodox tradition, directly connected to the lineage of Blessed Paisius: he was a close disciple of Elder Macarius of Optina, and his wife had received spiritual instruction from St. Seraphim of Sarov. Together with Elder Macarius, he prepared for publication many volumes of the writings of the Holy Fathers. As Fr. Seraphim observed, he found the principles for his philosophy in the Holy Fathers, “not by a mere printing of their texts, but by a creative reception of their teaching, and applying it to life today. This is that ‘philosophy of wholeness’ which [Ivan] Kontzevitch finds to be the

most important part of Kireyevsky's thought, but which has been little appreciated up to now." [4 \[b\]](#)

Quoting at length from Kireyevsky's philosophy, Fr. Seraphim traced the modern apostasy, which began with the Schism of Rome, to a special characteristic of the Western mind: the conviction that outward rationalism outweighs the inward essence of things. While Rome was still part of the ecumenical Church, this cultural trait, this reliance on logical syllogisms, was kept in balance; but when Rome broke away, this trait gave rise to a whole system of errors, causing a general blindness to those truths which lie outside the sphere of logic. "It is quite clear to us," wrote Kireyevsky, "why Western theologians with all their logical scrupulousness could not see the unity of the Church in any other way but through the outward unity of the episcopate.... This also explains why they could assign an essential worthiness to the outward works of a man; why, when a soul was inwardly prepared but had an insufficiency of outward works, they could conceive of no other means of his salvation than a definite period of purgatory; why, finally, they could assign to certain men even an excess of worthy outward deeds and give this worthiness to those who had insufficient outward deeds" (i.e., the whole Latin system of indulgences and supererogatory works of the saints).

Fr. Seraphim speculated that throughout history the devil had been trying various instruments, various cultural mentalities, by which to form the apostasy. It so happened that the Roman mentality was the one that worked: "Once having been taken away from Orthodoxy and free to develop according to its own principles, it became the source of a whole new philosophy which had power to overwhelm the whole world finally in our time."

The greatest changes took place during the "Middle Ages," which, as Fr. Seraphim noted, was a phenomenon that occurred only in the West. All other civilizations — whether Christian like the Byzantine or Russian, or non-Christian like the Chinese or Indian — had but two periods: the ancient period, when the civilizations were governed by their own worldviews, and the modern

period, when they have become overwhelmed by the West.

In the Scholasticism of the Middle Ages, Christian teaching becomes “systematized” and subordinated to logic. As Fr. Seraphim observed, “*logicalness* becomes the first test of truth, and the living sources of faith second. Under this influence, Western man loses a living relationship to truth. Christianity is reduced to a system, to a human level.... It is an attempt to make by human efforts *something better than Christianity*. Anselm’s proof of God’s existence is an example — he is ‘cleverer’ than the ancient Holy Fathers.”

“**T**HE Roman Church,” wrote Kireyevsky, “fell away from the truth only because it wished to introduce into the Faith new dogmas unknown to Church tradition and begotten by the accidental conclusions of Western logic. From this there developed scholastic philosophy within the framework of the Faith, then a reformation of the Faith, and finally philosophy outside the Faith. The first rationalists were the scholastics; one might say that nineteenth-century Europe finished the cycle of its development which had begun in the ninth.”

This was the main thread that Fr. Seraphim was to follow throughout his series of lectures. He traced it through the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, with its exaltation of man as the measure of all things, and its replacement of the scholastic method with the “scientific method”; to the “Enlightenment” period, with its naive optimism in the unlimited progress of man’s reason. By the end of the Enlightenment, rationalism reaches a dead end with the devastating critiques of it by Hume and Kant, who show that “pure reason” cannot exist by itself: all “truth” is subjective. Having gradually dethroned God through the centuries and put human reason in His place, Western man is now left with nothing — save himself. He now has no absolute standard; everything is relative. This in turn gives rise to the various existentialist and nihilistic philosophies which have shaped the modern age. Our era, the one beyond the “Age of Enlightenment,” Fr. Seraphim called the “Revolutionary Age.”

There were other threads that Fr. Seraphim traced as well. When in the

Middle Ages Christianity began to be reduced to an outward, human level, it was inevitable that the Kingdom of God would begin to be seen in earthly, chiliastic terms. Little more than a century after the Schism, the Roman Catholic abbot Joachim of Fiore began to preach a coming “Third Age of the Holy Spirit” on earth, which became the theological basis of some early Franciscan movements. During the Protestant Reformation, chiliasm appeared in fanatic millennialist sects such as the Anabaptists in Munster, Germany, who founded communes, abolished private ownership of property, and enforced their ideas through terror, killing off anyone who expressed dissent and then displaying their bodies as a public warning. The Munsterite Anabaptists called their city the “New Jerusalem” and claimed to be living in the “Third Age,” the age of the triumph of saints.

During the “Enlightenment,” chiliastic expectations became divorced from belief in God: the idea of theocracy became replaced by socialism. Fr. Seraphim talked at length about the eighteenth-century secular chiliasts, the Utopian Socialist “prophets”: Robert Owen (who tried to set up a model community of “order, neatness, and regularity,” and wanted to abolish the family), Charles Fourier (who called for the free development of human nature through the unrestrained indulgence of passions, which he said would result in a fantastic paradise on earth wherein men would live to be 144 years old), and Comte de Saint-Simon (who took Freemasonry as his ideal, anticipating the sunrise of a new age in which the barriers of religion and nationality would be thrown down).

In the nineteenth century, chiliastic expectations were seen in the Communism of Marx and Engels, which, as Fr. Seraphim noted, “called itself scientific but was quite utopian.” And in the twentieth century, millennialist schemes were attempted — in ways reminiscent of the Munsterite Anabaptists — first by Lenin and then by Hitler, who even called his reign the “Thousand-Year Reich.”

Another underlying thread in the history of the apostasy is the search for



universal monarchy. In his notes Fr. Seraphim wrote: “The thirteenth century saw the theory of the universal monarchy of the Pope — that all the land in the world belongs to the Pope as Christ’s representative on earth, and he gives it to landholders. The climax of this point of view occurred at the jubilee of 1300 in Rome, when Pope Boniface VIII seated himself on the throne of Constantine, arrayed himself in a sword, crown and scepter, and shouted aloud: ‘I am Caesar — I am Emperor.’ This was not just an act but an indication of something extremely deep in the whole of modern thought: the search for a universal monarch, which will be Antichrist.”

Since the “Revolutionary Age” is the one in which we now live, Fr. Seraphim devoted considerably more time to it than he did to previous epochs. He gave an entire lecture on the French Revolution, showing its roots in the philosophy of Voltaire and Rousseau, and in the influence of Freemasonry and the Illuminati. In another lecture he spoke on the conservative reaction to the destruction of the Old Order: in the West by Joseph de Maistre, Donoso Cortes, etc.; and in Russia by Nicholas I, Alexander III, Constantine Pobedonostsev, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Yet another talk concerned the revolutionary philosophers Mikhail Bakunin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and twentieth-century revolutionary movements.

Fr. Seraphim’s final section of lectures, like his final chapters for *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*, took as their subject the “New Religion.” Here he spoke on the philosophies which arose out of the “new subjectivism” after the dead end of Enlightenment reason, as well as on the modern “religious” philosophy of evolution and its “Christian” spokesmen. [\[c\]](#) Finally, he showed other symptoms of nihilism and chiliasm (both of which he called the “*central theme* of the modern age”): the decline from humanism to subhumanism in art and architecture, the rise of spiritualistic phenomena, and the chiliastic “prophecies” of Teilhard de Chardin, Nicholas Fyodorov, Nicholas Berdyaev, and Henry Miller.

THE preceding pages, being only a brief synopsis filled with generalizations, cannot do justice to the careful, highly detailed piecing together of ideas and philosophies, historical events, and political figures that Fr. Seraphim accomplished in his course. We have not even mentioned many of the themes that Fr. Seraphim touched on: themes such as the transformation of art, of the Lives of Saints, and even of the very concept of sanctity during the Middle Ages; the revival of paganism, astrology, alchemy, witchcraft and superstition, as well as the beginning of the concept of personal fame, during the Renaissance; the birth of modern science in Renaissance “mysticism,” and its subsequent rise, during the Enlightenment, in the “world-machine” of Newton and Descartes.

Fr. Seraphim’s course had behind it all the research that would go into any university course, and yet it provided something which could not be acquired in any university. “In universities today,” Fr. Seraphim told his students, “one comes across people who have learned a great deal, who are like walking encyclopedias, and yet there is no unity to the knowledge, no point to it at all. It is better in that case to go slowly, aware of how much one does not know rather than simply to grasp learning for the sake of learning. There must be a direction to all this learning....

“Nowadays the very principle of such an education is almost lost in the world. You can’t go to the university and obtain that kind of knowledge, since there everything is fragmented, divided up into different departments. The very idea of having knowledge which holds together is considered medieval superstition, backwards; and therefore one becomes a specialist in one particular sphere with a narrow point of view and does not know what the purpose of it all is. Some of the great men, now gone, who were at Jordanville had this key, this principle of learning. We should make a special point of learning from them about the necessity of having a point of view, of making everything, all our learning, centered on a particular point. And that point, of course, is Orthodoxy,

whose aim is the salvation of the soul.”

For an Orthodox Christian in today’s universities, learning from this point is, again, a matter of “survival.” For example, a student without an Orthodox understanding of history may find himself at a loss if his teachers or peers tell him that “Christian civilization” is to blame for the current ecological crisis. He will not be aware that it is not Christianity itself, but the Western apostasy from it — beginning with ultimate trust in human logic and ending with the mechanistic worldview of Descartes — which has caused the modern-day exploitation of nature. As Fr. Seraphim explained: “Modern science was born [in the Renaissance] out of the experiments of the Platonic alchemists, the astrologers and magicians. The underlying spirit of the new scientific worldview was the spirit of Faustianism, the spirit of magic, which is retained as a definite undertone of contemporary science. The discovery, in fact, of atomic energy would have delighted the Renaissance alchemists very much: they were looking for just such power. The aim of modern science is power over nature. Descartes, who formulated the mechanistic scientific worldview, said that man was to become ‘the master and possessor of nature.’ It should be noted that this is a religious faith, which takes the place of Christian faith.”

**A**T the end of the summer course, Fr. Seraphim recorded: “The four students of the ‘New Valaam Theological Academy’ give sermons at the skete on Gospel passages chosen for them. Final classes are held, and in the afternoon the ‘graduation exercises,’ with playing of the ‘1812 Overture.’ The classes... have had a definite beneficial effect on all; but the application of this knowledge to life remains to be made.” [5](#)

In a letter to Alexey Young, who had just written an article on Kireyevsky for *Nikodemos*, Fr. Seraphim spoke more specifically on the students’ reaction to the course:

Enclosed is the article on Kireyevsky — excellent! Just what is needed! We

read it last night to the ‘New Valaam Theological Academy’ (the name of our ‘summer school’), and it came as a fitting conclusion to my own long series of talks... on the mainstream of Western thought, from Francis to Teilhard. Teilhard, by the way — for which I mostly read our article from ‘Christian evolutionism’—was greeted with real repugnance by everyone, as the arch-villain of Western thought. The most popular talk was probably that on nineteenth-century conservatism, of which the heroes were Nicholas I, Dostoyevsky, and Constantine Pobedonostsev. The students seemed to have benefitted greatly, especially Christopher, for whom this is a kind of substitute for a college education — he is positively inspired right now. It was very good for me to organize all my thoughts, also. [6](#)

The “New Valaam Theological Academy” was held again in the summer of 1977, and every summer after that. The sessions grew in attendance every year, but were only about half as long as the first one. The tongue-in-cheek aspect of it all — the high-sounding name of “Academy,” the “graduation exercises” and official-looking printed diplomas — had all been designed by Fr. Herman. But what began as tongue-in-cheek eventually turned out to have some real significance. During Fr. Seraphim’s lifetime, at least ten people (many of whom were converts) were ordained to clerical ranks with no other formal theological training than that of the “Academy.” Archbishop Anthony, who wanted written proof that the clergymen in his diocese were theologically trained in case someone should ask, took the Academy’s diplomas very seriously.

At the end of each session, the fathers emphasized that the diplomas indicated not the end of the students’ Orthodox education, but only the beginning. For the rest of their lives they were to build on what they had acquired, handing it back in the form of Christian activity. Many pilgrims, having first come to the hermitage as greenhorns in Orthodoxy, were given confidence to go out and do much in the ready harvest of the mission field.

After Fr. Seraphim’s repose, the Academy graduated hundreds more

people, over forty of whom are now Orthodox clergymen. But perhaps the most far-reaching effects of that first “summer school” of 1975 will come from the lecture notes and tape transcriptions of Fr. Seraphim’s “Survival Course,” which are now being prepared for publication. The sketchy transcriptions alone, in manuscript form, have already evoked an incredible response from those who have been fortunate enough to read them.

Perhaps Fr. Seraphim never realized that his course could be so powerful. If the response of those who have had a preview is any indication, this work — this summer exercise of “organizing his thoughts” in order to educate four college-age boys — could be one of the most significant achievements of Fr. Seraphim’s life.

## “Spiritual” Self-Opinion

*If anyone takes a stand on his own righteousness alone, and thinks to redeem himself he labors in vain and to no purpose. For every self-opinion of one’s own righteousness in the last day will be manifested as nothing but filthy rags, as the Prophet Isaiah says: “All our righteousness is as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).*

—St. Macarius the Great (†390) [1](#)

*The devil does not hunt after those who are lost; he hunts after those who are aware, those who are close to God. He takes from them trust in God and begins to afflict them with self-assurance, logic, thinking, criticism. Therefore we should not trust our logical minds. Never believe your thoughts. Live simply and without thinking too much, like a child with his father. Faith without too much thinking works wonders. The logical mind hinders the grace of God and miracles. Practice patience without judging with the logical mind.*

—Elder Paisios of Mount Athos (†1994)

**I**N a previous chapter we have discussed the syndrome, deadly to monasticism as indeed to all Christian endeavor, known as “trusting oneself.” Closely bound up with this is a syndrome that Fr. Seraphim identified as “spiritual” self-opinion. When caught in this snare, a person thinks and claims he is acting according to “spiritual principles,” but in actuality he is following his own will, satisfying and preserving his own ego, and remaining hardened in his

own opinions. “A web of ideas is spun,” Fr. Seraphim explained, “which has no real contact with reality.... Usually the devil uses one little idea to ‘catch’ us, knowing that it will catch us in something we may be emotional about; and that ‘catch’ is sufficient to get us to weave the whole spider web which trips us up.” <sup>2</sup>

Fr. Seraphim discussed this problem many times in his writings and letters, and also in his dealings with brothers at the hermitage. In 1973, for example, he wrote to a former monastery brother whom he felt was caught in the trap of self-opinion: “By yourself you will only spend your whole life trying to *preserve* your soul, under the pretext of your understanding of Church ‘principles’ and the like; and he who would preserve his soul will lose it. Only if you try to lose your soul for Christ, by really committing yourself, will you finally gain it.” <sup>3 [a]</sup>

In 1975, Fr. Seraphim wrote about a leader of the super-correct faction whom he felt was caught in the same trap: “A sure sign that Fr. ———, whatever his outward arguments, is *spiritually wrong* in this case: he terribly grieved one hierarch (Vladika Averky’s letter to us is one of despondency, and if Fr. ——— will say in self-justification that Vladika Averky ‘misunderstood’ him, then it is Fr. ———’s fault for not communicating to him in a decent and understandable way), and he terribly upset at least two others; and yet not one word that Fr. ——— is ‘sorry’ or in any way is anything but ‘right.’ There is spiritual disaster ahead for this man; he has gone off the Orthodox track in so many ways of feeling and sensitivity that I once thought he understood.” <sup>4</sup>

On St. Patrick’s day in 1977, when talking in the refectory to assembled brothers and pilgrims, Fr. Seraphim spoke of how one can deviate from the path of salvation by falling into “spiritual” self-opinion. He began by relating a true story from the early history of the Brotherhood:

“In San Francisco there was a person who got on fire with the idea of the Jesus Prayer. He began adding prayer to prayer, and he finally came to, in the morning, five thousand. Right in the middle of the world, in the middle of the city, in the morning, before doing anything else, before eating, he was able to say five thousand Jesus Prayers on the balcony, and he felt wonderfully

refreshed and inspired. Then it happened one morning that somebody else came out right underneath the balcony and began busying himself and doing something while this person was saying his last thousand; and it so happened that this person was so put out by this that he ended up throwing dishes at him! How can you deal with a person occupying himself with the spiritual life, with the Jesus Prayer, when all of a sudden, while he is saying it, he is able to start throwing dishes? This means that inside of him the passions were free, because he had some kind of deceived idea or opinion that he knew what was right for himself spiritually. He acted according to his opinion, but not soberly, not according to knowledge; and when the opportunity came, the passions came out. In this case it is more profitable *not* to say those five thousand Jesus Prayers, but to do something else that is spiritual.” [5](#)

In 1982, about a half year before his repose, Fr. Seraphim again spoke of the danger of letting our opinions eclipse God and His will for our lives. It was Great Wednesday, the day the Church remembers the betrayal of Christ by Judas; and Fr. Seraphim gave a sermon on how Judas’ self-opinion, hiding behind a mask of righteousness, had caused him to deliver up God Himself for crucifixion. After reading the designated passage from the twenty-sixth chapter of St. Matthew, Fr. Seraphim began:

“In this passage of Scripture, we read how, as our Lord prepared for His Passion, a woman came and anointed Him with very precious ointment, having been inspired by God to do this. It is very touching how our Lord was accepted and was prepared for His Passion by simple people. At the same time, Judas — one of the twelve who were with Him — looked at this act, and something in his heart changed. This was apparently the ‘last straw,’ because Judas was the one in charge of the money and he thought that this was a waste of money. We can even see the logical processes going on in his mind. We can hear him think about Christ: ‘I thought this man was somebody important. He wastes money, he doesn’t do things right, he thinks he’s so important...’ and all kinds of similar little ideas which the devil introduces into his mind. And with his passion (his



main passion was love of money), he was caught by the devil and made to betray Christ. He did not want to betray Him; he simply wanted money. He did not watch over himself and crucify his passions.

“Anyone of us can be exactly in that position. We have to look at our hearts and say, ‘Which passion of mine will the devil try to hook me on in order to cause me to betray Christ?’ If we think that we are something superior to Judas — that he was some kind of a ‘kook’ and we are not — we are quite mistaken. Like Judas, everyone of us has passions in his heart. Let us therefore look at them. We can be caught with love for neatness, with love for correctness, with love for a sense of beauty: any of our little faults which we *cling* to can be a thing that the devil can catch us with, and then we can begin to think logically on the basis of that passion. From that logical process of thinking we can betray Christ, unless we watch over ourselves and begin to realize that we are filled with passions, that *each one of us is potentially a Judas*. Therefore, when the opportunity comes — when the passion begins to operate in us and logically begins to develop from a passion into betrayal — we must stop right there and say, ‘Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner! What am I doing?’

“The simple woman who heard the call from God and anointed Christ for burial — she was doing what we must be doing. We must not look at life through the glasses of our passions, nor see how we can ‘fit’ life into being what we would like it to be — whether this is a life where there is peace and quiet, or where everything is in order and in the right place, or where there is a lot of noise and excitement. If we try to make life ‘fit’ like this, a total disaster will result. In looking at life, we should accept all the things which come to us as God’s Providence, knowing that they are intended to wake us up from our passions, to lead us to God, or to show us some God-pleasing thing we can do. When we accept what comes to us, we begin to be like the simple woman in the Gospel, who is proclaimed to the ends of the world, as our Lord says, because of the simple thing she did — pouring the ointment upon Him. Let us be like her: sensitive to watching God’s signs around us. These signs come from

everywhere: from nature, from our fellow men, from a seeming chance of events.... Almost every day in our lives, there is something that indicates to us God's will. We must be open to this.

“We must become more aware of the passions within ourselves and begin to fight against them, and not let them begin the process which was seen in Judas. Judas started from a very small thing — love of money, being concerned for the right use of money — and from there he fell. From such small things we betray God the Saviour. Let us be sober, seeing *not* the fulfillment of our passions around us, but rather the indication of God's will: how we might wake up and begin to follow Christ to His Passion, and save our souls. Amen.” [6](#)

# PART VIII





Fr. Seraphim, during Great Lent of 1971, typing in the monastery refectory which he was then in the process of building.

## ***“It’s Later Than You Think!”***

*Monasticism — martyrdom — suffering an incurable affliction are all the same thing spiritually. Ask God to give, not merely guidance or help — but martyrdom, suffering, a path where you can make a supreme effort, “get involved, ” become on fire to serve God.*

—Fr. Seraphim, 1972<sup>1</sup>

*A monk is he who forces himself.*

—St. Abba Dorotheus of Gaza

**S**INCE his repose, Fr. Seraphim has come to be remembered as an ascetic. This is a true representation of him, but one that should not be exaggerated.

Fr. Seraphim was not like his preceptor Archbishop John in taking on a superhuman battle against the basic requirements of eating and sleeping. Whereas Archbishop John usually ate only once a day, at midnight, Fr. Seraphim ate two or three meals a day along with the rest of the brothers. And while Archbishop John slept only an hour or two a night without ever lying down, Fr. Seraphim usually slept a normal amount and in a normal fashion — although he sometimes stayed up late in prayer.

Ascetic exploits like those of Archbishop John are for the very few, specially chosen by God. The rest of us, if we were to try to take them on, would not be good for much else. Bishop Sava once said that if he were to try to keep up with Archbishop John’s special ascetic exploits and non-stop schedule of pastoral work, he would be dead within two weeks.

As mentioned earlier, however, all monastics without exception are to fight against comfort, which leads to laxness in spiritual life and prayer, and opens the door to gluttony, sexual passions, vanity, etc. Following the sober counsels of the Holy Fathers, Fr. Seraphim took on ascetic labors in moderation, that is, labors which were according to his strength and did not hinder his ability to perform his daily tasks. These ascetic labors were not “special,” but were standard for monks in traditional Orthodox monasteries like those of Mar Sabbas, Mount Athos, Mount Sinai, Valaam, etc. Fr. Seraphim’s bed, for example, was a typical monastic bed: narrow, hard, made of two boards with no mattress on top. His cell was the simplest imaginable, made of unpainted wooden boards and with no insulation. His tiny wood-stove would not keep the cell warm more than an hour after he had gone to bed at night, so on winter mornings he would wake up to temperatures below freezing.

Fr. Seraphim usually wore two cassocks, one over the other, and often they were dirty because of the outdoor work he did. His black-leather monastic belt was wide, and was tied with string. Most of the time he wore heavy work boots.

According to Sylvia Anderson, “The essence of Fr. Seraphim was to be seen in his hands. He had refined hands with long, thin fingers, which looked suited for only intellectual pursuits — for something high-minded like playing the violin. But they were banged up, covered with lumps and bumps, cuts and burns, from all the hard physical work he did.

“Likewise with Fr. Seraphim himself: here was this powerful, refined intellectual, and yet he was humble. He never exalted himself at all. He did not live in an ivory tower, but was in the middle of things.” [2](#)

During the years he lived at the skete, Fr. Seraphim did not take a shower or bath, washing himself with nothing except a wet rag. In time his strikingly long beard, reaching down to his waist, became matted. One would think that one who did not take a bath for so long would begin to smell terrible. But Fr. Seraphim never had a bad odor. This same phenomenon may be noticed in places like Mount Athos, where monks follow the same rule. As St. Nikodemos

of Mount Athos has written, this is because of the abstinence, lack of excess, and hard work in a monk's life, which evaporate and digest unnecessary bodily liquids. <sup>3</sup> More recently, Elder Paisios of Mount Athos has pointed out: "Through the ascetic life man becomes, in some way, immaterial and, even though he does not wash, he shines and is fragrant." <sup>4</sup>

Fr. Seraphim never imposed his ascetic practices on the other brothers at the monastery. He never told them not to take a shower; and never in his life did he scold someone for "eating too much."

**E**VEN without taking on special ascetic labors, Fr. Seraphim reached a level of dispassion that was remarkable for a modern-day monastic, especially one who was an American convert to Orthodoxy. Perhaps this was because, upon his conversion, he had deeply and thoroughly repented of the sins of his youth, particularly his indulgence in sensual pleasure. He had truly died to his former self, thereby receiving an entirely new life in Jesus Christ. In him were fulfilled the words of the Apostle Paul: *If ye through the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live* (Rom. 8:13).

People who lived at the skete noticed that Fr. Seraphim paid no attention to the taste of food. As Thomas Anderson later recalled: "Fr. Seraphim didn't enjoy food or care what it tasted like. He just ate to get enough energy to keep going, like fueling up a car. He ate whatever was put in front of him, without putting anything else on it, not even salt and pepper. And when it was his turn to cook, he prepared the most simple and basic food possible. When he cooked spaghetti, for example, it was just tomato paste and pasta, with no spices in the tomato paste.

"One time someone donated to the skete a good collection of spices in bulk quantity. When it came my turn to cook, I wanted to try out all these new spices. I was a kid then, and didn't know what I was doing. I cooked a potato dish and filled it with all kinds of spices, especially with a huge amount of cloves.

"At the dinner table, Fr. Herman was upset, asking what kind of a

concoction I had created. But Fr. Seraphim just ate it without saying a word.” [5](#)

Alexey Young likewise recalls: “I remember once asking Fr. Seraphim what his favorite food was, and he didn’t answer me. He didn’t even say, ‘I don’t have any’; he just changed the subject! Once, when he was coming to visit our home, someone had found out from Fr. Herman that there was, after all, something Fr. Seraphim liked. I don’t now recall what it was, but my wife fixed it for him — and I thought, ‘This will really please him.’ So a plate was put in front of him with what we believed was his favorite food, and he never paid any attention to it. He didn’t even seem to notice that the plate was in front of him. That was it.” [6](#)

In later years Fr. Seraphim’s lack of concern for the taste and quality of food became the subject of jokes at the skete. Fr. Herman good-heartedly teased him about it. One day some of the younger pilgrims thought they would play a practical joke on Fr. Seraphim. For dessert they gave a scoop of vanilla ice cream to all the brothers, but to Fr. Seraphim they gave a scoop of mashed potatoes. Fr. Seraphim winked at Fr. Herman to show that he was aware of the joke, but without the slightest objection he ate the mashed potatoes. Afterwards the pilgrims felt remorse for what they had done. [7](#)

The former Novice Gregory, who lived at the skete during the last year of Fr. Seraphim’s life, also recalls that Fr. Seraphim never made comments about the food.

All this is all the more remarkable when we compare it to what Fr. Seraphim was like during the dark years immediately prior to his conversion. As we have seen, at that time he had gone to gourmet restaurants as often as his limited means would allow, comparing and commenting on the taste and quality of the food and wine. Then he had tried to lose himself in the pleasures of the palate, and now he was totally dead to that. To Alison, his friend from those days, this is actually not so surprising. As she later pointed out: “The Scriptures say that God transforms our minds. [\[a\]](#) What many people don’t understand about Christianity is that people are really and totally *changed*. That’s what God does



to people who give their lives over to Him.” Fr. Herman has put it this way: “Fr. Seraphim *never* missed what he had given up. He was reborn. He was a new being, with a different vision.”

There was undoubtedly a connection between Fr. Seraphim’s dispassion toward food and his putting to death of sexual desire. In Patristic theology the sin of gluttony is closely linked to sexual sin, not only because they are both sensual pleasures, but also because the latter was made possible by the former. According to the Patristic exposition of the book of Genesis, in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve did not hunger for food, nor did they experience sexual desire. <sup>[b]</sup> The primal transgression occurred through eating, and it was only after this sin that sexual desire appeared in man. This was because, when Adam and Eve fell, their bodies took on the curse of suffering, sickness, and death, and it became necessary to reproduce their kind so that the human race would not be destroyed by death. <sup>8 [c]</sup>

From Fr. Seraphim’s writings and recorded talks, we can glean something about his understanding of sexual passion, and from his translations of Patristic counsels and his own spiritual journal, we can find some indications as to how he struggled against it and put it to death in himself.

Fr. Seraphim did not ascribe to sex the exalted significance that the modern world gives it, nor did he see it as a way to knowledge or realization of God, as do many modern spiritual writers — including some modernist Orthodox theologians. <sup>[d]</sup> In keeping with the Patristic teaching mentioned above, he regarded sexual activity as having come into being since the fall. In one of his talks he said: “The whole sexual function in man is seen to be taken from the animal creation. It was not meant to be that way in the beginning.” <sup>9 [e]</sup> This understanding alone must have helped him greatly to put sexual desire to death in himself. As a Christian, a monk, and a true philosopher, he always strove to look upward, toward heavenly things, beyond the fallen state of the creation and toward the original state, which is like that of the future age. Sexual desire was foreign to the state to which he was striving — a state characterized by purity

and virginity. Affirming the Patristic teaching that there was no sexual desire in the first humans before the fall, Fr. Seraphim wrote that “this... is the clearest indication of their dispassionateness before the fall, and of the fact that their minds were directed first of all to the glory of the heavenly world above.” <sup>10</sup>

About the value of virginity, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “It should not be thought that any of the Holy Fathers looked upon marriage as a ‘necessary evil’ or denied that it is a state blessed by God. They regard it as a good thing in our present state of sin, but it is a good thing that is second to the higher state of virginity in which Adam and Eve lived before their fall, and which is shared even now by those who have followed the counsel of the Apostle Paul *to be even as I am* (I Cor. 7:7–8).... <sup>[f]</sup> The original state was like the state to which we will return, when there will be no marriage or giving in marriage (Matt. 22:30), and everyone will be in the virginal state.” <sup>11</sup> <sup>[g]</sup>

Toward actual sexual *sin*—i.e., the types of sexual relations and practices specifically forbidden by God in the Scriptures — Fr. Seraphim had a feeling of revulsion. Even more than indulgence in the pleasure of eating, he saw indulgence in forbidden sexual pleasure as a sure path to hell, and he was dead to it. When people who were given over to sexual sin came to visit the monastery, he could often read it in their faces. As early as 1961 he had written that those who are controlled by the power of sexuality are “conditioned to the fact of *limitation*, of restriction to this world and its forces,” and that this is “revealed in the face.” “That is why,” he wrote, “the face is so ugly that is under the rule of sexuality, of contentment in the things of this world, of satisfaction with something less than human — less than Divine-human.” <sup>12</sup>

Fr. Seraphim did have compassion on those who were honestly struggling against sexual sin. However, when sexual sin itself was mentioned in conversation, Fr. Seraphim would not wish to discuss it, but would simply say, “It’s disgusting.” This was a mark of his own repentance for the sins of his youth, for according to the Holy Fathers the proof of true repentance is a feeling of disgust for one’s former sins. In Fr. Seraphim were fulfilled the words of the

fifth-century ascetic, St. Isaiah the Solitary: “When a man severs himself from evil, he gains an exact understanding of all the sins he has committed against God; for he does not see his sins unless he severs himself from them with a feeling of revulsion. Those who have reached this level pray to God with tears, and are filled with shame when they recall their evil love of the passions.” [13](#)

In the above-mentioned book of Saints Barsanuphius and John, Fr. Seraphim selected and translated a considerable number of passages which deal with warfare against sexual sin. Some of these passages speak of bodily labor as a way to fight against sexual passion, others speak of fervent prayer and the immediate cutting off of passionate thoughts, and still others speak of avoidance of vainglory and familiarity. [\[h\]](#)

In a private spiritual journal he kept from 1974 to 1976, one can find a record of how Fr. Seraphim put such Patristic teachings into practice. In one place he wrote of some of the primary means by which he struggled against fleshly thoughts: “Refusal to converse with them; Jesus Prayer; constant occupation with the Holy Fathers to avoid idleness of mind.” He also noted that the fight against “vainglory, self-opinion, [and] pride” were key in this struggle, and in another place he wrote: “Bodily labors and Jesus Prayer are the answer.” [14](#)

In several passages of his journal, he jotted down notes on how to struggle against carnal thoughts particularly during rest periods in the daytime: “Must wage warfare by filling the mind with the Holy Fathers, or else these thoughts will predominate.... Do not converse with them! Do not rest with an empty mind!... Rest must not be a time of ‘relaxation’ of spirit.... God grant me to learn to hate bodily repose, and struggle against it!... Jesus Prayer and reading of Holy Fathers must become constant — else I will fall into a worldly rut and be caught by the devil’s insinuations.” [15](#)

In other places he outlined what to do in order to ward off fleshly temptations during sleep at night: “Even if exhausted at night, struggle to perform the [prayer] rule, keep from ‘relaxing’ spiritually.... There must be a

constant fight against relaxation in the struggle.” [16](#)

As such passages indicate, a salient feature of Fr. Seraphim’s asceticism was his striving to be *never idle for a moment*, but to be constantly occupied with some godly activity. When at times he had to wait for something, such as for the meal to end in the refectory, he would be seen with bowed head, saying the Jesus Prayer mentally with his prayer rope. He strove to remain in a prayerful state not only when working but also when engaged in conversation. As he noted in his spiritual journal, the way to stay free of worldly entanglements was “more attention to cell rule and reading of Holy Fathers, and inward attention and prayer even during necessary worldly conversations and activities.”

Fr. Seraphim’s diligence in this regard did not go unnoticed by those who were close to him. “Fr. Seraphim never stopped working,” says Vladimir Anderson. “He never stopped praying. While he was talking with you, his *chotki* [prayer rope] was always moving unobtrusively.” [17](#)

“Fr. Seraphim drove himself,” Fr. Herman recalls, “and drove me more than I did him.” Going from task to task, he walked quickly through the monastery. He was always concentrated, doing his work quickly and decisively, but never frantically. People who worked alongside him — printing, cutting firewood, tending the garden, etc.—remember being exhausted trying to keep up with him. “He put all his energy into his work,” says the former Novice Gregory, “and all his heart into his writings.”

“There should be a sense of urgency about work,” Fr. Seraphim noted in one place. [18](#) Repeatedly he warned, “It’s later than you think! Hasten, therefore, to do the work of God.” This latter statement, of course, had first of all an apocalyptic significance, for Fr. Seraphim strongly sensed that the tribulations of the last times were to come upon America as they had upon Russia. But the statement may have also had a more personal meaning for Fr. Seraphim. Looking back at everything, Fr. Herman has said: “He was like one obsessed

with death. ‘It’s later than you think’ was on his lips like a broken record.”

One can only speculate to what extent Fr. Seraphim, feeling that he was living on “borrowed time” since being healed in 1961 of a disease he regarded as fatal, had a presentiment of his impending death. It is worth pondering that, as early as 1955, he wrote in a letter: “Someday, rather soon, I shall die.” [19](#)

Outwardly, Fr. Seraphim’s body was well formed, tall and slender, with broad shoulders; he had perfect eyesight until his death, and a perfectly even set of white teeth without a single cavity. But inside, it seemed that some physical disorder gnawed at him. He often looked tired and sickly. Helen Kontzevitch noticed this, and voiced her concern when the fathers visited her.

In January of 1980 Fr. Seraphim had pains in his abdomen, which, as it turned out, were caused by a kidney stone. As in the past, he was unwilling to go to a doctor, but Fr. Herman compelled him. The doctor was able to extract the kidney stone without cutting him open, but Fr. Seraphim had to spend six days recovering in the Redding hospital. “Everyone was very worried about me,” Fr. Seraphim noted later; “I was very touched to hear how many people were praying for me.” [20](#) While in the hospital, he was informed by the doctor that he had had only one functioning kidney since childhood.

In his later years a few of Fr. Seraphim’s fingernails began to grow out unevenly and his hair and beard turned prematurely gray. Although he was six months younger than Fr. Herman, he appeared to be many years his senior, and some people even had the first impression that he was his father. On many occasions Fr. Herman, having noticed a pallor in his co-laborer’s complexion, ordered him to go rest. But Fr. Seraphim himself never complained, never called attention to his fatigue, and never said that he felt he had not long to live.

**F**ATHER Seraphim’s sense of urgency about work was directed most of all to the publishing activity of the Brotherhood. His constant concern was to produce as much soul-profiting material as possible with limited time and limited means. “Above all,” he wrote in a letter, “let us remember that these are

the golden years for us to produce what we can in the Lord's harvest!" <sup>21</sup> In another letter he observed: "The future, it is evident, is very dark. We ourselves do not know from one year to the next whether we will have another year of printing activity or not. We pray that God will give us at least a few more years, if only to print those Patristic materials which will help us and others to survive in the days ahead." <sup>22</sup>

Through Fr. Seraphim's determination came a tremendous literary inheritance. Shortly after his repose, his godson Br. Laurence noted that "Fr. Seraphim was able to produce a torrent of articles and books in a relatively short span of time — only seventeen years — covering every conceivable subject of interest and importance to the Orthodox reader." <sup>23</sup>

Fr. Seraphim did most of his writing in his humble cell on an old manual typewriter, often by candlelight. Above his desk he hung photographs of two revered men who had gone before him in disseminating the Orthodox Patristic worldview through the printed word: Ivan Kireyevsky and Archimandrite Constantine of Jordanville. <sup>[i]</sup>

Unlike some authors, Fr. Seraphim never took time to warm himself up to writing by taking a stroll, etc. Whenever he was given the time he would go quickly to his cell and immediately begin work. First he would write out a plan or outline by hand, and then he would type an article from that. He would write fast, looking up occasionally. And he would often cross himself as he wrote.



The St. Herman Monastery printshop, September 1972. *Photograph by Timothy Ryan, courtesy of Fr. Neketas Palassis.*

When at times Fr. Seraphim would fall into a state of discouragement, Fr. Herman would pull him out of it by dreaming up some writing assignment that would be sure to inspire him. Perhaps it would be a project they had talked about months or years earlier but had put off for some reason. “Why don’t you go and work on it now?” Fr. Herman would ask. Fr. Seraphim would brighten up and say, “Bless!” — and then go off to work with zeal.

In the spirit of monastic humility, Fr. Seraphim avoided signing his name to what he wrote. In one of his (unsigned) articles, he wrote that some of the necessities for success in a monastic path outside an already established monastery were “a lack of publicity and a desire to be ‘lost to the world,’ the absence of any desire to ‘be somebody’ or do such an important thing as ‘open a monastery’ and deep humility and distrust in oneself.” <sup>24</sup> Once Fathers Seraphim and Herman moved to the wilderness, therefore, they no longer listed themselves as editors in the pages of their magazine. For most of the years that Fr. Seraphim



was producing his phenomenal output of Orthodox literature, his name never appeared in print. In the words of Alexander Pope:

Who builds a church to God, and not to fame,  
Will never mark the marble with his name. [25](#)

**T**RANSLATING occupied at least as much of Fr. Seraphim's time as did writing. He and Fr. Herman labored much over making their translations of sacred texts as true as possible to the spirit and meaning of the original. They often had long discussions about the translation of a single word or phrase. Fr. Seraphim would translate from the Russian according to the standard word definitions, but Fr. Herman, whose first language was Russian, would point out other meanings intended by the author: where, for example, one idea was meant to parallel another later on. All these things had to be taken into consideration, and often suffered through. But no matter how difficult it became at times, Fr. Seraphim was always glad to do it. "This is my joy!" he used to say to Fr. Herman. Above all, the fathers strove to maintain a sense of *humility* before the texts they were translating, and reverence before the subjects and authors.

Fr. Seraphim did not confine his translating work to his cell or his editorial desk, but brought it to the refectory as well. At meals he would translate out loud from some spiritual treasure from Russia. As the brothers would listen and benefit from the reading, the translation would be recorded on tape. Later, the tape would be transcribed by one of the fathers' helpers, and then the transcription would be carefully checked by the fathers themselves.

Alexey Young recalls being present at some of these translating sessions: "Fr. Seraphim was such a good linguist. Often when I would come to the monastery, he would be simultaneously translating while reading aloud into a tape recorder at trapeza. It is an amazing thing to be able to do this. I knew that conscious choices had been made not to have electricity, a telephone, and such things at the monastery, so I couldn't resist teasing him about this tape recorder



after one of the meals. I went up to him and said, ‘Fr. Seraphim, I don’t think they had any battery-run tape recorders at Optina.’ He looked first at me and then at the tape recorder, and said, ‘Well, God has sent it to us, so we’ll make use of it until it breaks.’” [26](#)

Entire books were translated by Fr. Seraphim through this method: *Instructions for Monks* from the *Great Catechesis* of St. Theodore the Studite, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* by Fr. Michael Pomazansky, the *Life of St. Anthony of Optina* by Fr. Clement Sederholm, *Commentary on the New Testament* by Archbishop Averky, [li](#) the *Resurrection Sermons* of Fr. Dimitry Dudko, and the *Spiritual Counsels* of Abba Dorotheus.

**W**HILE the fathers primarily translated from the Russian language into English, occasionally it was the other way around. In 1971 they published a small Russian-language book on Archbishop John which was based on Fr. Seraphim’s English-language *prima vita* of the blessed one. Up until that time, little material on Archbishop John had appeared in Russian, primarily because he was still considered a controversial figure. It was Fr. Seraphim who insisted that the Russian book be completed. He typeset it himself; and, since he was not able to use the Linotype for the Russian characters, he had to do it all by hand. Witnessing him spend long hours at this tedious work, Fr. Herman marveled how he, an American, was performing such a labor of love just so that poor Russians could read about their own uncanonized Saint in their own language. Once he asked him why he was doing it. “Russians have given us so much,” said Fr. Seraphim; “they’ve given us the Truth. It’s our duty to give back to them.”

When the fathers went to the Divine Liturgy in Archbishop John’s Sepulchre on the fifth anniversary of his repose, they brought boxes of their brand-new book with them. All the Russians who were present received the book with joy. Although Archbishop Anthony expressed some concern about what Archbishop John’s implacable critics in San Francisco would say about the book, he himself found it to be very well written, and, as he confessed to the

fathers, he even shed a tear when he came to the book's conclusion.

**I**N addition to printing an issue of *The Orthodox Word* every two months, the fathers printed an eighty-page *St. Herman Calendar* every year, beginning in 1972. This complete Church Calendar in English included saints' commemorations, Scripture readings, and fasting guidelines for each day. Nothing like it had yet appeared in any language, for it contained extensive lists of local saints from virtually all the lands of the earth, together with the names of as-yet-uncanonized righteous ones. Much of this material had originally been translated from Russian sources by Br. Laurence even before he had come to the monastery. The fathers printed the first Calendar in a special issue of *The Orthodox Word*: an issue which, as Fr. Seraphim noted in his Chronicle, gave them more troubles in printing than any other. In succeeding years it was published separately, in a larger format and with feature articles and illustrations. Soon it became a tradition and an indispensable tool for English-speaking Orthodox worldwide. At the time of this writing, it is in its thirty-eighth year of publication. [\[k\]](#)

**W**ITH the aim of leading souls to salvation through the word of God, the fathers sent out many free subscriptions to *The Orthodox Word*, to libraries, poor monastics, people without means, and people in poverty-stricken countries. Nearly half their distribution was composed of such missionary subscriptions. "Why, we run a charitable institution!" Fr. Herman commented once. Fr. Seraphim rejoiced in this; he looked on their common labors as a *privilege*, and cherished the opportunity to do and give more. Once a young man came to the hermitage and told the fathers that he had been converted to Orthodoxy through a free missionary subscription to their magazine. This, Fr. Seraphim asserted to Fr. Herman, was a proof that their "free" labors were worth it.

Along with the privilege came the responsibility. The Platina fathers were sitting on a veritable gold mine of material. Besides having many exceedingly

rare books, they had priceless original manuscripts bequeathed to them by the last direct links to Holy Russia — people who had personally known Russian saints and martyrs. The fathers had acquired a wealth of knowledge and experience through being in contact with these links, from whose old and feeble hands they had received a commission to share this wealth until time ran out. It was no wonder that Fr. Seraphim pushed himself so hard. Once, when Fr. Herman asked his old friend Fr. Vladimir of Jordanville whether or not a particular Orthodox book was ever likely to be published, the latter replied, “Since you came up with the idea, only you will be the one to do it. If you print it, it will be done. If you don’t, nothing will be done.”

On one occasion, after a series of grueling days at the printing press, with many more lead plates stacked in the room waiting to be printed, Fr. Herman asked his co-laborer: “Is it really worth killing ourselves for this? Does anyone out there really care?”

Fr. Seraphim looked hard at him. “I thank God,” he said, “for every day that I can kill myself for Orthodoxy!”

## *Suffering Russia*

*These poor villages which stand  
Amidst a nature sparse, austere—  
O beloved Russian land,  
Long to pine and persevere!*

*The foreigner's disdainful gaze  
Will never understand or see  
The light that shines in secret rays  
Upon your bare humility.*

*Dear native land! While carrying  
The Cross and struggling to pass through,  
In slavish image Heavens King  
Has walked across you, blessing you.*

—Fyodor Ivanovich Tyutchev (†1864)

**T**HE stories that Bishop Nektary most loved to tell about Russia centered around his spiritual father, Optina Elder Nektary. As the Bishop told the Platina fathers, his Elder, through prayer and clairvoyant advice, had many years ago saved him from having to serve in the Red Army, and had saved his mother from imprisonment. Not all the Bishop's stories, however, had such happy endings. There was the heartrending tale of the forced closure of Optina in 1923, which his mother had witnessed personally. Some of the monks were martyred, others were incarcerated; and the monastery became inhabited by a Komsomol

“Liquidation Committee.” But even against this bleak background, Bishop Nektary was able to add a touch of his endearing humor. He told how, when the Soviet officials came to investigate Elder Nektary’s cell, they found children’s toys there: dolls, balls, lanterns, baskets. When asked why he had them, the Elder answered, “I myself am a child.” And when the officials then found some church wine and tins of food, the Elder said, “Have a drink and munch a little.”



Elder Nektary, the last elder at Optina (1858–1928). This original watercolor, based on a sketch by one of the Elder’s disciples, was given to the St. Herman Brotherhood by Ivan and Helen Kontzevitch.

“During his arrest,” Bishop Nektary related, “the Elder’s eye became swollen, and he was placed first in the monastery infirmary and then in the prison hospital. When he was leaving the monastery on a sleigh, his last words were, ‘Help me a little,’ so that they would help him into the sled. Then he sat down, blessed his path, and left for good.”<sup>1</sup>

As he told such reminiscences of the Holy Russia he would never see again, Bishop Nektary’s eyes became filled with tears. Once, as the Bishop drove away after having spent a long time at the St. Herman Monastery talking to the monks, Fr. Seraphim rang the church bells in a traditional monastic farewell. Fr. Herman, who had just been waving to the car, came back to find Fr. Seraphim

still ringing the bells and smiling with deep satisfaction. “What are you smiling about?” he asked.

Fr. Seraphim released the bell cord. “How fortunate you are to have Russian blood,” he said.

On another occasion Fr. Herman remonstrated him for this attitude, saying that every nation has its own things to be proud of.

“Bishop Nektary wept over Optina,” Fr. Seraphim said simply.

“What? Isn’t there anything in America that you would weep over?”

At this Fr. Seraphim smiled: “I wouldn’t weep over the Grand Canyon or Golden Gate!”

As a Russian, Fr. Herman felt reverence, awe, and some inferiority before the refined Byzantine-Greek culture that had given Russia its Orthodoxy. Not so with Fr. Seraphim: he much preferred Russian culture. One can identify two reasons for this. In the first place, Russia had been the last great protector of the Orthodox worldview, the continuation of the Byzantine model of Christian society; it had been the seat of the “Third Rome” which had restrained the power of Antichrist until the martyrdom of the last Tsar; and, through such thinkers as Dostoyevsky and Kireyevsky, it had nurtured a profound Orthodox philosophy of life and history in the face of worldwide apostasy. Secondly, Fr. Seraphim loved Russia for the profound suffering that its people had endured in his own times, lighting lamps of humble martyrdom and persevering confession of the Faith, from the Arctic Circle to the scorching desert. There were times when Fr. Seraphim would weep on beholding old Russian women kneeling and praying fervently in church. In these old *babushkas* he saw the vestiges of a glorious past: the dying breed of Russian exiles who remembered Russia as once she had been, who were fully aware of what their people had lost, and who were genuinely suffering together with those in their faraway homeland.

**B**EHIND the Iron Curtain, opposition to Christianity was obvious: materialism was forced on the people as an ideology. In the West the enemy was

much more subtle: materialism permeated all aspects of life, including religion, and was accepted unconsciously, thus being far more difficult to overcome. Fr. Seraphim believed that, by learning how their co-believers in Communist countries struggled against the open enemies of their Faith, Orthodox Christians in the free world could gain courage to fight their own battles against worldliness, and also to endure when more violent persecutions come to the West as well. He was convinced that the New Martyrs of the Communist Yoke, whose numbers far exceeded those of the early Christian martyrs, comprised the most important phenomenon of the twentieth century; and he felt their story had to be told. “As I see it,” he wrote in a letter of 1970, “there are two great gifts that God has given people today: in the Soviet world, the difficult gift of suffering, which by God’s grace will probably be the salvation of Russia; and in the free world, the gift of freedom — to speak and witness the truth and tell what is going on. How poorly this gift is being used among us — and how soon, perhaps, it will be taken from us. While there is daylight, we must speak out.” <sup>2</sup>

As early as 1965 the fathers had published articles on the suffering Russian Church, with information on Russia’s New Martyrs and appeals from persecuted believers. In 1968 an entire issue of *The Orthodox Word* had been dedicated to Tsar-Martyr Nicholas II, including an article on him written by Fr. Seraphim. Then, in 1970, the magazine began to be literally filled with the Lives of the New Martyrs. This continued until after Fr. Seraphim’s repose; during some years there would not be a single issue without such a Life.

The testimony of the martyrs, said Fr. Seraphim, “is the best gift Orthodox Russia has to offer the West.” <sup>3</sup> And in the opinion of many, it was the most important material the St. Herman Brotherhood was ever to publish. Fr. Seraphim expressed his wish that, by laying bare the experience of an intense life in Christ amidst the most gruesome and inhuman conditions, this material would “serve to wake us up out of our sleep of self-satisfaction and all-too-often pretended (or at least untested) Christianity!” <sup>4</sup>

In compiling the Lives, the fathers used information from people who had

had firsthand contact with the New Martyrs: people such as Elena Lopeshanskaya, a spiritual daughter of Archbishop Leonty of Chile who had served as a secretary to New Martyr Bishop Damascene Tsedrick; the aforementioned Alexey and Zinaida Makushinsky, living in Sacramento, who had known St. John of Kronstadt and had been the spiritual children of the New Martyr Fr. Ismael Rozhdestvensky and his brother Fr. Michael; Fr. Nicholas Masich, a priest in San Francisco who had been imprisoned in Soviet concentration camps and had left accounts of Martyrs Joseph the Silent and Gregory the Cross-bearer; Ivan and Helen Kontzevitch, who had preserved invaluable information on the Martyrs Fr. Nicholas Zagorovsky and Abbess Sophia of Kiev; and above all I. M. Andreyev, Fr. Herman's Jordanville professor, a man of great sensitivity who chronicled the early history of the persecuted Russian Church from personal experience and recorded the unforgettable biographies of its confessors Mother Maria of Gatchina, Bishop Maxim of Serpukhov, Alexander Jacobson, and the Nuns of Shamordino Convent.

In all, there were nearly eighty people from whom the fathers received firsthand testimony. Of these, seventy-three were known personally to the fathers. Nearly all were elderly at that time, and nearly all have died since then. Had the fathers not taken down and published their own words, the lives of many of the martyrs whom they had known would have been lost to history.

**T**RYING to instill in the monastery brothers a personal interest in and love for the New Martyrs, Fr. Herman would at times ask them, as they sat around the refectory table at night, who their favorite Russian confessor was. Whomever they chose would henceforth be "their martyr," the one whose Life they would be expected to know inside and out, and whom they would draw especially close to in prayer. Some of the brothers would choose Priest-Martyr Elias Chetverukhin, who, as he bid farewell to his righteous wife when she visited him in the Gulag, had said, "You know, now I have come to burn intensely with love



for Christ. Here I have come to understand that there is ultimately nothing better, nothing more wonderful than Him. I would die for Him!” <sup>5</sup> Other brothers would choose Gregory the Cross-bearer, who joyfully anticipated being thrown out of the camps and into the trackless waste, there to be strengthened by God and receive a martyr’s crown. Fr. Seraphim, however, would always choose Bishop Damascene, whose *Life* he had translated from the Russian text by Elena Lopeshanskaya. Fr. Herman perceived the reason for this choice: like Fr. Seraphim, Bishop Damascene was what might be called a “spiritual philosopher,” one who sought to view modern history and his own times from an otherworldly, Patristic perspective. In a later chapter we will relate Bishop Damascene’s message concerning what the Soviet “experiment” has to teach us about the spiritual conditions of the last times, and concerning where the last hope of Christians is to be found.

**B**ISHOP DAMASCENE, like many of the first martyrs of the Communist Yoke, had served in the Russian “Catacomb Church”: that part of the Church which had refused to accept Metropolitan Sergius’ capitulation to the Soviet regime and had gone underground. From 1940 to 1979 the Catacomb Church disappeared entirely from view, causing some observers in the West to conclude that it did not exist at all. In the 1970s, however, with a new wave of emigration and increased communication between Russia and the outside world, this veil was slightly lifted and information on underground Christianity began to be leaked to the West. Fr. Seraphim rejoiced whenever Catacomb documents became known, and he unhesitatingly translated and published them in *The Orthodox Word*. These documents, he wrote, “are an ‘eyewitness testimony’ of religious life in the Soviet Union, and they bring up such crucial matters, rarely if ever discussed elsewhere, as the position of the Moscow hierarchs in relation to ordinary believers; the attitude of the latter toward the hierarchs and toward the sermons they hear in Patriarchate churches; the decline of Church consciousness among ordinary believers, leading sometimes to a ‘magical’ view

of the sacraments; the fact and the difficulties of ‘converts’ to Orthodoxy today in the USSR; the Church organization versus the Church as organism, the Body of Christ; the essential ‘catacombness’ of all genuine religious life in the Soviet Union, whether inside or outside the Patriarchate; and the perversion by the Patriarchate of Christian virtues such as humility in order to use them for political ends and crush believers *in the name of Orthodoxy*.” [6](#)

Fr. Seraphim’s interest in the Catacomb Church was not political; as in everything, it was for him a matter of Truth over external appearances. “The Catacomb Church of Russia,” he wrote, “is not primarily a rival ‘church organization’ which demands a change of episcopal allegiance, but is first of all the standard-bearer of *faithfulness to Christ*, which inspires a different attitude towards the Church and its organization than now prevails throughout much of the Orthodox world.” [7](#)

Fr. Seraphim valued the Catacomb Church as a continuation of the confessing stand of the first hierarchs martyred under Communism: a stand, which, avoiding sectarianism and fanaticism, did not cease to regard the Moscow Patriarchate as part of the Orthodox Church. As Fr. Seraphim pointed out in an article: “Metropolitan Cyril of Kazan and other leading hierarchs of the Catacomb Church have regarded it as a blasphemy to deny that the sacraments of the Moscow Patriarchate are grace-filled.” [8](#) When news reached Fr. Seraphim of the problems that had arisen in the Catacomb Church in his own days — such as the lack of unanimity, the scarcity of priests, and the mentality of sectarianism in some catacomb groups — he presented these problems openly in *The Orthodox Word* [9](#) and in his public lectures. [\[a\]](#) Also, even while the Sergianist position was still strong in Russia, he never expected or advocated everyone there to “join the Catacomb Church,” nor did he judge someone just because he was in the Moscow Patriarchate. “In the Soviet Union, as nowhere else in the world,” he wrote, “it is impossible to apply strict ‘jurisdictional’ labels.... We know of at least one Catacomb priest (and probably there are others) who deliberately entered the Moscow Patriarchate in order to bring the grace of God

to more people than is possible in the small cells of the Catacomb Church.... People cut off from the Catacomb Church do receive Communion from priests of the Moscow Patriarchate whom they can trust, and we cannot condemn them for this....

“In the Moscow Patriarchate there have been betrayer bishops.... But in the same Moscow Patriarchate there is an increasing number of priests... who do not participate in this betrayal.” [10](#)

In the 1970s the most well-known of these priests was the courageous preacher Fr. Dimitry Dudko, a man with whom Fr. Seraphim felt a deep kinship of spirit. Fr. Dimitry had been conducting meetings at his church in Moscow, open to everyone, in which he answered people’s questions about faith, atheism, and just plain day-to-day life in a direct and heartfelt way, and with profound Christian conviction. He had inspired thousands, especially the youth.

“Far from viewing Fr. Dimitry and others like him as jurisdictional ‘enemies’ because they do not ‘join the Catacomb Church,’” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “we should try to understand better their extremely difficult situation and rejoice that such a genuine Orthodox Christian phenomenon is coming even from the midst of the compromised Moscow Patriarchate.” [11](#)

Many of Fr. Dimitry’s sermons, as well as transcripts of his timely question-and-answer sessions, were made available in the West. “We’ve received some new talks of Fr. Dimitry Dudko,” Fr. Seraphim wrote in a letter in 1976, “and he really does have much of what is necessary not only in the Soviet Union, but here also. He speaks to the point against making ‘popes’ out of our bishops and spiritual fathers, of everyone thinking for himself instead of leaving it to others. His is one of the soundest and freshest voices in Orthodoxy today (despite some ‘theoretical’ errors), and gives great hope for the future of Orthodoxy in Russia. With this in mind, we *must* be ‘open’ rather than ‘closed’ with regard to the Moscow Patriarchate. The whole question of ecumenism and apostasy *cannot* be placed simply on the canonical-dogmatic-formal level, but must be viewed first *spiritually*. Fr. Dimitry also speaks forcefully against letting

a purely formal approach to the canons bind us spiritually and actually strangle church life — thus allowing the Protestants to take over with their fresher approach.” [12](#)

Other confessors of Christian Truth included the laymen Boris Talantov and Lev Regelson, both of whose writings Fr. Seraphim translated and published in *The Orthodox Word*. Fr. Seraphim saw such people as signs of “the awakening conscience within the Moscow Patriarchate.” It was an awakening for which some were even then being tortured and killed: Boris Talantov, arrested in 1969 for his articles calling for an end to deceit and betrayal in the Church, died in prison in 1971.

FATHER SERAPHIM was also keenly interested in the testimony of representatives of persecuted Russia who had escaped or been exiled to the West. When Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelago* came out in 1974, Fr. Seraphim not only read it, he studied it as a textbook. His lengthy article on it in *The Orthodox Word* was, from a spiritual perspective, probably the most penetrating review of it ever. “*The Gulag Archipelago*,” he wrote, “is not a ‘political exposé.’... ‘Communism’ as such is *incidental* to the terrible events described in this book; the villains of this book do not act the way they do because they are Communists, but *because they are victims of an ideology far deeper and more deadly than Communism*, an ‘ideology’ the significance of which few of them realize, because it is not something logically thought out, but rather something which has become part of their blood as men of our ‘enlightened’ twentieth century. Communism is merely the system in which this deeper ‘ideology’ has been more effectively put into practice.”

This ideology, Fr. Seraphim went on to say, is nothing else than the *nihilism* which according to Friedrich Nietzsche would “triumph” in the twentieth century. “*The Gulag Archipelago*,” Fr. Seraphim stated, “is the history of this ‘triumph of Nihilism’ by one who has lived through it....

“Solzhenitsyn has indeed written the ‘history of the twentieth century.’

History, after all, is not a chronology of political or economic events; it is what happens in the souls of men, for good or evil, and only then is reflected in outward events. In the whole nineteenth century there were only two ‘historical events’: the progress of the worldwide Revolution, which is to say, the progress of unbelief in men’s souls; and the attempt of one power to stop it: Orthodox Russia — an ‘event’ which can be seen as well in the lives of nineteenth-century Orthodox Saints as in the anti-Revolutionary actions of the Tsarist Russian Government. Similarly, in the twentieth century only one historical event is very visible to us as yet: the progress of Revolutionary atheism (or *anti-theism*, to use the Socialist Proudhon’s more accurate word) once it has come to power. The actions of those temporarily opposed to Bolshevism either out of envy (Hitler) or out of hypocrisy (the Western Allies) are only historical *episodes*, not *events*; Solzhenitsyn has chronicled the historical *event* of the twentieth century.” [13](#)

At the very time that the brave voice of Alexander Solzhenitsyn was resounding in the West, another representative of the conscience of the enslaved Russian people was revealed in the midst of the free world. This was twenty-one-year-old Sergei Kourdakov, whose book *The Persecutor* appeared in 1973, the same year of his mysterious death in California, almost certainly at KGB hands. Growing up in Russia, Sergei had been an idealistic Soviet youth who had quickly risen in the government ranks. He was made the head of a special police group assigned to break up underground religious meetings, beat the believers half to death, and confiscate all their religious literature. Reading a few pages of one of the handwritten Gospels he confiscated, his soul began to be moved. On his final raid, as he was attacking an old woman, he heard her praying, “God, forgive this young man.” Enraged, he raised his hand to club her to death — when suddenly his hand was held back by an invisible power. He ran away terrified, weeping hysterically, and finally he resolved to leave the nightmare of the Soviet Union. Escaping to Canada with an icon that his dying mother had given him, he converted to faith in Jesus Christ and began to speak to large crowds about his experiences. As Fr. Seraphim noted in an article about

him, however, Americans were not yet ready to hear his message:

“If one listens carefully to the widely distributed tape-recording (cassette) of one of Sergei’s talks (in halting but effective English), one cannot fail to notice a certain tone of desperation in his words. He is greeted enthusiastically, with applause, and his talk is punctuated by signs of agreement from the audience. But behind the merely outward agreement and sympathy, one senses that he is not being understood, and that he already knows he will not be understood. ‘My heart was like a rock. It was a big stone. I remember one night I hit some man reading the Bible; and he said, “No, don’t do this,” and I hit his face, and after, from his nose, was blood in my hand. And I came to a discotheque with a friend of mine in this group; *and I didn’t wash my hands!* I thought: it’s all right, it’s blood, it’s all right, it’s OK. And I drink and I eat—*and I didn’t wash my hands! It’s terrible!* I grew up under that beautiful idea where everybody is the same, *and I didn’t wash my hands from blood!*’ How many in complacent, overfed America can understand this cry of a soul that has truly suffered? How many can even imagine the reality of a system wherein a normal boy is praised and advanced because he has on his hands the blood of believers in God? How many even faintly realize how easy it will be for the same thing to happen here? Sergei continues his warning to free America: ‘*You don’t understand, and it’s terrible! We can lose our chance. America is the last chance!*’”

In the story of Sergei Kourdakov, Fr. Seraphim saw hope for Russia’s future: “In the future Orthodox Russia, God willing, there will be many Sergei Kourdakovs aflame with love for the true Orthodoxy which will then come out of the catacombs and which, born in confession and inconceivable suffering, will surely be of a quality quite different from the weak Orthodoxy of the Diaspora, where it is not only Russians who have used their freedom poorly!” [14](#)

**A**s these words indicate, Fr. Seraphim knew that Holy Russia would be resurrected, if only for an all-too-brief period before the end of the world. The

entire fiftieth issue of *The Orthodox Word* (which Helen Kontzevitch considered the best ever) was devoted to this subject. In it Fr. Seraphim related how Russia's saints and elders, while warning of the imminent disaster coming upon Russia for her abandonment of her Orthodox foundation, also foresaw her ultimate resurrection through suffering and repentance. He and Fr. Herman compiled a series of prophecies, including St. Seraphim's "Great Diveyevo Mystery" which had never before appeared in English. [\[b\]](#) These were placed beside two powerful articles by Archbishop John, who could unquestionably be ranked among the prophets of Holy Russia. As the fathers pointed out, Archbishop John "spoke with great depth and insight on the spiritual meaning of the enslavement of Russia by the God-hating Communist Yoke and on the Russian Diaspora, its repentance and mission. And perhaps no one has seen so clearly as he that the future of Russia is inextricably bound up with the mystery of resurrection — not with a merely metaphorical resurrection, but in some way with the actual resurrection of the dead which is the chief cornerstone of Orthodox Christian Faith." [15](#)

Even as Fathers Seraphim and Herman were speaking of Holy Russia's resurrection in their magazine, the liberal Russian intelligentsia in the emigration was propagating the idea that there *was no Holy Russia* to resurrect, that the very concept of Holy Russia was a "myth," the product of deluded nostalgia. These ideas came from that same cynical segment of Russian society that had once been so active in slandering the last Tsar and helping to bring about the downfall of Orthodox Russia. Although its representatives in the West were not Communists now, they were, Fr. Seraphim wrote, "striving to obliterate the fruits of repentance even in suffering Russia itself.... This pseudo-Orthodox intelligentsia continues to do everything possible to deny the very existence of Holy Russia, the reality of the Russian mission to preserve and preach true Orthodoxy, and of course the future of Russia as *Orthodox*." [16](#)

Time has shown that this intelligentsia was actually far from the heart of contemporary Russia. The latent spiritual power of Holy Russia is strongly felt

today, and is being unearthed by sober and courageous souls out of the blood-covered soil of that martyric land.

In the very first days of the Revolution, February 1917, Elder Anatole the Younger had prophesied, likening Holy Russia to a ship: “There will be a storm. And the Russian ship will be smashed to pieces. But people can be saved even on splinters and fragments. And not everyone will perish. One must pray, everyone must repent and pray fervently. And what happens after a storm?... There will be a calm.”

At this everyone said to the Elder, “But there is no more ship, it is shattered to pieces; it has perished, everything has perished.”

“It is not so,” said the Elder. “A great miracle of God will be manifested. And all the splinters and fragments, by the will of God and His power, will come together and be united, and the ship will be rebuilt in its beauty and will go on its own way as foreordained by God. And this will be a miracle evident to everyone.” [17](#)



## ***Toward the Restoration of Optina***

*Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.*

—John 4:35–36

*Russia will arise, and materially it will not be wealthy. But in spirit it will be wealthy, and in Optina there will yet be seven luminaries, seven pillars.*

—Prophecy of St. Nektary of Optina (†1928) [1](#)

**B**ESIDES the task of making people of the West aware of the most inspiring phenomenon of contemporary Christianity — the martyric suffering of millions of believers behind the Iron Curtain — the fathers felt another need that was just as pressing: to care for the soul of suffering Russia herself. The fathers wanted to print many more spiritual books, perhaps even publish a magazine, in Russian. One impetus toward this work came as follows:

Fr. Herman had a school-fellow from Jordanville, the above-mentioned Alexey Poluektov, a man who had suffered in Russia under Communism and had escaped to America in the 1950s. After graduating from seminary, getting married, and becoming a priest, Fr. Alexey was assigned to a parish in San Francisco in 1968. At this time Fr. Herman was still the editor of the Russian magazine *Pravoslavny Blagovestnik* (*Orthodox Tidings*); and Fr. Alexey, having

had previous printing experience, printed six issues of it at Mother Ariadna's convent. Wanting to do more publishing work for God, Fr. Alexey bought his own printing press. Soon after this, however, the St. Herman Brotherhood moved to Platina, and Archbishop John's *Blagovestnik* was discontinued.

"In 1970," Fr. Alexey recalled later, "Archbishop Anthony decided to publish a magazine called *Tropinka (The Little Path)* in place of the diocesan magazine *Blagovestnik*. Looking at the first issue, I could conclude that, although it was published under the direction of a whole staff, it was actually the magazine of the Archbishop alone. Since it was not easy for the Archbishop to publish it by himself, in 1973 only one issue came out. I offered the Bishop to summon some help, saying that people could be found, but he said he wanted to keep things the way they were."

Fr. Alexey thought of publishing a book of his own — a collection of prayers in Russian — and wondered if this would be pleasing to God. It was then that he had an unforgettable vision. "I saw a wide field surrounding me," he writes. "It was already sunset, and I thought to myself: 'How good it would be to work this field, to plant it and take the crop. Oh, it would bring riches.' When I thought this, a voice spoke from heaven: 'You're not thinking right. If you had need of riches, you would have been told where to go, or else St. Elias would have told you here in this place: 'Go to such and such a spot and take out [dig up] treasure.'"

This vision was related by Fr. Alexey to Fr. Herman. Fr. Alexey believed that God was calling him to take part in a great harvest — not a harvest of grain for his own material profit, but a harvest of souls for the Kingdom of Heaven. The field, Fr. Herman suggested, represented the ready spiritual harvest throughout his vast homeland, Russia. But the work had to be done now, for it was sunset, and *the night cometh when no man can work* (John 9:4).

"All this time," Fr. Alexey writes, "I had been begging God to indicate at least one person with whom, being bound in oneness of soul, I could begin printing the word of God so that the printing equipment I had would not be

without work, since I did not print worldly things. Then the Lord indicated to me my old friend from Holy Trinity Seminary, who was perhaps the only man here according to my spirit: Fr. Herman. Many times we talked about the contemporary needs of faith, and it seemed that the times were such that we could not be silent but must act.”

When his second child was born, Fr. Alexey gave him the name Elias in remembrance of his vision. Together with Fr. Herman, he conceived the idea of forming the “St. Elias Brotherhood,” dedicated to printing the word of God for Russia, and enlisting the help of Russian Orthodox youth from far and wide. He began by publishing a Russian magazine, *Vera i Zhizn’* (*Faith and Life*), deliberately making it extra small so that it could be distributed more easily in the Soviet Union. The Platina fathers supplied almost all the material for the first issues.

Fr. Alexey published several issues of *Vera i Zhizn’*, and received a most encouraging response from all sides, from clergy and monastics as well as lay people. Meanwhile, inspired by Fr. Alexey’s labors, the St. Herman Brotherhood began to publish more Russian books of its own. Fr. Seraphim went out and bought everything he needed to typeset old-orthography Russian [\[a\]](#) on the same Linotype machine that had always given him so much trouble.

The Platina fathers did not have the money needed to print books for Russia, all of which would be sent there free. But once the determination was present, God sent the means. One of the monastery’s former brothers, wanting to make a sacrifice to God, unexpectedly gave nine hundred dollars specifically for the Russian mission. When Fr. Vladimir of Jordanville learned of the fathers’ publishing plans, he was so enthusiastic that he paid in advance another two thousand dollars for the books.

In 1973 the fathers began to publish the Optina Elders Series in Russian: photo-offset facsimiles of the *prima vitae* of the Elders, most of which had originally been published by the Optina Monastery itself. Some of the original editions, due to the Soviet destruction of religious literature, had become so rare

as to be virtually nonexistent elsewhere. The fathers received nearly all of them from the private collection of the Kontzevitches, who in the 1940s had spent all their savings and even sold their furniture in order to buy up books from the old Optina Library when they were being sold at a Paris sale.

When the first books in the Optina Series came out, no one was happier than Fr. Vladimir, who, raised on Optina spirituality through Fr. Adrian, loved the Optina Elders with the same personal closeness and devotion that one would have toward one's living spiritual fathers. On receiving the third volume, he wrote to the Platina fathers on behalf of the brotherhood at Jordanville:

We thank you for the book on Elder Macarius, as well as for your labors. And if we can do something, then with all our hearts we wish that the Lord will bless your labors and plans for the future. We wish you all the best and complete success in what you are doing. May the Lord help and strengthen you through the prayers of these great righteous ones. [2](#)

Over the course of eight years, the fathers published eight separate books in the Optina Series, adding to them their own words of introduction as well as illustrations and relevant texts gathered from other sources. Since the fathers were not equipped to do photo-offset work themselves, they had the books printed elsewhere. Even though Optina had long been closed as a monastery, they were still able to get their books in there by sending them free to the Dostoyevsky Museum located inside Optina. [\[b\]](#)

In 1975 the Brotherhood published the Russian text of the book *Awareness of God*: the meditations of the aforementioned student of the Holy Fathers, Archpriest Nicholas Deputatov of Australia. In 1977 they published an exact facsimile of the original Russian version of the Life of Elder Zosima of Siberia. And in the following year they did the same with the 850-page, profusely illustrated *Diveyevo Chronicle*: a glorious testimony of Russian sanctity, originally published in 1903, filled with eyewitness stories about St. Seraphim

and how his Diveyevo Convent was founded.

There had been a tradition in Optina, instituted by Abbot Moses (†1862), that whenever a spiritual book was published by the monastery, a copy would be sent free to each monastery in Russia. At Fr. Seraphim's insistence the St. Herman Brotherhood did the same, sending a free copy of all its Russian books to Russian Orthodox monasteries throughout the world. By the time Fr. Seraphim died, he and Fr. Herman had published nearly twenty titles in the Russian language.

**I**N 1990, Optina Monastery was reopened after sixty-eight years of forced closure. [\[c\]](#) Since that time, both Optina and the nearby Shamordino Convent (founded by Elder Ambrose), with about forty monks and eighty nuns respectively, have been able to preserve a transmission of living tradition for two main reasons: first, because some of the people there had been disciples of Elder Sebastian and through him of Elder Nektary and all the Elders; and secondly because Optina has passed down such a full literary heritage about itself.

In August of 1991, only a year after Optina's reopening, members of the St. Herman Brotherhood made a pilgrimage to this historic center of Russian spirituality. There they were surprised to find how much influence the Optina Elders Series had exerted in Russia. The new Abbot of Optina, Benedict, said that people had come to him at Optina saying that they had been converted to Orthodoxy through reading those very books. The Optina monks said that the book written in the late 1960s by Helen Kontzevitch and Fr. Herman, *Optina Monastery and Its Era*, was considered in Russia *the* standard source-book on Optina spirituality. In expressing their gratitude to the St. Herman Brotherhood for making the Elders' Lives and teachings available again, the monks said that these materials helped them in their attempt to rekindle the true Optina tradition and set the right "tone" for their monastery. Abbot Benedict gave to the Brotherhood one of the first icons of Elder Nektary ever painted in Russia, during the painting of which he said the monks had been thinking of the

Brotherhood, and especially of Fr. Seraphim. In the nearby Optina Skete, a portrait of Fr. Seraphim had been placed in the cell of the holy Elder Ambrose, where Dostoyevsky, Gogol, and others had gone to speak to the Elders.

In this connection it will be of interest to cite an entry that Fr. Seraphim made in his Chronicle on October 13/26, 1976:

“Bishop Nektary came two days after the anniversary of his own tonsure (Elder Leonid of Optina), not knowing that it was the eve of the sixth anniversary of the fathers’ tonsure also. On leaving, he speaks enigmatic words about the restoration of Optina Monastery through our labors here; what he meant to say by this we do not know.”

Back in 1976 the “restoration of Optina” would have seemed to many a big stretch of the imagination. Bishop Nektary, however, knew it would happen — even though neither he nor Fr. Seraphim would live to see it. It is thanks to people like Bishop Nektary, who kept the Optina spirit alive for over a half-century after its closure, and Fr. Seraphim, who transmitted this spirit through the printed word, that much-suffering Russia will be able to stand on her old spiritual foundations once again.

## *Monastic Books*

*The Northern Thebaid of Russia is in no way inferior to its African archetype. The dwellers of the virgin forests beyond the Volga — in their spiritual power, the might of their ascetic life, and the height of their attainments — were equal to the Fathers of the first centuries of Christianity.... Both in Russia and in Egypt there is the same “noetic activity,” the same silence.*

—Ivan M. Kontzevitch [1](#)

**W**HEN Fathers Seraphim and Herman built their little cells out in the woods in 1975, they had a specific purpose in mind. They were both seeking, in the words of St. Gregory the Great, a “melancholy spot” where they could immerse themselves in the world of the great monastic saints and desert-dwellers, and out of this prepare monastic writings for publication for the sake of contemporary God-seekers.

The lumber for their secluded cells had been taken from three old, abandoned loggers’ cabins on the site of the original town of Platina. In 1973 the fathers had been given permission to dismantle the cabins and keep the wood, as long as they took all of it and left the area clean. The work was hard and the wood was old and rough, but Fr. Seraphim went to the work site each day cheerful and inspired. To Fr. Seraphim, this labor was connected with his idea of bringing Orthodoxy to the land of the cowboys. He rejoiced at the thought that they were using the dwellings of the original frontier settlers to build “monastic frontier” dwellings of their own.

Once Fr. Spyridon arrived at the monastery to celebrate his nameday with the fathers, and it so happened that they had just completed the “Valaam” cell. Although Fr. Spyridon’s heart was not well, he nevertheless hiked with them up the steep hill to the cell, in order to bless it. “It was amazing,” Fr. Herman recalls, “what childlike joy came over him upon seeing the little wooden cabin, which in his sight was the incarnation of some remote skete cell in Russia or an Athonite *kalyve*. [a] He entered it literally with trembling; his face lit up and became all red, and he began to kiss the walls, giving a long, inspiring sermon about the necessity of putting to use such dwellings and building them to the ends of the earth! He became out of breath, and held his hand on his heart. Thus was the ‘Valaam’ cell blessed, and out of it came a whole series of monastic texts.” <sup>2</sup>

**A**s early as 1972, the fathers began serializing in *The Orthodox Word* the Lives of Russian desert-dwellers from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Twelve Lives were eventually compiled into a book — the aforementioned *Northern Thebaid*—which was finished on November 26, 1975. In his preface, Fr. Seraphim wrote:

What Orthodox Christian is not exalted in heart and mind at the thought of the Egyptian Thebaid — the place of struggle of the great St. Anthony, first among monastic Fathers and model of the anchoritic life; of St. Pachomius the coenobiarch, who received the monastic rule of the common life from an Angel; and of the thousands of monks and nuns who followed them and made the desert a city peopled with Christians striving toward the heavens in the Angelic way of life?

Few, however, are those who know of Orthodoxy’s *Northern Thebaid* — the Russian “desert” of the forested, marshy North — where no fewer thousands of monks and nuns sought out their salvation in the footsteps of the great monastic Fathers of more recent times: St. Sergius of Radonezh,



St. Cyril of White Lake, St. Nilus of Sora, and hundreds of others whose names have been entered in the Calendar of Orthodox Saints. <sup>3</sup>

The book *The Northern Thebaid*, then, was intended to fill this gap. The fathers dedicated it to “the blessed memory of our beloved teacher, Ivan Mikhailovich Kontzevitch” — a man who had devoted years of research and writing to demonstrate the equality of Russian asceticism with that of ancient Egypt. A relevant chapter from Kontzevitch’s *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia* was included as an introduction to the new book. Informative, filled with poetic imagery, and at the same time fully within the Patristic tradition, Kontzevitch’s words set the whole book in the proper key, placing the Russian desert-dwellers in their rightful historical context.

The biographies of the desert-dwellers themselves were more than just straight translations from existing Lives. For most of them the fathers painstakingly gathered written material and illustrations from a number of different sources. The Saints became alive to them as they researched, wrote, and printed their Lives. They talked about and prayed to them, having processions in their honor on the dates of their repose. And the Northern Thebaid Saints responded to these prayers, helping the fathers to make them accessible to people of new lands. An obvious case occurred when the Platina fathers were about to print in *The Orthodox Word* the Life of the sixteenth-century Valaam monk St. Alexander of Svir. They had been lamenting that, although they had received from Finland a rare ancient manuscript of the Saint’s Life, they had not a single icon of the Saint. Then, one day shortly after Pascha in 1973, as they were on their way to work on the loggers’ cabins, they stopped at the Platina post office to get their mail. There they found an envelope containing an icon of the Saint; and in the background was a cabin just like the one they were gathering lumber to build. Totally amazed — for they had not requested this icon from anyone — they gave thanks to God and immediately printed it to go with St. Alexander’s Life.



The appearance of the Holy Trinity to St. Alexander of Svir. Seventeenth-century icon, very likely from the icon workshop of St. Alexander's monastery. Illustration from *The Northern Thebaid*.

As the fathers were compiling the Lives of the Northern Thebaid Saints, they found something obviously lacking: all the Lives were of men — none were of women. They felt they had to do something to remedy this situation. Fr. Herman asked Helen Kontzevitch what information had been preserved about women desert-dwellers of Russia, but she said she did not know. He began to search through a number of Russian sources — some of them exceedingly rare — and finally came up with the material he needed. From this he composed a poetic article of thirty pages, entitled “Women of Holy Russia.” It included information and illustrations of over forty women saints, with longer sections on the desert-dwellers Dorothy of Kashin, Anastasia of Padan, and Parasceva of Pinega. Interestingly, it was while preparing this article for *The Orthodox Word*

that the fathers were first visited by Barbara McCarthy, an American woman desiring desert monasticism. When the article finally came out, Helen Kontzevitch rejoiced to read it. Fr. Herman's labor also did not go unnoticed by Abbess Ariadna, who told him, "Thank you for giving us St. Dorothy of Kashin." Later the article was included as a chapter in *The Northern Thebaid*.

The epilogue to *The Northern Thebaid*, written by Fr. Seraphim, briefly described developments in Russian monasticism after the period covered in the main body of the book, that is, after the seventeenth century. Fr. Seraphim spoke about the Westernizing reforms of Peter I and Catherine II in the eighteenth century, which demanded that monasteries be either closed or turned into government institutions, thus smothering the very idea of monasticism: "But the aims of the Westernizing rules were not achieved: the monastic spirit, still very much alive in all classes of Russian society, was not snuffed out. Desert-loving monks and nuns simply went again to the desert, whether in Russia or outside her borders, avoiding the 'established' monasteries; new communities were established, despite the laws; and there rose up a number of powerful monastic leaders, new Abbots of Holy Russia, who were not afraid to defy the authorities in order to preserve the free monastic spirit." [4](#)

Having said a few words about a number of such heroic eighteenth-century monastic figures, Fr. Seraphim went on to speak of the more favorable monastic conditions of nineteenth-century Russia. The latter period, he said, "was to rival the epoch of the Northern Thebaid itself." During it, "the Orthodox monastic tradition is more alive in Russia than in Greece, and it is the Russians themselves who, in the nineteenth century, are responsible for the great monastic flowering on Mount Athos, led by great Elders such as Jerome and Arsenius, who had their spiritual roots firmly in Russian soil." [5](#)



The frontispiece of *The Northern Thebaid*. “An Anchorite in the Northern Forest”: engraving by O. Miloradovich, nineteenth century, from the Life of St. Sergius of Radonezh.

Finally, Fr. Seraphim looked at the possibilities for monasticism in present-day Russia. “The situation within enslaved Russia is spiritually much more favorable [than in the West],” he said, “because on the foundation of suffering and hardship which are the daily lot of most people there, something spiritual *can* come out. From many signs it is evident that a religious awakening is beginning now in Russia, whose result cannot yet be foreseen, but which may well result in the re-establishment of some of the monastic centers mentioned in this book.” <sup>6</sup> Today, three decades after Fr. Seraphim wrote these lines, we see

his hope being wondrously fulfilled. Valaam Monastery is now inhabited by monks again, as are the monasteries of St. Tryphon of Vyatka, St. Joseph of Volokalamsk, St. Dimitry of Priluki, St. Martyrius of Zelenets, St. Arsenius of Konevits, St. Alexander of Svir, and St. Macarius of Zholtovod. The northernmost Solovki Monastery, used for many years as a Soviet concentration camp, has now been restored, for which purpose Alexander Solzhenitsyn donated millions of dollars; and over a hundred more northern monasteries are being revived.

*The Northern Thebaid*, filled as it was with priceless photographs and lithographs from the height of Holy Russia, turned out to be a visual feast, bringing the reader right into the world it described. Although the fathers were only able to print it in two small editions, it became an inspiration to Orthodox monastics worldwide, especially loved and treasured by monks on Mount Athos. In 1980, some pious Orthodox Christians in Greece, in exemplary love for the saints of another Orthodox land, translated and published the book in large quantities in the Greek language. <sup>7</sup>

THE spiritual legacy of the Northern Thebaid Saints, Fr. Seraphim wrote, prepared the way “for a final spiritual current which has come down to our own times — that of Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky and the great Elders of the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries.” <sup>8</sup> It was this current that the fathers wished to make the subject of their next book — a kind of sequel to *The Northern Thebaid*. Their only question concerned which to present first to English-speaking readers: the story of Blessed Paisius or of the Optina Elders, who were the direct inheritors of Paisius’ tradition. After some deliberation, the fathers decided to begin with Paisius. Their readers would have to wait to learn all about the Optina Elders until *after* they had been made acquainted with the spiritual foundation of Optina, Blessed Paisius. The Platina fathers believed that Paisius, who had built this foundation upon a determined search for true spiritual fatherhood and upon a lifelong, practical study of Patristic wisdom, was not only



the key to understanding the phenomenon of Optina, but was also the means whereby modern man could begin to enter into the genuine Patristic spirit. They asked Bishop Nektary, their own spiritual father in Blessed Paisius' lineage, to write a brief introduction for the English edition of Paisius' Life, to which they added some of his reminiscences of Optina.

The book on Blessed Paisius was originally intended to be in two volumes, the first being an account of his life and the second a collection of his teachings. Volume One, first serialized in *The Orthodox Word*, was published in 1976, but Fr. Seraphim did not live to complete Volume Two. He did, however, translate two collections of Blessed Paisius' teachings, *Field Flowers* and *The Scroll*, which were also serialized. [\[b\]](#)

The main source for the new book, *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky*, was the Russian edition of the Life of Paisius published by Optina Monastery in 1847. To this the fathers added much more material, including sections that they composed themselves on the legacy of Blessed Paisius: his revivification of Russian and Romanian monasticism through his disciples, his influence on outstanding church writers of succeeding centuries, and his "traces" in America through St. Herman and others.

Ultimately the book became not just the life story of a righteous man, but a scholarly achievement as well. The fathers' main accomplishment was to prove beyond refutation that, had it not been for Blessed Paisius, the anthology now known as the *Philokalia* would not be in existence. It was Blessed Paisius' efforts in gathering and copying ascetic writings, bringing them to light and evoking interest in them, that had provided the impetus for the *Philokalia*, laying the groundwork for its compilation by Saints Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain and Macarius of Corinth.

*Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky* included a service to Paisius — with an entire Canon — written by Fr. Seraphim himself. [\[c\]](#) Between the lines of this touching memorial, one can see Fr. Seraphim's own humble, self-effacing attitude before such a great Father, who had helped form him in monasticism. When at one time

he had written that “we must go to the Holy Fathers *in order to become their disciples*,” <sup>9</sup> he had meant so literally. To Blessed Paisius he prayed:

Under thy protection have I lived, but of all thy disciples I alone am unworthy to behold thy face. Have pity on me, O blessed Father, and in thy goodness entreat Christ God to have mercy on me, the least of thy sheep.

Ever struggling, yet preserved by humility, thou didst ascend by the teaching of the Holy Fathers to the heights of prayer; [\[d\]](#) do thou help me, who know not how to struggle or to pray, at least to cover my wretched nakedness with knowledge of my infirmity.

As I behold the greatness of thy labors and the grace given thee by God, my heart doth fail within me; how can I, having disdained thy commandments, have a part with thee in eternal life? Have pity on me, thy wretched disciple, and entreat the Lord for my salvation. <sup>10</sup>

Fr. Seraphim’s introduction to the new book was largely inspired by a seventeen-year-old Russian boy named Gregory who was then staying at the monastery. A talented, intelligent youth, Gregory had reached such a state of rebellion that his own parents had become afraid of him, and they hoped that a stay at the monastery would somehow settle him. Gregory proved to be of great help to the fathers during his stay, building a storage area for printed materials which they named “Gregorian Hall.”

Before writing the introduction, Fr. Seraphim had consultations with Fr. Herman and made note of the latter’s suggestions. Fr. Herman advised him to write an article that would motivate people like Gregory to follow Blessed Paisius and would at the same time “shake them up a bit.” Fr. Seraphim actually wrote the article for Gregory’s sake, and the result was one of the most hard-hitting pieces he had ever written. In it he compared Blessed Paisius’ time with our own, speaking about the obstacles which the seventeen-year-old Paisius met

with in his spiritual search, and about the far greater obstacles faced by the storm-tossed seventeen-year-old youth of today:

Having come to love the Holy Fathers and true Orthodox piety in his childhood, Blessed Paisius at the age of seventeen saw that even in the best Orthodox school of Russia he was not being given the pure teaching of Holy Orthodoxy from the Patristic sources, but rather something second-hand and accompanied by useless pagan learning; and, further, that an overemphasis on the formal side of the Church's existence, greatly furthered by the Government in its attempt to make the Church a "department" of the State, promoted chiefly the idea that church-minded people, the clergy and even the monks, occupied a definite place in the apparatus of the Church *organization*. This overemphasis of a real but decidedly secondary aspect of church life tended to obscure the primary aspect: the love and zeal for true Orthodoxy and true piety, which are what inspire every genuine Orthodox Christian, whether clergy, monk, or layman....

Today, the situation of Orthodoxy is rather different, and much worse, than it was in the time of the Elder Paisius.... The seventeen-year-old Orthodox youth of today has usually not been raised properly and consciously in Orthodox teaching and piety, or, if he has, the ever-increasing tempo of paganized modern life acts powerfully to negate his upbringing; he has usually not come to love the Holy Fathers and the Divine services from childhood, and to hunger for more.... For such a youth not deeply grounded in Orthodoxy, the human side of the Church all too often becomes the center of attention, and the all too prevalent petty quarrels and injustices among church people are often sufficient to turn his attention away from the Church altogether, or — if some religious interest remains — to turn him toward one of the flourishing religious or social cults of the day, or even to the widely advertised life of drugs and



immorality.

Truly, we are far more in need today of a return to the sources of genuine Orthodoxy than Blessed Paisius was! Our situation is hopeless! And yet God's mercy does not leave us, and even today one may say that there is a movement of genuine Orthodoxy... which hungers for more than the "customary" Orthodoxy which is powerless before the onslaughts of a world refined in destroying souls.... It cannot be that the flame of truly Orthodox zeal will die out before the Second Coming of Christ; nor that if this flame exists, Christ our God will not show His zealots, even now, how to lead a true and inspired Orthodox life. In fact, *the message of Blessed Paisius is addressed precisely and directly to us, the last Christians*: in "The Scroll" he tells us that the Holy Fathers wrote their books "by the special Providence of God, so that in the last times this Divine work would not fall into oblivion."

Do you hear, O Orthodox Christians of these last times? These writings of the Holy Fathers, even those dealing with the highest forms of spiritual life, have been preserved *for us*, so that even when it might seem that there are no God-bearing elders left at all, we may still have the unerring words of the Holy Fathers to guide us in leading a God-pleasing and zealous life. Therefore, they are wrong who teach that, because the end of the world is at hand, we must sit still, make no great efforts, simply preserve the doctrine that has been handed down to us, and hand it back, like the buried talent of the worthless servant (Matt. 25:24–30), to our Lord at His Coming!... Let us then struggle while it is still day, with the time and the weapons which our All-merciful God has given us! [11](#)

Again with the contemporary seventeen-year-old youth in mind, Fr. Seraphim cautioned that the Life of Blessed Paisius must be properly applied to one's own spiritual condition. Taking his ideas straight from the mouths of his own "living links" to Blessed Paisius — Bishop Nektary, Helen Kontzevitch,

and Fr. Adrian — he wrote:

Let all readers be aware: (1) *There are no more elders like Paisius today*. If we imagine there are, we can do irreparable harm to our souls.... At the same time, we must have respect for our spiritual fathers and elders, who at least know more than we and try their best to guide their spiritual children under almost impossible conditions. Many young people today are seeking *gurus* and are ready to enslave themselves to any likely candidate; but woe to those who take advantage of this climate of the times to proclaim themselves “God-bearing Elders” in the ancient tradition — they only deceive themselves and others. Any Orthodox spiritual father will frankly tell his children that the minimum of eldership that remains today is very different from what Blessed Paisius or the Optina Elders represent. (2) *The type of community which Paisius guided is beyond the capabilities of our times*. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov said that such a way of life was not given even to his times — when Optina was at its height; and how much more has Orthodox life fallen since then! Such a “heaven on earth” could not exist today, not just because there are no God-bearing Elders to guide it, but because even if there were, the spiritual level of those who would follow is too impossibly low.... But let us therefore learn to make maximum use of the limited opportunities we do have (which still, after all, are ‘heaven on earth’ if compared to the worldly life of today!), not demolishing our few remaining Orthodox communities with self-centered and idle criticism.... (3) Our times, above all, call for *humble and quiet labors*, with love and sympathy for other strugglers on the path of the Orthodox spiritual life and a deep resolve that does not become discouraged because the atmosphere is unfavorable.... If we do this, even in our terrible times, we may have hope — in God’s mercy — of the salvation of our souls. [12](#)

When Fr. Seraphim read this introduction to Fr. Herman, the latter objected that its appraisal of the contemporary state of Orthodoxy was too negative, that it would extinguish desire in young people to lead an Orthodox Christian life. Fr. Seraphim argued that, on the contrary, it would actually *encourage* them. They have to face things as they are, he said; only then could they step boldly forward, prepared to struggle for Jesus Christ and their salvation without harboring any delusions or false expectations. After some argument Fr. Seraphim proved his point. Bowing before him, Fr. Herman told him to publish the Introduction as it was.

*Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky*, the largest book the fathers had printed thus far, was a true labor of love. In the years to come, Fr. Herman was to regard it as the most important of all their books: a treasure-house of Orthodox spirituality through which any serious reader could enter into the heart of ancient Christian experience.

The book could also serve as an excellent textbook for monastics (as it had for the Platina fathers themselves), setting forth in living examples all the major principles of a renunciant life in common. On the dedication page ran the words: “To the Orthodox Monks of the Last Times.”

After all the work, prayer, and hope they had devoted to *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky*, the fathers were disappointed to receive very little response to it. To be sure, there was little that was “tantalizing” in it: not many descriptions of clairvoyance, lofty spiritual states or miracle working. It was simply the story of one man’s lifelong struggle to seek out the wisdom of the Fathers, disseminate it, and first of all to live by it. Perhaps the English-speaking Orthodox world was not ready for it; perhaps more “bridges” still needed to be built. It seems that Orthodox countries were much more prepared for the message of Blessed Paisius. As they had done with *The Northern Thebaid*, Orthodox Christians in Greece translated the Brotherhood’s book into their own language, publishing it in 1990.

IN their talks to monastic aspirants, Fathers Herman and Seraphim often told stories and anecdotes from the Lives of the Russian ascetics, Lives that had been indispensable to their own monastic formation. To the frustration of some of their listeners, however, relatively few of these Lives existed in English. *The Northern Thebaid* and *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky* had only been a beginning. More than anyone else, Barbara McCarthy pressured the fathers to make more such texts available on a broader scale. Then, in 1976, the monastery was visited by a desert-lover from the younger generation: *another* seventeen-year-old Russian boy with the name Gregory. Since this new Gregory had a fair knowledge of Russian, Fr. Herman gave him to read the Russian Life of the desert-dweller Peter Michurin, a righteous youth who had lived in constant converse with God and undertaken severe ascetic exploits before departing to the eternal mansions at the age of nineteen. In his youthful zeal Gregory became enthused by this Life, and longed to attempt great feats of asceticism. Fr. Herman knew he had to channel this zeal into a direction that would be healthy and appropriate for Gregory, and thus he gave him the *podvig* of translating. Upon hearing this, Barbara became interested and offered to help. She asked Fr. Herman which of the Lives of two Russian Elders he would most like to see appear in English: Elder Anthony of Optina or Elder Zosima of Siberia, both of whom had been desert-dwellers in the forest of Roslavl and were followers of the spiritual school of Blessed Paisius. Fr. Herman chose Elder Zosima. It had been a shorter Life of this same Elder which Fr. Herman had once read to Fr. Seraphim as they had roamed the woods of Monterey, and which had helped inspire them to leave the world.

The labors on *Elder Zosima* began. Gregory would translate into a tape and send it to Barbara; Barbara, sitting quietly in the woods, would transcribe; and Fathers Seraphim and Herman would correct the transcription. Fr. Seraphim wrote the introduction. The book was published first by Alexey Young in 1977, and later by the Brotherhood, including a portrait of the Elder drawn by the

young Gregory. In 1980 the Brotherhood followed this by printing the Life of Peter Michurin, a short but powerful work written by Elder Zosima himself.

Other monastic texts published by the Brotherhood included books of spiritual counsel. In 1978 the fathers began a series called the *Little Russian Philokalia*, a new collection of ascetic writings drawn from Russian sources, chiefly of the nineteenth century. The first volume was devoted to St. Seraphim of Sarov, and the second to Abbot Nazarius of Valaam, the spiritual father of St. Herman of Alaska. After Fr. Seraphim's death a third volume came out on St. Herman himself, containing the Saint's spiritual counsels which Fr. Seraphim had translated and printed in *The Orthodox Word*. Another volume, comprised of Fr. Seraphim's translation of the counsels of Blessed Paisius, was printed later, followed by a volume of the life and teaching of the newly canonized St. Theodore of Sanaxar in northern Russia.

In the early 1970s, Fr. Seraphim translated the entire book of counsels of the sixth-century Desert Father Dorotheus of Gaza, known as the "ABC's" of monasticism. With the blessing of Archbishop Averky and Fr. Michael Pomazansky, the fathers were about to publish it as an offering to the monks of our times, but another press came out with an edition of it first. After Fr. Seraphim's death, the Brotherhood published his translation of the counsels of Saints Barsanuphius and John, the Elders of Abba Dorotheus. Another monastic text translated by Fr. Seraphim — of the Rule of St. Theodore the Studite, which formed the basis of all Russian monasticism — has not yet seen the light of publication.

**W**ITH a seemingly endless store of important Orthodox writings just waiting to be translated and printed, Fr. Seraphim could not but think of how much he could do if only he had more time. "Sometimes we allow ourselves to dream," he wrote in a letter, "of two or three brothers one in mind with us who could double or triple our translating and printing work; and then sober reality tells us that we are probably achieving maximum efficiency precisely by the

‘suffering through’ which we are doing. I somehow have the feeling that we are ‘pre-digesting’ the food for a number of seekers, and if we chewed too much [at once] they would begin to get sick.” [13](#)

Everything was achieved in God’s time. Having been “suffered through” in the context of a monastic life of labor, hardship, and poverty, the books that the fathers produced had a spiritual power that they would not have had otherwise. One has only to turn the pages of the hand-printed *Northern Thebaid* or *Blessed Paisius*; to look at the pictures that the fathers searched for, kissed and treasured; to read the language that they labored over in order to capture the authentic savor of the sacred original.... Then, from these thin sheets of paper, one may sense the reality of a life detached from the ever-increasing tempo of the modern world; a life harking back to simpler times yet still accessible today; a life that, while being filled with struggle, has been emptied of worldly distractions.

Alexey Young used to tell Fr. Seraphim that reading these pages made his “heart grow still.” Smiling quietly, Fr. Seraphim would merely say, “That’s what they’re supposed to do!” And soon he would return to translate more writings in his forest cell.

## ***Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future***

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

—II Timothy 4:3–4

*For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*

—Matthew 24:24

**O**N May 10, 1976, Fr. Seraphim was driving home in his truck from Oregon, where he had just picked up a shipment of his first published book, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*—a book that would one day become a catalyst for spiritual awakening, especially in Russia. The book was an examination of contemporary religious phenomena, symptoms of the “new religious consciousness” which prepared the way for one world religion and marked the beginning of a “demonic pentecost” in the last times. Never before had such a penetrating analysis of twentieth-century spiritual currents been written, for until now no one had studied them so closely according to the timeless wisdom of the Holy Fathers.

In the early to mid-1970s, when Fr. Seraphim was writing his book, many

of the phenomena he was describing were considered aberrations on the margin of society. But he saw what was coming: he saw that the fringe would become more and more the mainstream. He saw the frightening unity of purpose behind a wide range of outwardly disparate phenomena, and saw the end result looming over the horizon. As he traveled southward with this book which was to tear the mask off the most subtle forms of demonic deception in our times, it was appropriate that he should stop at a nucleus of neopaganism in America: Mount Shasta. Considered a sacred mountain by the original Indian inhabitants, Mount Shasta had become a center of occult activities and settlements, which were now on the increase there. Fr. Seraphim drove part way up with his load of books. Standing in the shadow of the immense mountain, on a spot where neopagan festivals were commonly held, he sang Paschal chants, sang of Christ's Resurrection and His victory over Satan and the law of death. A thought arose in his mind which had come to him before: "An Orthodox priest should come and bless this mountain with holy water!" <sup>1</sup> Later, after their ordination, he and Fr. Herman would return to bless the mountain. But his book would do more: it would *move* mountains.



Fourteen-thousand-foot Mount Shasta in northern California.

**T**HE seeds of *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* had been with Fr.



Seraphim for quite some time. Like his “Survival Course,” this book was an outcome of his laborious work for *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*. For years Fr. Herman had been urging him to finally complete his *magnum opus*, but Fr. Seraphim had balked on the grounds that it was too big a job to undertake along with everything else, and that, besides, it was too intellectual and abstract. “We need something more practical,” he told Fr. Herman. His intellectual elitism was now a thing of the past. As he had grown in both inward and outward knowledge, acquiring a commanding view of sober and salvific spiritual life, his writings had grown not more complex and abstruse, but more accessible, understandable, basic, and to-the-point. Following the path of Gospel simplicity, he now wrote in a manner which anyone — young or old, educated or uneducated — could understand.

*Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* was begun in 1971 with an examination of the latest “ecumenical” fashion: the opening of a “dialogue with non-Christian religions.” Three chapters on this subject were printed in *The Orthodox Word*, followed by a detailed description of the “charismatic revival” as a form of “ecumenical spirituality” inclusive of religious experiences which were distinctly non-Christian.

Shortly after the publication of the “charismatic” article, Fr. Seraphim received a letter from Helen Kontzevitch, saying: “What you have described here is the religion of the future, the religion of Antichrist.” Fr. Seraphim realized, however, that he had by no means written an exhaustive treatment of this religion, which had not yet attained its final form. His work, he stated, was a “preliminary exploration of those spiritual tendencies which, it would seem, are preparing the way for a religion of anti-Christianity, a religion outwardly ‘Christian,’ but centered on a pagan ‘initiation’ experience.”

Helen Kontzevitch’s words about “the religion of the future” came to mind when the St. Herman Brotherhood was about to publish the chapters together in book form. When talking with Fr. Herman, Fr. Seraphim insisted that the word “Orthodoxy” be added to the title, since everything in the book would be

presented in light of the Orthodox Patristic standard of spiritual life.

The fathers completed the first edition of *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* on Bright Friday (April 26/May 9), 1975. Evidently the book had struck a responsive chord: the first edition sold out so quickly that the fathers realized they could not meet the demand all by themselves. Within three months of the first edition, they had a second edition printed by a company in Redding. A third edition was printed by a company in Talent, Oregon, that Alexey Young had discovered. It was almost a year to the day after the first edition came out that Fr. Seraphim drove to Oregon to pick up the third edition, as has been described above.

**I**N 1979, Fr. Seraphim revised the book considerably, expanding it into eight chapters. In the introduction he spoke of the “ecumenical movement” as “a syncretic world religion,” and gave examples of frontline Christian ecumenists who were working toward a “new unity” with other religions. As against this he offered, in the first three chapters of his book, a general approach to non-Christian religions and their radical differences from Christianity, both in theology and spiritual life. The first chapter, written by an Orthodox priest in Switzerland, was a theological study of the “God” of the Near Eastern religions, with which the Christian ecumenists hoped to unite on the basis of “monotheism.” The second dealt with the most powerful of the Eastern religions, Hinduism. Written by a woman who had practiced Hinduism for twenty years before converting to Orthodoxy, it was shockingly revealing of the often demonic nature of pagan worship. Having herself had a clearly demonic experience while worshipping a “god” in a shrine in India, the author quoted the famous Swami Vivekananda as saying: “Let us worship Terror for its own sake.... Only the Hindu dares worship [God] as the Evil.” Vivekananda, she explained, had come to the Western world in 1893 with the express goal of evangelizing it with Hinduism, making this religion more palatable by saying that it incorporated all other religions into it (though in fact he had a special

contempt for Christianity). In a relatively short time Vivekananda had achieved remarkable success, especially in introducing Hindu ideas into Roman Catholicism. His vision of a “Universal Religion” was identical to the “New Christianity” of Teilhard de Chardin, who to some extent plagiarized ideas from Vedanta. Further, Vivekananda’s Hindu formulation of modern evolutionism was completely in line with Teilhard’s evolutionary philosophy. [2 \[a\]](#)

The third chapter of *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, “A Fakir’s Miracle and the Prayer of Jesus,” was about a direct confrontation between Christian and non-Christian spirituality. Recorded by the talented writer Dr. A. P. Timofievitch (whom Fr. Herman had known personally at the New Diveyevo Convent), it described a strange encounter that an Orthodox priest-monk had had in the presence of a “miracle-worker” in Ceylon at the turn of the century. The fakir was awing Western spectators with incredible visions until the priest began saying the Jesus Prayer, at which time the fakir was unable to keep up the illusion and turned to the priest with an expression of malice. “Eastern spirituality,” wrote Fr. Seraphim at the end of this chapter, “is by no means limited to such mediumistic ‘tricks.’... Still, all the *power* that is given to the practitioners of Eastern religions comes from the same phenomenon of mediumism, whose central characteristic is a passiveness before ‘spiritual’ reality that enables one to enter into contact with the ‘gods’ of the non-Christian religions.” [3](#)

The remainder of the book was written entirely by Fr. Seraphim himself. Having presented the testimony of three Orthodox Christians confirming that the Orthodox do not at all have the same God as the “monotheists” who deny the Holy Trinity, and that the experiences and powers provided by the pagan “gods” are satanic in nature, Fr. Seraphim wrote by way of disclaimer: “All this in no way contradicts the words of St. Peter, that *God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him* (Acts 10:34–35)... Those who live in the bondage of Satan, the *prince of this world* (John 12:31), in darkness which is unenlightened by the Christian

Gospel — are judged in the light of the natural testimony of God which every man may have, despite this bondage.” [4](#)

In later years, when Fr. Seraphim was asked about the Orthodox attitude toward non-Christian religions, he replied that each person is responsible for what he is given: “Once you *accept* the revelation [of the Gospel], then of course you are much more responsible than anyone else. A person who accepts the revelation of God come in the flesh and then does not live according to it — he is much worse off than any pagan priest or the like.” [5](#)

And yet, as Fr. Seraphim wrote in his book, “for the Christian who has been given God’s Revelation, no ‘dialogue’ is possible with those outside the Faith. *Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers.... What communion hath light with darkness... or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?* (II Cor. 6:14–16). The Christian calling is rather to bring the light of Orthodox Christianity to them, even as St. Peter did to the God-fearing household of Cornelius the Centurion (Acts 10:38–48), in order to enlighten their darkness and join them to the chosen flock of Christ’s Church.” [6](#)

A lack of discernment in the area of “spiritual experiences” has caused great confusion in the minds of many would-be Christians as the presence of Eastern religious movements has grown in the West. “The case of Thomas Merton,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “immediately comes to mind: a sincere convert to Roman Catholicism and Catholic monasticism some forty years ago (long before the radical reforms of Vatican II), he ended his days proclaiming the equality of Christian religious experiences and the experience of Zen Buddhism and other pagan religions. Something has ‘entered the air’ in these past two decades or so that has eroded whatever remained of a sound Christian outlook in Protestantism and Roman Catholicism and now is attacking the Church itself, Holy Orthodoxy. The ‘dialogue with non-Christian religions’ is a result rather than a cause of this new ‘spirit.’” [7](#)

In Chapter Four, “Eastern Meditation Invades Christianity,” Fr. Seraphim examined various attempts to develop a syncretism of Christianity and Eastern

religions, particularly in the area of “spiritual practices.” He began by looking at the books *Christian Yoga* and *Christian Zen*. In the former, the author described how the “Christian Yogi” becomes relaxed and “ready to tremble at the touch of the Holy Ghost... ready to be taken, to be seized.” From his knowledge of Patristic sources, Fr. Seraphim identified this state as a form of *spiritual deception*, characterized by a striving for “holy and divine feelings,” a mistaking of self-intoxication for a “state of grace,” and an incredible ease in becoming “contemplative” and “mystical.”

Along the same lines, Fr. Seraphim provided a detailed look at “Transcendental Meditation,” a technique that had been advertised as “a course in how to succeed spiritually without really trying.” During the mid-1970s, he wrote, Transcendental Meditation “was widely used in the Army, public schools, prisons, hospitals and by church groups, including parishes of the Greek Archdiocese in America, as a supposedly neutral form of ‘mental therapy’ which is compatible with any kind of religious belief or practice.” In showing the fallacy of this conception, he described the Sanskrit initiation ceremony conducted at “TM” courses, in which American practitioners are unknowingly led to offer sacrifices to pagan deities. “Thus the modern agnostic, usually quite unawares, has been introduced to the realm of Hindu religious practices; quite easily he has been made to do something to which his own Christian ancestors, perhaps, had preferred torture and cruel death: he has offered sacrifice to pagan gods. On the spiritual plane it may be this sin, rather than the psychic technique itself, that chiefly explains the spectacular success of ‘TM.’” [8](#)

Chapter Five, “The New Religious Consciousness,” dealt more specifically with the proliferation of Eastern (and pseudo-Eastern) religious cults and movements. “Let us look,” he wrote, “at just a few pictures — descriptions of actual events in the early and mid-1970s — which illustrate the dominance of Eastern ideas and practices among many young Americans (who are only the ‘avant-garde’ of the youth of the whole world).” [9](#)

The first picture was of the Hare Krishnas in San Francisco, who held an

annual ritual of wheeling an immense idol of their “god” through Golden Gate Park to the ocean — attended by all the signs of Hindu devotion: “A typical scene of pagan India,” Fr. Seraphim observed, “but something new for ‘Christian’ America.” [10](#)

Next to be examined was the movement of Guru Maharaj-ji, who had been hailed as “Lord of the Universe” by thousands of young American devotees. At a huge event called “Millennium ‘73,” held in the Houston Astrodome, Maharaj-ji was greeted by a tremendous ovation as the Astrodome scoreboard flashed the word “G-O-D.” “This is already something beyond mere worship of pagan ‘gods,’” Fr. Seraphim wrote. “Until a very few years ago such worship of a living man would have been inconceivable in any ‘Christian’ country; now it has become an ordinary thing for many thousands of religious ‘seekers’ in the West. Here we have already had a preview of the worship of Antichrist at the end of the age — the one who will *sit in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God* (II Thess. 2:4).” [11](#)

Tantric Yoga, practiced in the mountains of New Mexico by a modern adaptation of the Sikh religion known as “3HO” (Healthy-Happy-Holy Organization) was another movement to be looked at. The chapter then concluded with a section on “Zen Training in Northern California,” describing life at a Zen monastery near Mount Shasta which Fr. Seraphim himself had visited. The “Shasta Abbey,” as it was called, was the first successful *American* Zen monastery, having an Englishwoman as its abbess. Founded in 1970, about the same time the St. Herman Monastery was established only a hundred miles away, the Abbey had several authentic elements. From what Fr. Seraphim could see from the literature it produced, the people there possessed a high degree of awareness of spiritual posing and fakery. “Of all today’s Eastern religious currents,” he wrote, “Zen is probably the most sophisticated intellectually, and the most sober spiritually. With its teaching of compassion and a loving ‘Cosmic Buddha,’ it is perhaps as high a religious ideal as the human mind can attain — without Christ. Its tragedy is precisely that it has no Christ in it, and thus no

salvation, and its very sophistication and sobriety effectively prevent its followers from seeking salvation in Christ. In its quiet, compassionate way it is perhaps the saddest of all the reminders of the ‘post-Christian’ times in which we live. Non-Christian ‘spirituality’ is no longer a foreign importation in the West; it has become a native American religion putting down deep roots into the consciousness of the West. Let us be warned of this: the religion of the future will not be a mere cult or sect, but a powerful and profound religious orientation which will be absolutely convincing to the mind and heart of modern man.” [12](#)

In connection with Zen, Fr. Seraphim spoke of the “pragmatic fallacy” which had been mentioned earlier by the Orthodox convert from Hinduism. This was the non sequitur, found in many Eastern religions, that “if the practices work, they must be true and good”; that is, nothing need be taken on faith — *experience* is the criterion. “Without any theology,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “Zen is no more able than Hinduism to distinguish between good and evil spiritual experiences; it can only state what *seems* to be good because it brings ‘peace’ and ‘harmony,’ as judged by the natural powers of the mind and not by any revelation — everything else it rejects as more or less illusory.” [13](#)

These comments are reminiscent of what Fr. Seraphim had written over a decade earlier on the “cult of experience.” Now, however, he was speaking openly about the danger of demonic manipulation. “When *experience* is emphasized over doctrine,” he observed, “the normal Christian safeguards which protect one against the attacks of the fallen spirits are removed or neutralized, and the passiveness and ‘openness’ which characterize the new cults literally open one up to be used by the demons.” [14](#)

Fr. Seraphim realized that he had only scratched the surface in his description of Eastern cults in the West: “Each year finds new ones, or new transformations of old ones. In addition to the overtly religious cults, the last decade especially has seen an increase of secular ‘consciousness cults’... all of which offer a ‘release of tensions’ and a ‘tapping of the hidden capabilities’ of man, expressed in more or less plausible twentieth-century ‘scientific’ jargon.”

Fr. Seraphim counseled Orthodox Christians to absolutely stay away from such movements, whether “religious” or “secular,” warning that they lead one “into a wrong spiritual path whose end is spiritual or psychic disaster, and ultimately the loss of one’s soul eternally.” [15](#)

Fr. Seraphim next turned to a seemingly non-religious phenomenon of our times which is helping to form a “new religious consciousness” even among people who think they are far from any religious interest. This was the phenomenon of “Unidentified Flying Objects.”

For Chapter Six, “Signs from Heaven: An Orthodox Christian Understanding of UFOs,” Fr. Seraphim researched a great many books: works by reputable scientists and historians as well as some popular works which gave him insights into the mind of the times. His library in the “Optina” cell even included the books *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Star Wars*.

At the beginning of the chapter, Fr. Seraphim looked into the background of science-fiction literature in order to characterize the *mentality* associated with UFOs. He then proceeded to the objective evidence for UFO phenomena, quoting scientists he had studied and discussing the official government reports. He chronologically traced the history of UFO sightings in the twentieth century, defined the various kinds of UFO “encounters,” and related in detail some of the more reliable, well-documented, and revealing cases. About “close encounters of the third kind” (cases of actual contact with “animated beings”) he wrote: “Science fiction has given the images, ‘evolution’ has produced the philosophy, and the technology of the ‘space age’ has supplied the plausibility for such encounters.” [16](#)

Having demonstrated that “there can be no reasonable doubt that there is something behind the many thousands of serious UFO reports,” Fr. Seraphim went on to present his conclusions based on Patristic sources. These conclusions, as it turned out, were being corroborated by the secular scientists themselves. “Only lately,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “have serious investigators begun to agree that UFOs, while having certain ‘physical’ characteristics, cannot at all be



explained as somebody's 'space-ships,' but are clearly something of the parapsychical or occult realm." He quoted the French astrophysicist Jacques Vallee as saying that UFOs might be "constructed *both as physical craft... and as psychic devices.*" Dr. Vallee had well asked whether the sightings might not be "carefully engineered scenes" and whether the "visitors from outer space" idea might not "serve as a diversionary role in masking the real, infinitely more complex nature of the technology that gives rise to the sightings." Both he and Dr. J. Allen Hynek, the chief scientific consultant of the Air Force investigations of UFOs, had advanced the theory of "earth-bound aliens," speculating on "interlocking universes" right here on earth from which the phenomena might be coming. In the words of Iowa College Professor Brad Steiger, who had made a detailed study of the Air Force files, "We are dealing with a multi-dimensional parapsychical phenomena which is largely indigenous to planet earth."<sup>17</sup>

Fr. Seraphim wrote that "the most puzzling aspect of UFO phenomena to most researchers — namely, the strange mingling of physical and psychic characteristics in them — is no puzzle at all to readers of Orthodox spiritual books, especially the Lives of Saints. Demons also have 'physical bodies,' although the 'matter' in them is of such subtlety that it cannot be perceived by men unless their spiritual 'doors of perception are opened, whether by God's will (as in the case of holy men) or against it (as in the case of sorcerers and mediums)."<sup>18</sup>

From Orthodox literature spanning the centuries, Fr. Seraphim presented examples of demonic manifestations which precisely fit the UFO pattern. The parallels were so obvious as to be irrefutable. Looking at the supernatural occurrences in the ancient Lives of Saints in this context, the reader cannot but be struck by how "contemporary" is the reality they describe. Fr. Seraphim retold the story of the fourth-century monk Anatolius, who had been led to regard demonic apparitions as "visions of angels" before being enlightened to their true nature by St. Martin of Tours. And from the Life of the fifteenth-century St. Nilus of Sora he related a case of demonic "kidnappers" which bore

marked resemblance to modern reports of UFO “abductions.”

“It is clear,” concluded Fr. Seraphim, “that the manifestations of today’s ‘flying saucers’ are quite within the ‘technology’ of demons; indeed, nothing else can explain them as well. The multifarious demonic deceptions as described in Orthodox literature have been adapted to the mythology of outer space, nothing more; the Anatolius mentioned above would be known today simply as a [UFO] ‘contactee.’ And the purpose of the ‘unidentified’ object in such accounts is clear: to awe the beholders with a sense of the ‘mysterious,’ and to produce ‘proof’ of the ‘higher intelligences’ (‘angels,’ if the victim believes in them, or ‘space visitors’ for modern men), and thereby to gain trust for the *message* they wish to communicate....<sup>19</sup>

“The ‘message’ of the UFOs is: prepare for Antichrist; the ‘saviour’ of the apostate world is coming to rule it. Perhaps he himself will come in the air, in order to complete his impersonation of Christ (Matt. 24:30; Acts 1:11); perhaps only the ‘visitors from outer space’ will land publicly in order to offer ‘cosmic’ worship of their master; perhaps the ‘fire from heaven’ (Apoc. 13:13) will be only a part of the great demonic spectacles of the last times. At any rate, the message for contemporary mankind is: expect deliverance, not from the Christian revelation and faith in an unseen God, but from vehicles in the sky.”<sup>20</sup>

Fr. Seraphim repeated the prophetic words uttered by St. Ignatius Brianchaninov a hundred years earlier: “The miracles of Antichrist will be chiefly manifested in the aerial realm, where Satan chiefly has his dominion.”<sup>21</sup>

As Fr. Seraphim counseled, “the UFO phenomenon is a sign to Orthodox Christians to walk all the more cautiously and soberly on the path to salvation.... The conscious Orthodox Christian... knows that man is not to ‘evolve’ into something ‘higher,’ nor has he any reason to believe that there are ‘highly evolved’ beings on other planets; but he knows well that there are indeed ‘advanced intelligences’ in the universe besides himself: these are of two kinds, and he strives to live so as to dwell with those who serve God (the angels) and avoid contact with the others who have rejected God and strive in their envy and

malice to draw man into their misfortune (the demons). He knows that man, out of self-love and weakness, is easily inclined to follow error and believe in ‘fairy tales’ that promise contact with a ‘higher state’ or ‘higher beings’ without the struggle of Christian life — in fact, precisely as an *escape* from the struggle of Christian life. He distrusts his own ability to see through the deceptions of the demons, and therefore clings all the more firmly to the Scriptural and Patristic guidelines which the Church of Christ provides for his life.”<sup>22</sup>

If the contemporary realities described in this chapter were sobering and frightening, even more so were those described in the chapter that followed, “The Charismatic Revival as a Sign of the Times” — only because the latter were to be found in a sphere commonly regarded as Christian. Having begun as a Protestant movement in the year 1900, the “charismatic revival” had swept Roman Catholicism as well in the late 1960s. Fr. Seraphim became especially concerned about it when, in 1972, it began to be embraced by a number of Orthodox parishes, being actively promoted by a Greek Orthodox priest, Fr. Eusebius Stephanou.

As he had done with UFO phenomena, Fr. Seraphim first traced the history and development of the “charismatic revival.” He observed how the ecumenical movement was now utilizing it in order to unite all churches on the basis of a common “spiritual experience,” and how even some Orthodox Christians had accepted this false criteria for unity. Next he considered the nature of the phenomena itself, drawing primarily on the testimony of people involved and devoted to the “charismatic” movement.

In conjunction with his study of this movement, Fr. Seraphim researched standard textbooks on spiritism and shamanism. On every point, he found that the descriptions of modern-day “charismatic” experiences precisely matched those of old-time *mediumism*, not of the true Christian worship of the Orthodox Church. In the end, he was to coin the term “*Christian*” *mediumism* as a way of identifying this frightening phenomenon. And indeed, in his research he encountered “charismatic” experiences so weird as to make the comparison with

shamanism not seem farfetched. Just as “UFOs” were a new *mediumistic technique* by which the devil gained occult initiates from secular society, so the “charismatic” experience was a technique by which he could influence unwitting Christian society. “The chief actual accomplishment of the modern Pentecostal Movement,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, is “that it has *discovered a new mediumistic technique for entering into and preserving a state wherein miraculous ‘gifts’ become commonplace.*” [23](#)

Nicholas Berdyaev, claimed by Orthodox ‘charismatic’ apologists to be the “great spiritual prophet of our age,” regarded it as absolutely essential that in the “new age of the Holy Spirit” “*there will be no more of the ascetical worldview.*” “The reason,” Fr. Seraphim observed, “is obvious: the Orthodox ascetic worldview gives the only means by which men, having received the Holy Spirit at their baptism and chrismation, may truly continue to acquire the Holy Spirit in their lives; and it teaches how to distinguish and guard one-self against spiritual deception. The ‘new spirituality’ of which Berdyaev dreamed and which the ‘charismatic revival’ actually practices, has an entirely different foundation and is seen to be a fraud in the light of the Orthodox ascetical teaching.”[24](#)

Fr. Seraphim expounded on this ascetical teaching at some length, again making the Holy Fathers come alive for the reader by having them speak directly to contemporary concerns. He especially made use of the writings of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov in applying the ascetical teaching on spiritual deception to specific recorded instances of “charismatic” phenomena. He pointed out that, besides the more spectacular forms of deception in which the devil grants great “visions,” there is another, more common form known in Patristic literature as *fancy*. In this form the victims are offered not visions but just exalted “religious feelings.” This occurs, as St. Ignatius has written, “when the heart desires and strives for the enjoyment of holy and divine feelings while it is still completely unfit for them. Everyone who does not have a contrite spirit, who recognizes any kind of merit or worth in himself, who does not hold unwaveringly the teaching of the Orthodox Church but on some tradition or other has thought out his own

arbitrary judgment or has followed a non-Orthodox teaching — is in this state of deception.” According to St. Ignatius, the deception known as fancy “is satisfied with the invention of counterfeit feelings and states of grace, from which there is born a false, wrong conception of the whole spiritual undertaking... It constantly invents pseudo-spiritual states, an intimate companionship with Jesus, an inward conversation with Him, mystical revelations, voices, enjoyments... From this activity the blood receives a sinful, deceiving movement, which presents itself as a grace-given delight.... It clothes itself in the mask of humility, piety, wisdom.”<sup>25</sup>

“The Holy Spirit,” Fr. Seraphim pointed out, “is acquired... by the long and arduous path of asceticism, the ‘path of sorrows’... within the Church of Christ.”<sup>26</sup> By contrast, as St. Ignatius wrote, “*fancy* lavishes its gifts in boundless abundance and with the greatest speed.”<sup>27</sup>

In the concluding chapter of his book, Fr. Seraphim acknowledged that “there may be those who will doubt that the ‘charismatic revival’ is a form of mediumism; that is only a secondary question of the means or technique by which the ‘spirit’ of the ‘charismatic revival’ is communicated. But that this ‘spirit’ has nothing to do with Orthodox Christianity is abundantly clear. And in fact that ‘spirit’ follows almost to the letter the ‘prophecies’ of Nicholas Berdyaev concerning a ‘New Christianity.’ It completely leaves behind the ‘monastic ascetic spirit of historical Orthodoxy,’ which most effectively exposes its falsity. It is not satisfied with the ‘conservative Christianity which directs the spiritual forces of man only towards contrition and salvation,’ but rather, apparently believing like Berdyaev that such a Christianity is still ‘incomplete,’ adds a second level of ‘spiritual’ phenomena, not one of which is specifically Christian in character (although one is free to *interpret* them as ‘Christian’), which are open to people of every denomination with or without repentance, and which are completely unrelated to salvation. It looks to ‘a new era in Christianity, a new and deep spirituality, which means a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit’—in complete contradiction of Orthodox tradition and prophecy...

“It is deeply indicative of the spiritual state of contemporary mankind that the ‘charismatic’ and ‘meditation’ experiences are taking root among ‘Christians.’ An Eastern religious influence is undeniably at work in such ‘Christians,’ but it is only as a result of something much more fundamental: the loss of the very feeling and savor of Christianity, due to which something so alien to Christianity as Eastern ‘meditation’ can take hold of ‘Christian’ souls...

“The present-day ‘charismatic’ movement and ‘Christian meditation,’ and the ‘new religious consciousness’ of which they are part, are forerunners of *the religion of the future, the religion of the last humanity, the religion of Antichrist*, and their chief ‘spiritual’ function is *to make available to Christians the demonic initiation hitherto restricted to the pagan world*. Let it be that these ‘religious experiments’ are still often of a tentative and groping nature, that there is in them at least as much psychic self-deception as there is a genuinely demonic initiation rite; doubtless not everyone who has successfully ‘meditated’ or thinks he has received the ‘Baptism of the Spirit’ has actually received initiation into the kingdom of Satan. But this is the aim of these ‘experiments,’ and doubtless the techniques of initiation will become even more efficient as mankind becomes prepared for them by the attitudes of passivity and openness to new ‘religious experiences’ which are inculcated by these movements...

“Against this powerful ‘religious experience’ true Orthodox Christians must now arm themselves in earnest, *becoming fully conscious of what Orthodox Christianity is and how its goal is different from that of all other religions, ‘Christian’ or non-Christian*.

“Orthodox Christians! Hold fast to the grace which you have; never let it become a matter of habit; never measure it by merely human standards or expect it to be logical or comprehensible to those who understand nothing higher than what is human or who think to obtain the grace of the Holy Spirit in some other way than that which the one Church of Christ has handed down to us. True Orthodoxy by its very nature must seem totally out of place in these demonic times, a dwindling minority of the despised and ‘foolish,’ in the midst of a

religious ‘revival’ inspired by another kind of spirit. But let us take comfort from the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: *Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom* (Luke 12:32).”<sup>28</sup>

IN writing *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, Fr. Seraphim used a method that proved most effective in reaching modern-day readers. Whether writing about Eastern religions, UFOs, or charismatic phenomena, Fr. Seraphim would always state the facts first, letting the evidence speak for itself before offering any categorical conclusions. Sometimes, as in the case of practices which any Christian reader would readily recognize as pagan, this would only require a few pages; in other cases, as when dealing with charismatic phenomena, much more material was needed as evidence.

In *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, the facts and descriptions in each chapter work toward a separate conclusion, and then all the individual conclusions culminate at the end of the book in a message of astonishing unity and clarity. Since all parts lead toward one end, it is important that the book be read as a whole.

Another quality of Fr. Seraphim’s writing which should be mentioned is its understatement — something which Helen Kontzevitch had always employed in her own writings and appreciated in Fr. Seraphim’s. At the end of *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, Fr. Seraphim even noted that “this book has been deliberately ‘understated.’” “Our intention,” he wrote, “has been to present as calm and objective a view as possible of the non-Christian religious attitudes which are preparing the way for the ‘religion of the future’; we have hardly touched on some of the ‘horror stories’ that could be cited from some of the cults mentioned in this book: true stories that reveal what happens when one’s involvement with the unseen demonic powers becomes complete.”<sup>29</sup>

On the eve of the publication of the revised edition of the book, however, the whole world was suddenly made aware of perhaps the worst of these “horror stories”: the mass suicide of nearly a thousand cult members in “Jonestown,”

Guyana. Fr. Seraphim felt called upon to mention it in an epilogue, speaking of Jim Jones' spiritualism that tied him to the "new religious consciousness" (Jones stated that he was an "oracle or medium for discarnate entities from another galaxy"), and also of his Communism that tied him to the twentieth-century revolution of nihilism (he bequeathed all the assets of the Jonestown commune — some seven million dollars — to the Communist Party of the USSR). In the phenomenon of Jim Jones and his followers, Fr. Seraphim saw "the particular blending of religion and politics that seems to be required for the zealots of Antichrist, the religious-political leader of the last humanity."<sup>30</sup>

**A**LTHOUGH Fr. Seraphim employed understatement and avoided sensationalism, some readers may find the conclusions he drew to be unnecessarily severe. It is true that, in his published writings, Fr. Seraphim had always been one to address contemporary issues head on. Alexey Young recalls: "Fr. Seraphim observed that so many church publications dealt with 'non-issues' like local parish activities, or historical nostalgia, instead of addressing the questions and burdens that were in the hearts of many."<sup>31</sup> Since Christian truth was so often being compromised in the modern world, Fr. Seraphim felt he could not afford to put on kid gloves, especially when confronting demonic deceptions which were leading well-meaning people to perdition. Once, as *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* was being serialized in *The*

*Orthodox Word*, he remarked in a letter: "The conclusion is so frightful that we wonder if our readers can take it.<sup>[b]</sup> But then it's about time that such things were said."<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, despite his severity when it came to warning of demonic deceptions, Fr. Seraphim was loving and compassionate in his pastoral approach to individual people. Thus, after talking with several sincere Christians who had been involved in the "charismatic" movement and had read his chapter on the subject, he became more aware of their feelings and was better able to grasp the personal side of the issues he was addressing. A paragraph he added to the



revised edition of *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* as a result of these discussions carries this more personal tone:

“This book has been read by a number of people who have participated in the ‘charismatic revival’; many of them have then abandoned this movement, recognizing that the spirit they had experienced in ‘charismatic’ phenomena was *not the* Holy Spirit. To such people, involved in the ‘charismatic’ movement, who are now reading this book, we wish to say: You may well feel that your experience in the ‘charismatic’ movement has been largely something good (even though you may have reservations about some things you have seen or experienced in it); you may well be unable to believe that there is anything demonic in it. In suggesting that the ‘charismatic’ movement is mediumistic in inspiration, we do not mean to deny the *whole* of your experience while involved in it. If you have been awakened to repentance for your sins, to the realization that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Saviour of mankind, to sincere love for God and your neighbor — all this is indeed good and would not be lost by abandoning the ‘charismatic’ movement. But if you think that your experience of ‘speaking in tongues,’ or ‘prophesying,’ or whatever else of the ‘supernatural’ that you may have experienced, is from God — then this book is an invitation for you to find out that the realm of true Christian spiritual experience is much deeper than you have felt up to now, that the wiles of the devil are much more subtle than you may have imagined, that the willingness of our fallen human nature to mistake illusion for truth, emotional comfort for spiritual experience, is much greater than you think.”<sup>33</sup>

Fr. Seraphim took a similar approach with those who were sincerely seeking for truth in the Eastern religions. In a letter to a young man, a student of the writings of René Guénon who was pursuing an intellectual interest in Eastern religions, Fr. Seraphim told of his own early involvement in Guénon and Oriental studies. Finally he concluded: “I look back fondly now on René Guénon as my first real instructor in Truth, and I only pray that you will take what is good from him and not let his limitations chain you. Even psychologically,

‘Eastern wisdom’ is not for us who are flesh and blood of the West; Orthodox Christianity is clearly the tradition that was given us — and it can be clearly seen in the Western Europe of the first ten centuries, before the falling away of Rome from Orthodoxy. But it also happens that Orthodoxy is not merely a ‘tradition’ like any other — a ‘handing down’ of spiritual wisdom from the past; it is God’s Truth here and now — it gives us immediate contact with God such as no other tradition can do. There are many truths in the other traditions, both those handed down from a past when men were closer to God, and those discovered by gifted men in the reaches of the mind; but the full Truth is only in Christianity, God’s revelation of Himself to mankind. I will take only one example: there are teachings on spiritual deception in other traditions, but none so thoroughly refined as those taught by the Orthodox Holy Fathers; and more importantly, these deceptions of the evil one and our own fallen nature are so omnipresent and so thorough that no one could escape them unless the loving God revealed by Christianity were close at hand to deliver us from them. Similarly: Hindu tradition teaches many true things about the end of the Kali-Yuga; but one who merely *knows* these truths in the mind will be helpless to resist the temptations of those times, and many who recognize the Antichrist (*Chakravarti*) when he comes will nonetheless worship him — only the power of Christ given to the heart will have strength to resist him.”<sup>34</sup>

**F**OLLOWING the publication of *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, the St. Herman Monastery was visited by people who had been involved in the phenomena it described. On November 25, 1976, Fr. Seraphim recorded in his Chronicle: “Today B. G. comes to visit for the weekend. He was born Orthodox (Greek) in Stockton, later became a ‘Christian Yoga’ monk, until his swami purged his sect of Christian influences and told him he would have to leave, as Orthodox Christians and Jews alone could not renounce their religion. He went back to his place of origin to begin anew, and now for several months has been attending the Greek Church in Stockton, being interested in monastic life. He

leaves on Sunday, seemingly satisfied with his stay and with the idea of coming later to spend a longer time, as part of a pilgrimage to a number of Orthodox monasteries.”

There also came those suffering from the spiritual deception that Fr. Seraphim had discussed in his book. In July of 1976 a young man named Jeff visited for a weekend, having been brought to the monastery by an Orthodox man from San Francisco. Fr. Seraphim’s Chronicle reads: “On Sunday Fr. Seraphim has a long talk with Jeff, of a Protestant background, who over several years (he is now twenty-seven) has been having strange experiences — seeing strange figures and powers — especially in connection with the efforts of one cult to ‘capture’ him lately. No one is able to explain his experiences to him, and reading St. Symeon the New Theologian, he wonders whether his experiences might be close to the Saint’s — a vision of ‘living water’ in particular. Fr. Seraphim explains that the experiences are from the devil, are nothing unusual in our time, and that his answer is to become Orthodox — after which his psychic sensitivity will probably decrease and spiritual life can begin. Truly what demon-ridden times ours are!”<sup>35</sup>

Fr. Seraphim’s advice reflects that given by St. Ignatius Brianchaninov to a monk in a similar state. The monk, who had been led by “fancy” to think he was a great ascetic and visionary, told St. Ignatius that he was constantly enveloped in burning heat and heard angels telling him to fly through the air to Mount Athos. When he followed the Saint’s advice to just live a humble monastic life without taking on self-willed ascetic feats (and to live on the first floor in case he was tempted to “fly” out the window), all his “special powers” went away and he was able to begin again on a sober footing.<sup>36</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Fr. Seraphim’s book had a profound effect on several “charismatics” who read it. One example was a pilgrim named Dan, who visited the monastery in September of 1974. “During his brief visit,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “the story of this young man unfolded itself. He was from a conservative Protestant background which he found spiritually barren, and he had been

opened up to ‘spiritual’ experiences by his Pentecostalist grandmother: the moment he touched a Bible she had given him, he received ‘spiritual gifts’—most notably, he was attended by an invisible ‘spirit’ who gave him precise instructions as to where to walk and drive; and he was able at will to hypnotize others and cause them to levitate (a talent which he playfully used to terrorize atheist acquaintances). Occasionally he would doubt that his ‘gifts’ were from God, but these doubts were overcome when he reflected on the fact that his spiritual ‘barrenness’ had vanished, that his ‘spiritual rebirth’ had been brought about by contact *with the Bible*, and that he seemed to be leading a very rich life of prayer and ‘spirituality.’ Upon becoming acquainted with Orthodoxy at this monastery, and especially after reading the article on the ‘charismatic revival,’ he admitted that here he found the first thorough and clear explanation of his ‘spiritual’ experiences; most likely, he confessed, his ‘spirit’ was an evil one.”<sup>37</sup>

Dan had read the article on the “charismatic revival” in its serial form in *The Orthodox Word*. Later, when Fr. Seraphim included this article in his book, he related Dan’s story in the preface, without mentioning his name. In a year or so Dan came again to the monastery, telling the fathers that he had abandoned his “charismatic” activities as too frightening. Having now been given a copy of *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, he quickly recognized himself as a character in it.

Sometime later the fathers received this letter from a woman in Missouri:

Dear Sirs:

Your chapter on “Charismatic Revival” is superb. From my experience it is “right on”! You have perceived so well the actuality of it all. We “Protestants,” who are feeling so bereft of any power or strength for these increasingly hard times, reach out for more than is demonstrated in our own church affairs, and in this reach to the charismatic realm we see some evidence of power that is not displayed in our own situations. At first we

are impressed. But then we begin to realize some of the fallacies in practice and in perception. It all comes so easy — these “powers” of healing, prophecy, etc.—and seemingly to people of such little spiritual depth... And then we want to back away. But to what? To where? It is your Orthodoxy, that to me displays real strength and beauty and holiness and marks of striving in one’s own personal conduct, that I see missing in other religions. I am enclosing a pamphlet that I thought might interest you in this regard of charismatic movements. I note a form of self-righteousness that emanates instead of true humility from this arena of charismatic groups, which to me is sad. Thanks for your edification.

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM’S conversion to true Christianity out of the realm of Eastern religions gave him a valuable edge in reaching out to people who were still enmeshed in this realm. The following is an account of a college student specializing in Religious Studies, who at the age of nineteen met Fr. Seraphim:

“Although I had been raised ‘Christian’ in a rather loose sense of the word, by my freshman year in college I had been involved for some time in Zen Buddhism, both in study and in practice. When I first encountered Orthodox Christianity through some college students and attended my first Orthodox service, I was deeply moved. My heart immediately responded, even if my mind didn’t. Soon thereafter I was invited to the dormitory of the Orthodox students — fervent young converts who were looking for more converts. Almost immediately they began telling me that ‘all the gods of the heathen are demons’ (Psalm 95:5)—and quoting Fr. Seraphim’s book to prove it. I was offended. I felt they could have at least got to know me before attacking what they assumed to be my beliefs. But more importantly, I felt that they didn’t know what they were talking about. What did *they* know about Zen Buddhism? They were converts from Lutheranism and Anglicanism, and had probably not sat in a lotus position in all their lives! I felt at that time that my experiences were spiritually ‘neutral.’ I had never worshipped some eight-armed idol, and I never intended

to. I had just burned incense, sat on my *zafu* and ‘counted my breaths.’ Under the influence of Zen philosophy, I had believed that ‘God’ was impersonal: the ‘One Mind,’ the ‘Big Self,’ etc.

“The students gave me a copy of *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* to keep. Somehow inside me I felt there was much truth in that book, but at the same time I felt I wasn’t ready for it. ‘I’ll come to it when I’m ready,’ I thought. —But I wouldn’t be forced!

“Then I met Fr. Seraphim himself when he came to the college campus, and everything fell into place. Somehow my Orthodox friends (by this time I had forgiven them) had led me to believe that Fr. Seraphim had once been closely involved in Hinduism. (Looking back, I believe this was because they had read portions of the chapter by the woman who had converted from Hinduism, not noticing that that chapter had not been written by Fr. Seraphim.) When I asked him about this, he said, ‘No, I was more involved with Buddhism.’ That already made me feel closer to him. I asked him about the concept of the ‘Impersonal God,’ something that had for some time been troubling me. I guess I was expecting a learned answer from such an intelligent man — but that’s not what I got. Instead, he told me something simple and down-to-earth that spoke directly to my heart. It made perfect sense, on a rational as well as on a deeper level. I realized that Fr. Seraphim spoke not just as an intelligent repeater of ‘correct’ Orthodox phrases, but as someone who *knew*, who had experienced both sides, and that’s why his words had power. As it turned out, he knew infinitely more about Buddhism than I did. My meeting with him was a turning point for me, one that would lead to my baptism into the true Church of Jesus Christ.

“When I finally did read *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* straight through, it was like reading a part of myself, something which in my soul I had known all along.”

ONE reader of *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* has commented: “Some years ago, when I read this book, it seemed very ‘far-out’ to me. I

thought: These are just *fringe* movements Fr. Seraphim is describing — this kind of thing can't really be taking over the world. Now, however, I see otherwise. All that Fr. Seraphim was saying is true.”

Any thoughtful observer of the world today can see that the formation of a “new spirituality” has progressed precisely along the lines that Fr. Seraphim described. When Fr. Seraphim’s book was first published in 1975, the form of neopaganism in Western society was only beginning to be delineated. Today it has taken on a much more definite shape, being seen most clearly in what has come to be known as “New Age” spirituality. In 1975 the term “New Age,” though indeed familiar in Masonic, esoteric, and countercultural groups, was not common parlance. Now it is a banner term for a whole worldwide movement — and a multi-billion dollar business.

Having no formal membership, geographic center, dogma or creed, the New Age movement is a loose network of people who share similar ideas and practices, and who align themselves with the worldview of the “new religious consciousness.”<sup>38</sup> New Agers can hold to any number of neopagan beliefs, from pantheism, panentheism, monism, reincarnation and karma, to a belief in a World-Soul and in Mother Earth (Gaia) as a goddess or living entity. Various psychotechnologies (e.g., guided imagery, possibility thinking, hypnosis, “dream work,” “past-life regression,” Yoga, Tantra, and hallucinogenic drugs), divination (tarot, astrology), and spiritistic practices (now usually referred to as “channeling”) are undertaken in order to raise practitioners to new levels of consciousness, to develop new “mind-body-spirit” potentials, to effect “inner healing,” or to attain psychic powers.

According to the prevailing New Age view, since man and everything else is God, only one reality exists; and therefore all religions are only different paths to that reality. New Agers anticipate that a new universal religion which contains elements of all current faiths will evolve and become generally accepted worldwide.

As the New Age “religion of the future” takes shape, we see in our

Western, post-Christian society the continued rise of neopaganism in every possible form. The Eastern religions that Fr. Seraphim wrote about — especially Hinduism and Buddhism — continue to gain followers, receiving endorsements from high-profile celebrities and being publicized through television talk shows, news magazines, and other media outlets. At the same time, however, we see today an equal if not greater interest in *Western* forms of paganism. Witchcraft, Druidical magic, gnosticism, and Native American shamanism have gained enormous popularity among Westerners who find them closer to their own roots than Eastern religions. Kabbalah, the Jewish system of occultism developed after the time of Christ, has also attracted widespread interest; its adherents now include many movie and rock stars.<sup>39</sup> While many people merely dabble intellectually in these modern expressions of paganism/occultism, a growing number have entered deeply into their practice, thus taking part in the “initiation experience” that Fr. Seraphim said would characterize the religion of the future.

With the help of books, movies, television shows, games, and web sites that target young audiences, witchcraft has become one of the most fashionable themes in American youth culture.<sup>40</sup> Today in America, the most popular form of witchcraft is Wicca, a modern amalgam of medieval witchcraft, feminism, goddess worship, pantheism, “deep ecology,” and worship of the earth. In terms of percentage, Wicca is the fastest growing religion in the United States and Canada. With adherents being inducted from among the old and young alike, it is estimated that the number of Wiccans in the U.S. and Canada is doubling every thirty months.<sup>41</sup> According to polls taken by the Wiccan organization “Covenant of the Goddess,” the total number of self-styled Pagans in the United States, including witches, is now nearing a million and a half.<sup>42</sup>

While such statistics are a significant indicator of the growing normalization of paganism in our society, more significant is the fact that *New Age ideas and practices* are entering more and more into all spheres of human thought and activity, shaping the lives of millions who may not consciously identify themselves as neopagans or New Agers. Thus, the “New Age” has



become less an organized movement than a leaven insinuating itself everywhere: into psychology, sociology, history, the arts, religion, health care, education, and government. Mental hospitals throughout the country have instituted New Age programs: Eastern meditation, transpersonal psychology, biofeedback, and music meditation. Many senior citizen centers have adopted Yoga as a way to promote “mind-body” health. A large number of major corporations have sponsored New Age seminars for their employees, where visualization, hypnosis, “psychic healing,” “dream work,” contacting “spirit guides,” and other “consciousness-raising” practices have been taught. Even in public, government-funded schools, mediumism under the name of “channeling” has been taught as a means of “inner healing.”<sup>43</sup>

Christian churches, sadly, follow the same dangerous trends, trailing in the dust of the world’s march of apostasy. In the mid-1970s Fr. Seraphim had written: “The profound ignorance of true Christian spiritual experience in our times is producing a false Christian ‘spirituality’ whose nature is closely kin to the ‘new religious consciousness.’” Years before “channeling” of disembodied entities had become popularized as a New Age fad, Fr. Seraphim had quoted “charismatics” speaking about how they “channeled” the “Holy Spirit.” But even if we omit the whole issue of the “charismatic revival,” the prognosis he made has been borne out in other areas. As New Ager Marilyn Ferguson writes in her book *The Aquarian Conspiracy*: “An increasing number of churches and synagogues have begun to enlarge their context to include support committees for personal growth, holistic health centers, healing services, meditation workshops, consciousness-altering through music, even biofeedback training.”<sup>44</sup>

In the city of Detroit, for example, “Silva Mind-Control” courses have been taught by a Roman Catholic priest and nun. In New York City, the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine has featured sermons by David Spangler — a leading member of the Findhorn Foundation who has said that a “Luciferian Initiation” would be required to enter the New Age. In Oakland, California, the “University of Creation Spirituality,” under the leadership of Episcopal priest

Matthew Fox, advocates a redefined “Christianity” that rejects traditional Christian theology and the ascetical Christian worldview while embracing Wiccan spirituality. Here, “rave masses” (also known as “techno-cosmic masses”) are held every month, having been originally launched at Grace Episcopal Cathedral in San Francisco. Described by one observer as “a syncretistic brew of paganism, witchcraft, nature-worship, drama, art and dance,” these multi-media “masses” are attended by well over a thousand people.<sup>45</sup>

Within many mainline Christian churches (especially Methodist and Presbyterian), there is a strong and determined movement to “re-imagine” the Christian Faith along the lines of radical feminist theology, neopagan goddess worship, and a New Age worldview. At “Re-imagining” conferences, attended largely by mainline Christian clergy, the goddess “Sophia” is worshipped rather than Jesus Christ, and a “liturgy” is celebrated wherein milk and honey are used rather than bread and wine.<sup>46</sup>

Concurrently, there is now a movement in Roman Catholicism to assimilate the teachings of Carl Jung, one of the founding fathers of the New Age movement. Jung, who participated in séances and admitted to having “spirit guides,” taught that the exclusion of the “dark side” is a fatal flaw in Christianity, and that therefore there needs to be a fourth *Hypostasis* added to the Holy Trinity — Lucifer! His theories are being extolled in Roman Catholic seminars and workshops, and his psychotherapy is being practiced in some Roman Catholic churches, and by monks and nuns in some monasteries.<sup>47</sup> Episcopal and Protestant (especially Methodist) churches have also entered this movement: a number of Protestant ministers also work as Jungian analysts.<sup>48</sup>

In the realm of charismatic experiences, Fr. Seraphim’s observations have been borne out most strikingly in the “holy laughter” movement. About “laughter in the Holy Spirit,” Fr. Seraphim had written: “Here perhaps more clearly than anywhere else the ‘charismatic revival’ reveals itself as not at all Christian in religious orientation.”<sup>49</sup> This is precisely the charismatic

phenomenon that has seen the greatest increase in the last decade.

In 1994, at the Airport Vineyard Church of Toronto, an event occurred which skyrocketed into the public limelight, eliciting the attention of the worldwide media. Billed as the top tourist attraction of 1994, this was the so-called Toronto Blessing, at which the Holy Spirit was said to have filled crowds with uncontrollable laughter. Men and women not only collapsed on the floor in bouts of laughter, cackling and hooting, but were also seen to crawl on the ground and bark like dogs, paw the ground and snort like bulls, “oink,” roar, growl, and emit other animal noises — behavior which in Orthodox countries even today is regarded as a sign of demonic possession.<sup>50</sup>

Since then, hundreds of thousands of Christians from all over the world have come to “catch the fire” of the laughter movement. Of these, fifteen thousand have been Christian ministers and pastors who have subsequently brought the movement to their congregations throughout the world. In England alone, seven thousand churches, including those of the Church of England, have embraced the Toronto Blessing. The movement has swept what has long been regarded as mainstream Christianity. In July of 1995, Pat Robertson’s 700 Club featured a Pentecostal and several Protestant and Roman Catholic charismatic scholars who defended the animal noises as either manifestations of the Holy Spirit or human responses to the Holy Spirit’s working.<sup>51</sup>

In the area of UFOs, Fr. Seraphim’s conclusions have also been borne out by new developments. Now there is a growing consciousness, not only on a scientific but on a *popular* level as well, that the UFO phenomenon is not just a matter of beings from other planets in spaceships, that it is somehow involved in the psychic and occult realm, and that the “aliens” are somehow inhabiting the earth with us. Also, the image — promoted by director Steven Spielberg in his films *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*—of benevolent and even “cuddly” aliens, is now being replaced by an image closer to the truth. With the experiences described by Whitley Strieber in his book *Communion: A True Story*, the public has been shown that these so-called

“visitors” are in fact cruel, malicious beings who wreak psychic havoc on those who contact them.<sup>52</sup> (This aspect of the phenomenon also corresponds very closely with the evidence amassed by the scientists Vallee and Hynek.) “I felt an indescribable sense of menace,” Strieber writes. “It was hell on earth to be there, and yet I couldn’t move, couldn’t cry out, and couldn’t get away. I lay as still as death, suffering inner agonies. Whatever was there seemed so monstrous and ugly, so filthy and dark and sinister...” Strieber also describes peculiar smells associated with his “visitors” — among them, a “sulfur-like” odor such as is mentioned when the ancient Lives of Saints speak of demonic encounters. Perhaps the saddest “sign of the times” in our post-Christian age is the fact that great numbers of spiritually impoverished people now find it preferable to be in contact with these monstrous and pitiless “visitors” than to feel all alone in what seems to them an impersonal universe. As a journal called *The Communion Letter* states, “People all across the world are encountering strange beings in their homes and even in the streets... along the roads of dream and night.” The journal asks people to “learn to respond usefully and effectively to the visitors if they appear in your life.—Discover the mystery, the wonder, and the beauty of the experience... the things the ordinary media will not reveal... the strange and wonderful truths that are rushing up out of the darkness.”

In the face of all this, the Christian believer can hardly doubt Fr. Seraphim’s words that, indeed, “Satan... is now entering naked into human history.”<sup>53</sup>

**A**T is interesting to note that 1975, the year that Fr. Seraphim’s book came out, was a banner year for the “new religious consciousness.” This was when the deceased occultist Alice Bailey — one of the major builders of the present-day New Age movement and an avowed enemy of orthodox Christianity — had designated for her disciples to publicly disseminate hitherto secret teachings to all available media. During that year David Spangler, Benjamin Creme and a host of other New Age spokesmen and organizations began their public work.

The goals of the “New Age” were mapped out well in advance in the writings of Helen Blavatsky (founder of the Theosophical Society, who called Satan “the real creator and benefactor... of Mankind”),<sup>54</sup> Alice Bailey, Nicholas Roerich (author of the Agni Yoga writings), H. G. Wells, and Teilhard de Chardin. In the words of Teilhard, these goals begin with a “convergence of religions” in tandem with a “confluence” of political and economic forces toward World Government.<sup>55</sup> Today, some New Age circles speak of “The Plan” for a “New World Order,” which would include a universal credit system, a universal tax, a global police force, and an international authority that would control the world’s food supply and transportation systems. In this utopian scheme, wars, disease, hunger, pollution, and poverty will end. All forms of discrimination will cease, and people’s allegiance to tribe or nation will be replaced by a planetary consciousness.

Within New Age esoteric societies, it is taught that we must go through mass “planetary initiations” for the realization of “The Plan.” As we have seen, David Spangler — a follower of the writings of Alice Bailey who is himself regarded as a founding figure of the modern New Age movement — these initiations will be “Luciferic” at their esoteric core. Reiterating the teachings of Bailey, who “channeled” them from a discarnate entity called “Djwhal Khul,” Spangler writes: “Lucifer works within each of us to bring us to wholeness as we move into the New Age... each of us is brought to that point which I term the Luciferic initiation.... Lucifer comes to give us the final... Luciferic initiations... that many people in the days ahead will be facing, for it is an initiation into the New Age.”<sup>56</sup>

The core of the New Age movement is found in what Joseph Campbell has called a “new planetary mythology”: a mythology which maintains that man is not fallen, that he is ultimately perfectible through the process of “evolution,” and that through leaps of consciousness he can realize that he is God and thus actualize the chiliastic dream of a Kingdom of God on earth. Such a mythology makes way for the final goal of the “new religious consciousness,” which is to

bring forth the New Age Messiah: the so-called “Maitreya — the Christ.” According to Alice Bailey, “angels” will appear with this false Christ in order to convince people that they should follow him.

The New Age movement is only the “spiritual” side of a much broader movement which has mushroomed in the decades since Fr. Seraphim’s death. This is the multi-faceted movement toward one-world government, which is very much in the interest of those whose goals may not be religious at all. In a talk he gave in 1978, Fr. Seraphim contemplated the possibility of such a global system: “St. Paul spoke of one of the signs of the end: *The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. For when people will say, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them* (I Thes. 5:2–3). Never has there been more talk of ‘peace and security’ than today. One of the chief organs of the United Nations is the ‘Security Council,’ and organizations for ‘world peace’ are everywhere. If men do achieve finally a semblance of ‘peace and security,’ it would seem to contemporary man to be a state like heaven on earth — a millennium. The practical way to do this is to unite all governments under one. For the first time in history such an ideal becomes a possible goal of practical politics — a world ruler is conceivable now. For the first time, the Antichrist becomes an historical possibility.”<sup>57</sup>

In the years since Fr. Seraphim spoke these words, international investment bankers and corporations have made enormous strides toward their goal of a hegemony of world finance and a global economic system. In 1980 the following warning was issued by Admiral Charles Ward, a former member of the elite “Council on Foreign Relations,” which includes major government figures, heads of multinational corporations, and representatives of the largest banking firms in the world: “The most powerful cliques in these elitist groups have an objective in common — they want to bring about the surrender of the sovereignty and the national independence of the United States. A second clique of international members in the CFR... comprises the Wall Street International bankers and their key agents. Primarily, they want the world banking monopoly

from whatever power ends up in the control of global government.”<sup>58</sup> More recently, in 1993, the President of the Council on Foreign Relations, Les Gelb, announced on television: “You had me on [before] to talk about the New World Order.... I talk about it all the time.... It’s one world now.... Willing or not, ready or not, we are all involved... The competition is about who will establish the first one-world system of government that has ever existed in the society of nations. It is control over each of us as individuals and over all of us together as a community.”<sup>59</sup>

With the establishment of the European Union, the creation of the Euro currency, the control of former Eastern-bloc countries by Western financial interests, the advances toward a cashless society, the formation of an international criminal tribunal by the United Nations, and the consolidation of state armies as “peacekeeping” forces under the United Nations and NATO, we see what appear to be the forerunners of such a one-world system. Some of these developments are not necessarily evil in themselves. Taken together, however, they help to set up a global apparatus which can make way for the rising “religion of the future.” Such was the expectation of Alice Bailey, who in the 1940s wrote: “The expressed aims and efforts of the United Nations will be eventually brought to fruition, and a new church of God, gathered out of all religions and spiritual groups, will unitedly bring to an end the great heresy of separateness.”<sup>60</sup> Robert Muller, former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, expressed the same belief on the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations in 1995: “At the beginning the United Nations was only a hope. Today it is a political reality. Tomorrow it will be the world’s religion.”<sup>61</sup> A proponent of the teaching of both Alice Bailey and Teilhard de Chardin, Muller says that mankind’s goal should be “to see the religions globalize themselves urgently in order to give us a universal, cosmic meaning of life on Earth and give birth to the first global, cosmic, universal civilization.”<sup>62</sup>

**F**ROM all that has been said above, it can be seen how, in the years

following the publication of Fr. Seraphim's book and especially following his repose, the formation of an actual "religion of the future" has become increasingly believable. Now we can see even more clearly how humanity is being made open to the "demonic pentecost" that Fr. Seraphim predicted, in which the multitudes of the world — including well-meaning Christians — can actually be initiated into the realm of demons.

In the nineteenth century, the Russian Orthodox philosopher Ivan Kireyevsky explained how the acquisition of the Patristic mind enables one to see what others cannot: "An Orthodox mind stands at the point where all roads cross. He carefully looks down each road and, from his unique vantage point, observes the conditions, dangers, uses, and ultimate destination of each road. He examines each road from a Patristic viewpoint as his personal convictions come into actual, not hypothetical, contact with the surrounding culture." As Alexey Young was to observe: "These words perfectly describe Fr. Seraphim's thought and explain why so much of what he wrote had a strong 'prophetic' flavor. It was *not* that he was some kind of clairvoyant elder or 'oracle,' but simply that, being steeped in the wisdom of the Fathers, and applying these Patristic principles to day-to-day living, he was able to see clearly what awaits those who organize life (both in society and in the Church) according to the spirit of this world."

When Fr. Seraphim was writing in the mid-1970s about the dangers of the neopagan cults, there were other "cult-watchers" around (although then they were not so widely listened to as when the "cult-scare" hit America in 1979, in the wake of the Jonestown massacre). Without the Patristic principles of spiritual life, however, they were not able to perceive the underlying unity behind the phenomena of UFOs, Eastern religions, *and* the "charismatic revival" — all of which possess mediumistic techniques for getting in contact with fallen spirits under different guises.

Now that the New Age movement has become so visible and powerful, a number of "warning" books by Christian authors have become available. In



1983, a year after Fr. Seraphim's death, one of these books became a number one bestseller among Protestant Christians: *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow: the New Age Movement and Our Coming Age of Barbarism*, by Attorney Constance E. Cumbey.<sup>63</sup> Although this book is, like the others, not informed by Patristic principles and may include some exaggerated conclusions, it came as a much-needed eye-opener to the Christian world, revealing little-known facts about the roots of the New Age movement, and about the cooperating religious, political, economic, health, and environmental organizations working toward the "New World Order." After the book came out, Constance Cumbey went on a speaking tour, appearing many times on television and radio, giving interviews and debating such prominent New Age leaders as Benjamin Creme. Then, in 1988, she came across *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*. This book by a predecessor in her field was like a revelation to her. To the St. Herman Brotherhood she wrote: "An unknown benefactor sent me a copy of Fr. Rose's book approximately one year ago, and I consider it the most important book I have read on the subject to date. Reading Fr. Rose is like drinking pure water after wading in muck! I have recommended it to many people in my public talks and radio interviews."<sup>64</sup>

Of the forty books that the Brotherhood published during Fr. Seraphim's lifetime — twenty in English and twenty in Russian—*Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* was the most popular. At the time of this writing, it is in its ninth English printing.

In Russia the impact of the book has been far greater than it has in America. During his lifetime Fr. Seraphim learned that the book had been translated into Russian behind the Iron Curtain, but he was never to know the astounding results. After his death it became known that the Russian translation (or a number of translations) had been secretly distributed among believers all over Russia in the form of countless typewritten manuscripts. The lives of untold thousands were changed as this book awakened them to the spiritual dangers of their times. The book was seen to be particularly relevant to a Russian society

which, deprived of true spiritual nourishment throughout over a half-century of enforced materialism, was increasingly falling prey to fraudulent spiritual trends.

With the “opening up” of Eastern European countries, portions of the widely known “underground” manuscript of *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* were published in newspapers inside Russia. The chapters on “The Fakir’s Miracle and the Prayer of Jesus” and on the UFO phenomenon appeared, introduced by biographical information on Fr. Seraphim. In both cases the articles were deliberately published to fulfill a specific need, since Eastern religions and UFO experiences have attracted tremendous interest in Russia. As the newspaper publishers stated, Fr. Seraphim’s explanation of these phenomena has proven more plausible than any other theories. One believer in Russia has said: “Fr. Seraphim’s books demonstrate that these seemingly ‘inexplicable’ phenomena *can* be explained according to the stable, secure, precise theory of Orthodox Patristic doctrine.”<sup>[65](#)</sup>

Finally, in 1991, the entire book was published in mass quantities inside Russia. There are now many Russian editions, as well as editions in Greek, Serbian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Georgian, Latvian, French, and German.

**O**VER the years *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* has succeeded in jarring people from complacency, making them take spiritual life more seriously. It has challenged them with the reality that there is indeed a spiritual war going on, a battle for souls, and that they must *walk circumspectly* (Eph. 5:15) so as not to lose the grace of God which leads them heavenward.

This was Fr. Seraphim’s intent, but he knew it was only a beginning step. It would lay the groundwork for the Brotherhood’s other books — books that would help people to continue on the Orthodox Christian path, giving them otherworldly images to live by and to draw inspiration from in order to *endure to the end* (Matt. 24:13) and so attain salvation.

## Western Orthodox Roots

*How sweet, for those who thirst after God, are these remote solitudes with their forests! How pleasant, for those who thirst after Christ, are those retreats, extending far and wide, where only nature wakes! All things are hushed. Then, as if under the goad of silence, the mind is aroused joyfully towards its God, and quickens with unutterable transports. No shrill distraction is met there, no word, except perhaps with God. That sweet din alone breaks in amid the hush of the remote abode. An uproar sweeter than silence interrupts that state of placid silence, a holy tumult of modest converse...*

—St. Eucherius of Lyons<sup>1</sup>

**A**TTRACTED by the solitudes of the desert, a thirty-five-year-old man once penetrated into the forest: “He set out, not for any distant place, but for the wilderness close to his own home. What did he hope to achieve by this? Why did he not stay in an established monastic community, or seek out one with more renowned elders?... Everything in his life... seemed to indicate that he had no religious ‘romanticism’ whatever: he did not dream of far-away lands, ‘ideal monasteries,’ or ‘holy elders.’ He thought of only one thing: how, on the solid foundation of the ABC’s of spiritual life and strict monastic practice, to save his soul and prepare for the heavenly Kingdom.”<sup>2</sup>

These words could well serve to describe Fr. Seraphim Rose, who settled permanently in the wilderness at age thirty-five with just such an approach to the monastic life. But they were not written for that purpose. They were actually

written by Fr. Seraphim himself to describe St. Romanus, the ancient fifth-century founder of desert monasticism in the land of Fr. Seraphim's own ancestors: France.

As Fr. Seraphim went deeper into the Christian world of ancient France (called Gaul in those times), he was in awe before its forgotten spiritual riches. "The air of fifth- and sixth-century Gaul," he wrote in a letter, "is extremely invigorating and inspiring."<sup>3</sup> Here was a world that was purely Orthodox — with the same piety, practices and outlook found in Eastern Orthodox lands — and was at the same time wholly of the West. Being of French descent on his father's side, Fr. Seraphim found here a vital connection with his own Orthodox roots. As at the beginning of his monastic path he had drawn inspiration from the phenomenon of desert-dwelling in northern Russia, so now was he to do so from an identical phenomenon in the land of his forefathers. The flight of God-seeking men and women into the Jura Mountains of ancient Gaul was in fact an exact precursor of the movement that began in Russia almost a millennium later. "The Jura monasteries," wrote Fr. Seraphim in 1976 to a young monastic aspirant, "are especially interesting to us because they are a *forested* desert, very close to the spirit of the Northern Thebaid (or to the American Thebaid that could be if there were souls to match the mountains!)."<sup>4</sup> It is noteworthy that Fr. Seraphim took up an in-depth study of monastic Gaul at about the same time he was preparing the book *The Northern Thebaid*.



A scene from the Jura Mountains of eastern France. *Photograph by Michel Loup, from the book Paysages: Massif du Jura.*

What appealed most to Fr. Seraphim about Gallic monasticism in its early stages was its freedom and freshness. He wrote that “the history of Orthodox monasticism in Gaul in this period is not at all one of institutions. The monastic ‘orders’ of the medieval West, with their centralized government and uniform rule, were of course unheard of in this early period of fresh monastic fervor... The spiritual tone of monastic Gaul in these centuries was set by the Orthodox East”<sup>5</sup> — which was largely due to the efforts of St. John Cassian (†435) in bringing the ascetic wisdom of the Desert Fathers back with him from Egypt.

In the writings of St. Gregory of Tours (†594), Fr. Seraphim found the most general picture of Western Orthodox monasticism in the early centuries. “But we will look in his writings in vain,” Fr. Seraphim noted, “for an account of monastic *institutions*; we will find there the names of few monasteries, and there is almost nothing on monastic rules or government. He is interested first of all not even in monks and nuns (i.e., formally tonsured monastics), but in *ascetic strugglers and their spiritual deeds*. For the most part he recounts the exploits of ascetics renowned for their sanctity and miracles; but he also recounts tales of

those who went astray, holding these up as a warning to those who would undertake the path of spiritual struggle. The center of his attention, and that of monastic Gaul, is *spiritual struggle* itself. The forested ‘desert’ of Orthodox Gaul at this time breathes the same freshness and fervor and freedom as the Egyptian and Palestinian deserts, as chronicled in *The Lausiak History* and other such classic accounts of early Eastern monasticism.”<sup>6</sup>

**I**T had been Archbishop John’s work with the Orthodox Church of France that had originally evoked the fathers’ interest in ancient Gaul. After the Archbishop’s repose, the fathers remembered his love for Western Orthodox Saints, his work to spread their veneration among Orthodox Christians, and his last words to them about the veneration of St. Alban of Britain — and they saw this as his testament to their Brotherhood: a call to honor and make known the Saints of the West. In fulfillment of this testament, they published material about Gallic Saints in *The Orthodox Word* as early as 1969: a Life of St. John Cassian by Ivan Kontzevitch, followed by an article on “The Foundation of Orthodox Monasticism in the West” by Fr. Seraphim.<sup>7</sup> This was a subject which until that time had not been broached by Orthodox writers in the English language. As a result, the fathers’ efforts did not go without some surprised and even indignant response. When they were working in their bookstore only a few months before their move to the wilderness, a young “traditionalist” Orthodox scholar came in and began disparaging the new issue of *The Orthodox Word*. On the cover of this issue was a photograph of the monastic isle of Lerins and the words “St. John Cassian and Western Orthodox Monasticism.”

“There is no such thing as ‘Western Orthodox Monasticism,’” the college student objected vehemently, and began expounding his “traditionalist” *Eastern* Orthodox point of view. Fr. Seraphim listened politely to the arguments, but they appeared rather adolescent in his eyes. He had no part in such an anti-Western bias — the same bias which provoked others to disparage Blessed Augustine at every opportunity. It was spiritually debilitating, he knew, for Westerners to cut

off their native roots for the sake of an artificial “Eastern” purism. From Archbishop John he had been given the task of restoring Western Christians to their own Orthodox heritage, and this he intended to do whatever his detractors might say.

**I**N 1975 Fr. Seraphim again picked up the subject of Orthodox Gaul. At that time there was staying at the monastery a novice named Paul, one of the four graduates of the first “New Valaam Theological Academy” course. A convert to Orthodoxy, Br. Paul had learned Latin at a Roman Catholic seminary. Fr. Seraphim, although his knowledge of Latin was limited, could easily read French; and thus between the two of them they could understand just about all the material written about fifth- and sixth-century Gaul.

On April 11, 1975, Fr. Seraphim and Br. Paul went together to the library of the University of California, Berkeley (where Fr. Seraphim, having earned his master’s degree there, had free access to the closed stacks), and did research on Western Saints. There they found the original Latin version, printed side by side with a literal French translation, of *Vita Patrum (The Life of the Fathers)* by St. Gregory of Tours. The seventh of St. Gregory’s eight *Books of Miracles*, this book was of special value as an original source because many of the saints whom St. Gregory wrote about were known to him personally, three of them being his close relatives. Surprisingly, due to the dying of interest in the early Saints of the West, *Vita Patrum* had not yet been translated into English. Fr. Seraphim became inspired with the idea of translating and publishing it, and his inspiration was caught by Br. Paul, who was then going through a period of uncertainty as to what to do with his life. Less than a month later, Fr. Seraphim wrote in his Chronicle: “On Pascha Sunday evening Br. Paul is presented with a project to help his own decision as to how to serve God: to spend this summer translating and setting *The Life of the Fathers* of St. Gregory of Tours, at the same time imploring these great Saints of Gaul to help him find his path in life. If he is capable of valuing and making this sacrifice, God will surely reward and

guide him.”<sup>8</sup>

Fr. Seraphim worked closely with Br. Paul, checking the translation from the original Latin against the French version. By October the work was finished. Before presenting it in the pages of *The Orthodox Word*, however, Fr. Seraphim felt he had to guide his readers in their approach to it. He wrote that “very many of these basic Orthodox sources, already translated into English, are lying unused by Orthodox Christians because a proper Orthodox approach or introduction to them has not been given. Let us attempt here to make this approach, particularly with regard to the Orthodox Saints of the West who are as yet so little known to Orthodox Christians in America, even though a number of them have been revered for centuries in the East.”<sup>9</sup>

Fr. Seraphim’s own articles on the Orthodox West, which ultimately comprised over a hundred published pages, succeeded in providing this approach as never before, bridging the gap of centuries, enabling his fellow Westerners to enter deeply into the spirit of Orthodox antiquity and its literature. As Fr. Herman has observed: “It was not just a matter of someone looking at ancient texts in a modern way. Fr. Seraphim did not have a modern ‘feel’ for them; he had an ancient ‘feel.’” This is seen not so much in Fr. Seraphim’s writing style — for it is not difficult to outwardly imitate the “pious style” of ancient writers, as many have done — as in the mind and heart that is sensed behind the words. Fr. Seraphim comes across as a definitely modern man who is dealing with contemporary issues and problems, and yet he obviously does not think, feel, and see reality according to the spirit of his age. As a Christian and particularly as a monastic, he was actually breathing that invigorating air of ancient Gaul. One day during the time he was researching and writing about this subject, he wrote enthusiastically to Alexey Young: “I am deep in Orthodox Gaul in the sixth century. What a wonderful fragrance it has! May God grant us to print this book as our duty to Vladika John.”<sup>10</sup>

**T**HE first article Fr. Seraphim wrote to introduce *Vita Patrum* was his



outstanding “Prologue of the Orthodox Saints of the West.” Here he spoke in detail about several major sources of Western Orthodox hagiography: the *Dialogues* and *Life of St. Martin of Tours* by Sulpicius Severus, the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory the Great, and the *Books of Miracles* by St. Gregory of Tours. Since all of these works were filled with accounts of miraculous occurrences, Fr. Seraphim felt it necessary to explain that Orthodox tradition is by no means credulous in its acceptance of the miracles of saints. “Great care,” he wrote, “is always taken to assure that the Lives of Saints contain true accounts and not fables; for it is indeed true that, in the age of ‘romance’ that began in the Western Middle Ages just after Rome’s final separation from the Church of Christ (1054), such fables *were* introduced into many Lives of Saints, rendering all later Latin sources especially suspect. Orthodox hagiographers, on the other hand, have always taken as their principle the maxim that St. Dimitry of Rostov placed on the first page of his *Lives*: MAY I TELL NO LIE ABOUT A SAINT. This is also why, in the Orthodox Church, great care is taken to transmit the *original sources* that tell of the saints: those Lives which are based on the author’s immediate experience and the testimony of witnesses known to him personally. Thus the freshness and marvel of one who personally knew the saint is preserved, and there is transmitted to us directly, ‘between the lines’ as it were, the authentic ‘tone’ of a holy life.”<sup>11</sup>

Despite the historical authenticity of the original Orthodox sources, the modern scholar is likely to disdain them both for their “moralizing” and for their miracles. As Fr. Seraphim pointed out, however: “Perhaps we may find in these miracles and morals that so insult the ‘modern mind’ a missing dimension of the contemporary outlook, which in its elusive search for a two-dimensional ‘objectivity’ has lost the key to much more of true wisdom than it thinks to have gained. ‘Scientific objectivity’ has come today virtually to a dead end, and every kind of truth has come into question. But this dead end for worldly knowledge is perhaps the opening of a way to a higher knowledge, wherein truth and life are

no longer divorced, where advance in true knowledge is impossible without a corresponding advance in moral and spiritual life. Involuntarily, the converts to Orthodoxy from Western lands — and the Westernized ‘native Orthodox’ as well — have been transported back to that earlier time when the proud rationalism of pagan Rome was conquered by the true wisdom of Christianity.”<sup>12</sup>

When it was printed in *The Orthodox Word*, Fr. Seraphim’s “Prologue of the Orthodox Saints of the West” met with high praise from Helen Kontzevitch. “Mrs. Kontzevitch just wrote us,” Fr. Seraphim noted. “She liked the ‘Prologue’ very much and writes: ‘If you hadn’t been sitting in the wilderness you would never have thought to write such an article!’”<sup>13</sup>

In addition to his general “Prologue,” Fr. Seraphim wrote three articles specifically on Orthodox Gaul. The first examined various aspects of Christianity in Gaul at the time of St. Gregory: iconography, church structures, vestments, services, fasting, church government, etc. It was not difficult for Fr. Seraphim to bring the contemporary Orthodox reader right into St. Gregory’s world. As he pointed out, a great many aspects of ancient Gallic Christianity, although changed in the Catholic-Protestant world, have retained their same essential form in Eastern Orthodoxy. In this sense, the Christian East is today much closer to the early Christian West than is the West itself.

Summing up his description of the Christian world of St. Gregory of Tours, Fr. Seraphim spoke of its spiritual significance in our times: “The Orthodox Christian of today is overwhelmed to open St. Gregory’s *Books of Miracles* and find there just what his soul is craving in this soulless, mechanistic modern world; he finds that very Christian path of salvation which he knows in the Orthodox services, the Lives of Saints, the Patristic writings, but which is so absent today, even among the best of modern ‘Christians,’ that one begins to wonder whether one is not really insane, or some literal fossil of history, for continuing to believe and feel as the Church has always believed and felt. It is one thing to recognize the intellectual truth of Orthodox Christianity; but how is

one to live it when it is so out of harmony with the times? And then one reads St. Gregory and finds that all of this Orthodox truth is also profoundly *normal*, that whole societies were once based on it, that it is unbelief and ‘renovated’ Christianity which are profoundly abnormal and not Orthodox Christianity, that this is the heritage and birthright of *the West itself* which it deserted so long ago when it separated from the one and only Church of Christ, thereby losing the key to the ‘secret’ which so baffles the modern scholar — the ‘secret’ of true Christianity, which must be approached with a fervent, believing heart, and not with the cold aloofness and modern unbelief which is not natural to man but is an anomaly of history.”<sup>14</sup>

The second article dealt specifically with monasticism in Gaul: the teachings of St. John Cassian, the instructions of St. Faustus of Lerins, the exalted poetry of St. Eucherius of Lyons’ “In Praise of the Desert,” and finally the story of Saints Romanus and Lupicinus, brother-monks who initiated the “flight into the desert” in Gaul. Throughout the article, Fr. Seraphim paused to apply the ancient writings to modern conditions. He carried this practical application further in his third and final article: “Orthodox Monasticism Today in Light of Orthodox Monastic Gaul.” Looking at the contemporary American scene, he described general types of monastic situations which an aspirant may encounter, candidly told the benefits and dangers inherent in each, and then set forth a message to aspirants in whatever situation, based on the experience of Orthodox Gaul. Of this message we will speak more later.

**W**HILE he was working on his introductory articles, Fr. Seraphim learned that Daniel Olson, one of his former monastic brothers who had recently become a soldier in the army, was about to be stationed in Germany. He wrote to Daniel and encouraged him to take the opportunity of making an Orthodox pilgrimage to the nearby Jura Mountains, home of the ancient Gallic desert-dwellers. Fr. Seraphim’s letter included a report on the location and significance of six holy places which interested him most, almost all of them bound up with Saints

Romanus and Lupicinus. “Just the ‘feel’ of the mountains and forest,” he wrote, “some photographs if possible, and especially information on relics, and at least a little memento of these places — earth and a fir cone!—would be very dear to us.”<sup>15</sup>

Daniel followed Fr. Seraphim’s advice. Not long afterward he sent back photographs of the Jura and of the relics of Saints Romanus and Lupicinus, together with a detailed report on his pilgrimage, which the fathers soon published in *The Orthodox Word*. “I thank you with my whole heart,” Daniel wrote, “for suggesting this pilgrimage to me and also for your suggestions and advice on what to see. May God bless you in your efforts to kindle in the Orthodox Christians of these last days the fire that shone so brightly, and continues to shine for those who have the eyes to see, in the Saints of the West.”<sup>16</sup>

**B**ESIDES the *Books of Miracles*, Fr. Seraphim took keen interest in the book for which St. Gregory of Tours has mostly become known today: *The History of the Franks*. As a historian, St. Gregory was more than a mere chronicler of bare facts: he was a spiritual man, rich in experience and wisdom, who sought out the pattern of history. “In St. Gregory,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “we may see the *wholeness* of view which has been lost in almost all of modern scholarship.”<sup>17</sup> Speaking informally to his brothers and sisters at the refectory table, Fr. Seraphim once explained how modern scholars tend to ascribe secondary causes to historical events, thinking them to be the real causes. “The real cause,” he said, “is the soul and God: whatever God is doing and whatever the soul is doing. These two things actualize the whole of history; and all the external events — what treaty was signed, or the economic reasons for the discontent of the masses, and so forth — are totally secondary. In fact, if you look at modern history, at the whole revolutionary movement, it is obvious that it is not the economics that is the governing factor, but various ideas which get into people’s souls about actually building paradise on earth. Once that idea gets there, then

fantastic things are done, because this is a spiritual thing. Even though it is from the devil, it is on a spiritual level, and that is where actual history is made...

“Thus St. Gregory is actually looking at history in the correct way, because he sees that there is a first cause, which is what God does in history and how the soul reacts to it, and that the secondary cause is ordinary events... He is constantly looking *above*, not below.”<sup>18</sup>

Fr. Seraphim’s love for St. Gregory’s writings led to an interest in and veneration for St. Gregory himself. In February of 1976 Fr. Seraphim spent three days in the libraries of the University of San Francisco, Stanford University, and the University of California, Berkeley, obtaining valuable information on St. Gregory and other Western Saints. Among the works he brought home was the original Life of St. Gregory by Abbot Odo, in both Latin and French. A week later he wrote in a letter: “St. Gregory of Tours is tremendously inspiring! We’ve found a tenth-century Life of him taken mainly from his own works — one of the most moving Lives I’ve read.”<sup>19</sup> Fr. Seraphim translated the entire thirty-page Life into English and serialized it in *The Orthodox Word*.

Soon afterward, *Vita Patrum* began to be serialized. “No apology,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “is necessary for presenting these twenty chapters on the monastic Saints of Gaul in the fifth and sixth centuries. For the Orthodox Christian they are fascinating reading; the edifying homily that precedes each Life is most instructive for our spiritual struggle today; the spirit of the book is entirely Orthodox, and the Orthodox practices described in it have remained the inheritance of Orthodox Christians (but not of Roman Catholics) today, including the veneration of the ‘icons of saints’ (the Latin text has *iconicas* instead of the more to be expected *imagines*) in chapter 12. Some of the incidents, just like the stories of the desert Fathers, have precise relevance for our problems today — for example, the story of the ‘charismatic’ deacon who ‘healed in the name of Jesus’ until St. Friardus exposed him as being in satanic deception (ch. 10).”<sup>20</sup> Bishop Nektary, when the fathers told him this story about St. Friardus, became quite interested, and Fr. Herman promised to translate it

into Russian for him.

The fathers dedicated their English translation of *Vita Patrum* to Blessed Archbishop John, who, as Fr. Seraphim noted, was not only a promoter of Western Saints, but was also “the most recent of the great Orthodox hierarchs of Gaul”<sup>21</sup> like unto those described in *Vita Patrum*, since he had served as a bishop in France. Fr. Seraphim remarked more than once on the similarity between Archbishop John and the fourth-century St. Martin of Tours. Both of these bishops of France had been great ascetics and fools-for-Christ, unconcerned about their outward appearance; both had been characterized by utter fearlessness; both had cared for the poor and needy; and both had performed incredible miracles. As Fr. Seraphim noted in one place, although modern scholars may have difficulty in believing accounts of St. Martin’s miracles, those who knew Archbishop John have no difficulty at all! The phenomenon is one and the same. In an Akathist he wrote to Archbishop John, Fr. Seraphim addressed him as a “new Martin by thy miracles and ascetic feats.”<sup>22</sup>





Fr. Seraphim atop Mount Yolla Bolly, October 11, 1981.



Fr. Seraphim atop Mount Yolla Bolly, October 11, 1981.

ON October 11, 1981, less than a year before his death, Fr. Seraphim led a group of eight brothers on a hike to the top of Mount Yolla Bolly, about twenty-five miles south of the monastery. After driving to the base of the mountain, they hiked for three hours, until they reached the peak at eight thousand feet above sea level. One of the brothers remembers the experience:

“On the mountain the trees were covered with frost, and there were patches of snow. The view was crystal clear and extremely majestic. We could see the edge of the mountains in the north, Mount Lassen in the east, far along the coastal range in the west, and alpine valleys extending southward. Amidst the latter was, Fr. Seraphim told us, one of the oldest stands of living trees in the world: the bristle-cone pine.

“The brothers sat down on the mountain peak, shivering in the windy, frosty air. Fr. Seraphim looked highly inspired, and did not seem to be bothered at all by the cold. He stood up and began to read from *The Orthodox Word* about monasticism in the mountains of Gaul, the abode of Saints Romanus and Lupicinus. Both during his reading and at the end of it, he spoke of the meaning of the foundation of monastic life by these ancient Gallic saints in virginal nature, in the middle of nowhere. He told us how such an endeavor is still something valid and legitimate, that it remains a *realistic possibility* today.

“With the vast expanse of the untouched Western American wilds spread out before us, this talk went deeply into me and left an indelible impression. Saints Romanus and Lupicinus had dwelt in a similar mountainous territory in the western regions of the European continent, in an area of trees and gorges such as we now saw around us. Fr. Seraphim related how they had fled from institutionalism, cut themselves off from the world, and went off to the nature surrounding where they had grown up. They had settled under a fir tree, which for years provided their only shelter, and there they had offered up their prayers to God, living in communion with Him.



“Fr. Seraphim compared the experience of Saints Romanus and Lupicinus and other Gallic desert-dwellers with the experience of Russia’s Northern Thebaid. He told how the bright beginning of desert-dwelling in Gaul continued until a fire destroyed the first simple monastic cells, and an established coenobitic monastery was erected in their stead, making a break with the informal, semi-hermitic tradition of Saints Romanus and Lupicinus which later became so dear to the Northern Thebaid Saints.

“That day was unforgettable. We returned to our little Platina skete with new levels of understanding concerning the significance of monastic struggles in the West.”<sup>[23](#)</sup>



The group of hikers atop Mount Yolla Bolly, October 11, 1981.



Descending the mountain.

In his article on monasticism in ancient Gaul and today, Fr. Seraphim said more about this significance: “Orthodox monastic Gaul shows us that the monastic path is not something merely ‘Eastern’; rather, it is *universally Christian* and, indeed, it has been tried before in the West, and with great spiritual success. The teaching of the Orthodox monastic Fathers of the East and the West is one and the same, and it offers nothing less — for those with ears to hear it — than the shortest path to Christ’s Kingdom.”

This path, however, requires far more than just wearing robes and following various monastic practices. “Unfortunately,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “the awareness of Orthodox monasticism and its ABC’s remains largely, even now, an outward matter. There is still more *talk* of ‘elders,’ ‘hesychasm,’ and ‘prelest’ than fruitful monastic struggles themselves. Indeed, it is all too possible to accept all the outward marks of the purest and most exalted monastic tradition: absolute obedience to an elder, daily confession of thoughts, long Church services or individual rule of Jesus Prayer and prostrations, frequent reception of Holy Communion, reading with understanding of the basic texts of spiritual life, and

in doing all this to feel a deep *psychological* peace and ease — and at the same time to remain *spiritually* immature. It is possible to cover over the untreated passions within one by means of a facade or technique of ‘correct’ spirituality, without having true love for Christ and one’s brother. The rationalism and coldness of heart of modern man in general make this perhaps the most insidious of the temptations of the monastic aspirant today. Orthodox monastic *forms*, true enough, are being planted in the West; but what about the heart of monasticism and Orthodox Christianity: repentance, humility, love for Christ our God and unquenchable thirst for His Kingdom?”<sup>24</sup>

Here is where the monasticism of ancient Gaul has much to teach the monks of these latter times. Newly born and vibrant with its initial impulse, it rises above the smog of “spiritual calculation” and soars in the pure mountain air of Gospel simplicity. As Fr. Seraphim put it, “It is always close to its roots and aware of its aim, never bogged down in the letter of its disciplines and forms. Its freshness and directness are a source of great inspiration even today.

“Finally, Orthodox monastic Gaul reveals to us how close true monasticism is to the Gospel. St. Gregory’s *Life of the Fathers* is particularly insistent on this point: each of the Lives begins with the Gospel, and each saint’s deeds flow from it as their source. No matter what he describes in Orthodox Gaul — whether the painting of icons, the undertaking of ascetic labors, the veneration of a saint’s relics — all is done *for the love of Christ*, and this is never forgotten.

“The monastic life, indeed, even in our times of feeble faith, is still above all *the love of Christ*, the Christian life par excellence, experienced with many patient sufferings and much pain. Even today there are those who penetrate the secret of this paradise on earth — more often through humble sufferings than through outward ‘correctness’—a paradise which worldly people can scarcely imagine.”<sup>25</sup>

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM sought to carry out Archbishop John’s testament to him until the end of his life. Although he concentrated first on the Saints of Gaul, he

was desirous of promoting the veneration of Orthodox Saints of *all* Western lands: England, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Germany, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, etc. Like Archbishop John, he made a study of Western Orthodox Saints whose names were not found in the Orthodox Calendar, in hopes that believers would honor them and ask their prayers once again. To a priest who asked for a report on some of these Saints, he wrote:

We ourselves have been gradually compiling information on the Western Saints and coming to some conclusions about the ways by which to distinguish the authentic Orthodox Saints of the West (who are certainly the vast majority of the pre-schism Western Saints) from the few which for one reason or another are dubious or even definitely not Orthodox. Since we simply cannot trust any Western sources of recent centuries, and in fact most Western sources right back to the eleventh century (when romance and legend start coming in), the key is to get back to the original sources as much as possible, and tie them in when possible with the undoubted Orthodox sources of both East and West. I have tried to do this briefly in the enclosed report...[\[a\]](#) Please pray for us that we will be able to continue this work which Archbishop John gave as his testament to us!

Concerning the veneration of Saints not found in Orthodox Calendars: there have been different approaches to this in different periods and places in Orthodox history, and there is no one rule to guide us. To wait for the official “canonization” of all these Saints would be futile and hopeless (and very discouraging to us who love them!), and in fact has never been done — usually lists of local Saints or Saints from other Orthodox Churches are added to the Orthodox Calendar far less formally. But it is also evident, because there *are* some questions with regard to at least a few of the pre-schism Saints of the West, that we should not be too free in simply venerating whomever we want.[26](#)

Fr. Seraphim had no qualms about locally venerating those pre-schism Western Saints whose lives he had researched and whose sanctity was unquestioned. He had especially great veneration for St. Scholastica of Italy, whom her brother St. Benedict saw enter heaven after her death.<sup>[b]</sup>

In 1976, when Alexey Young was about to take a trip to England, Fr. Seraphim began to think of more possibilities for the propagation of Western Orthodoxy. “If only God would give us a few more years of the golden opportunity we now have,” he wrote to Alexey, “we could use Gaul as a ‘beachhead’ to give a powerful dose of Orthodox England and Ireland as well! Or perhaps you could do this! Let your trip this summer be for a beginning of an Orthodox awareness of the English past not only for yourself, but for others as well; by the prayers of Vladika John may this trip be fruitful.”<sup>27</sup>

Alexey himself recalls Fr. Seraphim’s personal interest in his trip:

“From the very beginning of my relationship with Fr. Seraphim, he was always very keenly interested in the pre-schism West. Everything about it fascinated him, especially because he saw that it had exactly the same ‘tone’ as the Eastern part of the Church had... To say that he adored the subject wouldn’t be an understatement!

“When I was planning to go to Britain in 1976, Fr. Seraphim not only encouraged me to seek out various pre-schism sites and shrines, but he gave me a list of places to visit and a list of pre-schism Celtic Saints. I’m of Scottish descent, so I have Celtic blood. I suppose it had occurred to me that if one went back far enough, my ancestors were Orthodox, but I had not thought about it very much until then. Fr. Seraphim told me, ‘Go to this place, go to that place’... and after I returned from my trip he questioned me thoroughly about the holy places I had visited.

“As a result of Fr. Seraphim’s urging us to pay attention to our own ethnic past, my wife and I began to discover more and more of the riches of pre-schism Orthodoxy in the West. Because of my own descent from Scotland, I narrowed down my search to the British Isles.

“Fr. Seraphim enthused over this, believing it to be very important. ‘This is your legacy,’ he told me. He believed that if Orthodoxy was to really send down deep roots in the West today we would have to ‘regain’ our lost Western Orthodox past and fully integrate it into the post-schism Eastern Orthodox experience.

“And yet, for all this, he never expressed an interest in visiting Orthodox Gaul or Britain himself. Once I asked if he would let me take him on a pilgrimage to pre-schism Europe. He said, ‘No — I have no desire to go there or to Russia or even Mount Athos. Everything I need for my salvation has been given me by God right here on this mountain. And here is where I will stay. Anything else would just be distraction.’ For Fr. Seraphim had already been to all these places in his heart, his soul, and in his prayers, and he was united to the Western Fathers and Saints through the Mystical Body of Christ and the Communion of Saints. That was enough for him, and more than enough. This kind of single-minded monastic detachment impressed me very much, as *I*, by contrast, was always ready to trot off at the drop of a hat to see some wonderful holy place! Unlike me, Fr. Seraphim already saw it all with the eyes of his soul.”<sup>28</sup>

At the end of his life, Fr. Seraphim had yet another idea. When *Vita Patrum* was finished being serialized, he planned to follow it with a presentation of the Orthodox Saints of Spain (Iberia). It is unfortunate that he did not live to carry this out, that he did not have a chance to do for the Saints of other Western Orthodox lands what he had done for the Saints of Gaul. He has left this task for others.

As one man, Fr. Seraphim could only do so much. What was most important, however, was that he bequeathed to future generations *the proper approach* to the Orthodox West. He has given a “blueprint” for entering into its mind. For those who would continue his work where he left off, this blueprint may be found in the book *Vita Patrum*, which with God’s help his brothers managed to publish after his repose, including within its covers virtually

everything he wrote on fifth- and sixth-century Gaul.<sup>[c]</sup> Fr. Seraphim's introductory articles alone comprise over one hundred pages, and include what some have regarded as his best writings on the spiritual life, based on Western Orthodox sources. Spanning the bridge of centuries between St. Gregory of Tours and Fr. Seraphim, this book can connect the contemporary Orthodox Christian of Western background with his Western Orthodox roots — not in an abstract, academic way, but in a concrete, practical way that is unto salvation.

# PART IX







Bishop Sava with Archbishop John at St. Steven's Serbian Orthodox Cathedral, Alhambra, California, 1964. Left to right: Milan Senic, Archimandrite Anastassy Sagarsky, Andrei Lukianov, Fr. Vladimir Mrvichin, Bishop Sava, Archbishop John, Scepan Kral, Bishop Gregory of the Western American Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Fr. Marko Malovrazich, Alex Cattell.

## *The Inheritance of the Serbian Bishop Sava*

*I write about Vladika John and everything somehow becomes pleasant in my soul. I would not want any important information about him to be lost.*

—Bishop Sava<sup>1</sup>

**E**ARLIER we have recounted how Fr. Herman, when he was in Canada right before his first meeting with Fr. Seraphim, had stayed up all night with Bishop Sava of Edmonton, listening to the Bishop speak animatedly about his grand vision of spiritual renewal among Russians abroad. At that time, Fr. Herman had been right to have reservations. As Fr. Seraphim later noted: “Bishop Sava’s fervent appeals did awaken some response, but in the end the result was not too great, doubtless owing chiefly to the extremely unfavorable conditions of the Russian emigration, overwhelmed as it is by worldly cares and temptations.”<sup>2</sup>

In the last years of his life, however, it was given to Bishop Sava to sow seeds of spiritual renewal which would later bring forth much greater fruit than all his earlier praiseworthy efforts. After Archbishop John’s death he performed an inestimable service to the Church by becoming the *chronicler* of his sanctity. It is for this labor of love that this outstanding Serbian hierarch, Bishop Sava, is most remembered today.

“In the first months after Archbishop John’s repose in 1966,” Fr. Seraphim recounted, “there appeared in the Russian press many personal testimonies of his

holiness and ascetic life and of what he meant to individual members of his flock. Soon, however, these began to appear less frequently, and it was evident that their significance was limited and chiefly personal and that by themselves they would not preserve the memory of the holy hierarch beyond the lifetimes of those who already knew him. It was then that Bishop Sava began to publish his own material on Archbishop John. This appeared in the form of fifteen articles in *Pravoslavnaya Rus* in 1967 and 1968, and it was soon apparent that this was material with a different dimension and purpose. In the place of limited individual memories, he offered a collection of personal testimonies, carefully selected and verified, which were arranged so as to point out various characteristics and aspects of Vladika John's life and sanctity. More than this, Bishop Sava... interspersed these testimonies with citations from the lives and writings of the Holy Fathers, in order to make clear the whole Orthodox tradition of sanctity in which Vladika John had a definite place.



Bishop Sava with Mothers Seraphima and Ambrosia, nuns of Holy Protection Skete near Bluffton, Alberta, Canada.

“In these articles Bishop Sava discusses and places in Patristic context such aspects of Vladika John’s sanctity as his miraculous healings and exorcisms; his strict asceticism and sleeplessness; his appearance in dreams after his repose; his clairvoyance; striking incidents such as the visible fire which once appeared when he served the Divine Liturgy; the bitter persecution which he suffered; and even that which very few as yet have come to value in him, perhaps because almost never before has this kind of sanctity been joined to hierarchical rank: his foolishness for Christ’s sake.”<sup>3</sup>

Bishop Sava realized there would be many who would not share his fervor to communicate the value of Archbishop John. He knew, too, that he would be attacked for his labors. But as Fr. Seraphim noted: “In his zeal for the memory of

a man who was a true fool-for-Christ's sake in the midst of our twentieth-century life (even church life) of calculation and petty logic — Bishop Sava himself became a fool-for-Christ, caring nothing for the opinions of this world as long as he could speak the truth.”<sup>4</sup>

Bishop Sava was indeed punished for his boldness. At a Synodal meeting in 1972, he was forced to retire from all episcopal functions. Fr. Seraphim commented on this in a letter: “We haven’t told you the whole story, but the treatment of Vladika Sava by his fellow hierarchs at the Sobor was simply a disgrace. When asked later why he had to endure such treatment, Vladika Sava only pointed his finger heavenward, and at the end he was very peaceful in soul. He wrote us that he received this because he helped Vladika John (probably as much in a spiritual sense as in a literal sense).”<sup>5</sup>

From his forced retirement, Bishop Sava wrote: “As for me, glory be to God, I am living quietly. I would not want to change my situation. St. Gregory the Theologian wrote: ‘For those who leave thrones do not lose God, but they shall have a See above, which is much higher and more secure than these Sees below.’”<sup>6</sup>

Bishop Sava had spent over six years compiling material for an entire book on Archbishop John. Sensing his death approaching with this work still unfinished, he willed all his materials, published and unpublished, to the St. Herman Brotherhood.

On January 30, 1973, scarcely a year after his retirement, Bishop Sava reposed in the Lord. Very soon Fr. Herman received word from the Bishop’s spiritual children in Canada, telling him to come there at once. As it turned out, Bishop Sava had set aside a sum of money for Fr. Herman to fly to Canada right after his death and take away his belongings — books, papers, etc.

In accordance with Bishop Sava’s dying request, the fathers lost no time in setting out for the airport, attempting to leave the snowbound monastery in midwinter. As Fr. Seraphim recorded: “We had so many obstacles on the way beforehand — three cars in the ditch, ruined transmission, dead battery — that

we began to wonder whether he [Fr. Herman] should go; but once he got off everything went well and more than well... and so we saw that all the difficulties were only ‘iskusheniya’ [temptations].”<sup>7</sup>

**R**EFLECTING on the loss of Bishop Sava shortly after his repose, Fr. Seraphim remarked that, “as usual, it is only now that we begin really to value him.” On February 20, he wrote to one of Bishop Sava’s closest spiritual sons, Igor Kapral:<sup>[a]</sup>

We were very glad to have even a brief letter from you, for somehow we feel even more kin to you now with the repose of Vladika Sava. We were most moved when we found out that Vladika Sava had willed us his books and papers, and had even left money for Father Herman to come as soon as possible and take care of them. (It would be best not to go into some of the reasons for that!)... When, God willing, we have our Skete library built, it will be in Vladika Sava’s memory....

Vladika Sava himself has now become a part of the whole story of Archbishop John: his concern for his memory and unashamed acknowledgment of his sanctity are an encouragement for the rest of us who sometimes become dejected over the blindly negative attitude toward him in some places. We plan to tell about Vladika Sava in the new *Orthodox Word* and to begin translating some of his material on Vladika John, together with his own valuable comments...

How true that in Vladika Sava we have lost a spiritual and righteous bishop, and I fear to say, one of the last of them... In Vladika Sava’s righteous and patient enduring of the injustice which fell to him in his last months on earth, there seems to be an example and pattern for the rest of us who wish to remain honest and upright Orthodox Christians. Let us make a covenant among ourselves, that wherever we may happen to be in Christ’s Church, that we will not be anything but honest and upright, whatever

Church politics may say or what we must have to sacrifice for it!

I hope you understand! With Vladika John's repose we were orphaned; but now with the passing of Vladikas Leonty and Sava, and with Vladikas Averky and Nektary in such a frail condition, who will we have left to whom we can speak our hearts?

In another letter, Fr. Seraphim wrote the following passage on what he and Fr. Herman learned from the materials bequeathed to them by Bishop Sava:

In reading over his [Bishop Sava's] papers and also his articles in *Orthodox Russia*, we see that he had a definite message for the Russian people, which will probably be forgotten now if we don't do something about it. His articles on Vladika John speak more strongly than any of us on the fact that he is a *saint* who is not yet properly valued and who is of great significance for the Orthodox people. His testament to us is, clearly, to continue speaking this truth, even if the "organization" mentality doesn't like to hear it.

In reading the papers of Bishop Sava, we find addressed to him the usual complaints against Vladika John (these are the worst things they can find about him!): that he is irritable, crude, unthinking of others (for example, because he comes late to services), disrupts the usual order of things, is a poor administrator, can't be understood, mumbles and falls asleep in the midst of the most important (worldly) discussions, that the clergy of the San Francisco Cathedral consider it a holiday when he *isn't* present. I myself had occasion to witness most of these phenomena, and I can testify, for example, that on the several occasions when he was "crude" with me I was extremely grateful and saw only spiritual benefit in it. In all of this I think there is a hidden significant fact about Vladika which hasn't been brought out much: that *he refused to allow the Church to become a habit*, and by his seeming crudeness, he tried to jolt people out of the



spiritual rut into which it can be so easy to fall. As soon as Vladika was gone, everything became “smooth” in the Cathedral and the clergy were content — because now they could and did make the Church a habit, incapable of inspiring anyone except on the capital of the past which has not yet been used up (but will be before long!).<sup>8</sup>

Fr. Seraphim was to bear witness to this waning of inspiration the following year, on July 2, 1974, when he and Fr. Herman went to the annual Liturgy in Archbishop John’s Sepulchre. After the Liturgy, a sermon was given on the critical shortage of priests. “What is wrong?” wrote Fr. Seraphim in his Chronicle. “Obviously, the concept of the Church as an ‘organization’ with ‘places to be filled’—is breaking down. No one wants to ‘fill the places’ anymore — because church life has become unconscious and automatic; the sources of spiritual life are neglected; the spiritual wealth of the Church is taken for granted, but no one any longer strives to acquire it for himself. The Church’s crisis is much deeper than the ‘shortage of priests’ reveals....

“A hint of this fact was given in the Sepulchre this morning. After a mild sermon by the chief celebrant, Bishop Nektary, Fr. Mitrophan gave a fiery sermon — even in his old age and toothlessness — about the *shame* it is to Russians not to value their own *wonderworker*, Archbishop John, while other people, such as the Greeks, already print icons of him and venerate him openly as a Saint. (Such words haven’t been spoken publicly before!) Truly, as long as political considerations are placed first... there is no hope for the Orthodox faithful, and they will simply die out and leave no spiritual legacy.”<sup>9</sup>

The fathers left San Francisco very discouraged about the state of the world and the faithful, but with all the more reason to continue publishing about that city’s great wonderworker. From Fr. Mitrophan they had learned that the Saint himself had posthumously blessed the recording and publishing of his miracles. On August 30, 1972, Fr. Mitrophan had written to the fathers: “I have made a resolve to apply myself most seriously to gathering material about Vladika



John... I felt a pressing need to do this, and that night after my decision I clearly and close-up saw Archbishop John. He was very joyful and blessed me. Praise the Lord in His Saints. *It is pleasing to God*, because the Saints of God perform miracles not by their own power, but by His Divine Power. I have already verified a series of cases of people who received healings.”<sup>10</sup>

Fathers Seraphim and Herman considered it their sacred duty to complete Bishop Sava’s work to the best of their ability. “We feel ourselves to be spiritual heirs and debtors of Vladika Sava,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “and we will certainly do all we can, with God’s help, to collect all his materials on Archbishop John into one book.”<sup>11</sup>

Although much of the material that Bishop Sava had willed to the fathers had already been published in *Pravoslavnaya Rus’*, there were some very valuable unpublished documents: for example, a letter from Archbishop John’s younger brother which Fr. Seraphim used to write an article on the Saint’s childhood. The fathers also received Bishop Sava’s personal notebooks, which turned out to be full of nothing but the writings of the Holy Fathers, written out by hand. These notebooks testified to their author’s great love for and knowledge of the Holy Fathers, which had enabled him to so effectively place Archbishop John within a true Patristic context. As Fr. Seraphim pointed out, Bishop Sava’s articles on the Saint “offered in effect a brief course in Patristic education to the Orthodox people.”<sup>12</sup>

In 1976, the tenth anniversary of Archbishop John’s repose, the fathers were able to fulfill their duty to Bishop Sava by organizing his materials on Archbishop John and publishing them in Russian as a book. The book turned out to be not a Life of Archbishop John, but rather a record of his miracles and veneration. It was entitled by the fathers *A Chronicle of the Veneration of Archbishop John Maximovitch*.

“The *Chronicle*,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “is valuable first of all not as much for the actual material it gives as for its *evaluation* of Archbishop John.” For this evaluation Bishop Sava called in the testimonies of such venerable witnesses as

Archbishop Averky, Archimandrite Constantine, and the renowned Serbian hierarch Nikolai Velimirovich. “But the most endearing part of the *Chronicle* is the testimony of Vladika Sava himself. In every word of his, especially in his sermons on Vladika John, one feels the boundless love and veneration of the younger hierarch for the older.”<sup>13</sup>

In 1980 the fathers published a second volume of the *Chronicle*, also in Russian, this time featuring sermons and theological essays written by Archbishop John himself. Included was a definitive article on the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God, which the fathers had discovered in an exceedingly rare Serbian Church calendar from the 1930s; and also an article on the “sophiological” errors of the Parisian theologian Fr. Sergius Bulgakov regarding the Mother of God and St. John the Baptist.

**M**EANWHILE, the veneration of Archbishop John continued to grow. On repeated occasions in the St. Herman Monastery church, Bishop Nektary sang the glorification hymn to Blessed John as to a Saint, just as Blessed John had once sung this hymn to St. Herman prior to the latter’s canonization.<sup>[b]</sup> As Fr. Seraphim explained in a letter: “[Bishop Nektary] did this solely out of love for a Saint... He acted ‘secretly’—precisely because those who should be shouting the praises of a newly revealed Saint are silent due to the political considerations and the cold hearts that reign in our midst; and if it were not for such loving hearts which *beat* with holy Orthodoxy, the fire of true Orthodoxy would be completely absent from our midst today. In future, we trust in God, the loving zealous acts of such men... whether they be hierarchs or priests or monks or simple laymen, will be praised and lauded by the whole Church, because throughout the Church’s history these are the stuff of which Orthodoxy is made in practice.”<sup>14</sup>

There would come a time — although neither Bishop Nektary nor Fr. Seraphim would live to see it — when the formal, official glorification of Blessed John would seem possible and even natural; when the controversy

surrounding him would die down; and when all the pain, scandal and heartbreak surrounding his persecution would largely be forgotten. Archbishop Anthony of San Francisco, who before had been cautious about openly glorifying Archbishop John so as not to arouse the ire of a good portion of his diocese, now became one of the chief proponents of the canonization. Inspired by the veneration of Archbishop John by Patriarch Pavle of Serbia (who sang a Troparion hymn to Archbishop John at the end of a memorial service to him in his Sepulchre in San Francisco), Archbishop Anthony carried out the preparatory work for the Saint's canonization and eventually saw it to fruition, even writing the greater part of the service to the Saint.<sup>15</sup> On June 19/July 2, 1994, Archbishop John was canonized in San Francisco by the Russian Church Abroad, to the great joy of the Orthodox faithful worldwide.



Icon of St. John Maximovitch, Archbishop and Wonderworker of Shanghai and San Francisco, showing him holding the new “Joy of All Who Sorrow” Cathedral in San Francisco. Painted by Reader Vladimir Krassovsky at the time of St. John’s canonization in 1994, this icon now adorns the Saint’s reliquary in the Cathedral.

*Courtesy of the “Joy of All Who Sorrow” Cathedral.*

Through the power of Jesus Christ working in His Church, human limitations and fears were overcome, and the truth was proclaimed. Now that it is safe to openly venerate Archbishop John as a saint, we should not forget that the first impetus toward his canonization was given by Bishop Sava, who put himself on the line at a time when it was decidedly *not* safe to glorify him.

“It may be,” wrote Fr. Seraphim in 1973, “that Bishop Sava saw in Vladika John a key, as it were, to that spiritual renewal for which he labored; doubtless he saw in his glorification a source of great spiritual strength for the faithful. In one of his articles in *Pravoslavnyaya Rus'*... Bishop Sava pointed out the little-known fact that it was a Serbian hierarch, Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich, who in large measure gave the impetus for the canonization of St. John of Kronstadt by the Russian Church Outside of Russia... And now it is also a Serbian hierarch, Bishop Sava — who, however, had a devotion to the Russian Church and people which is not surpassed even among Russian hierarchs!—who has given the first impetus for the future canonization, in God’s time, of Archbishop John, an event for which he was consciously laying the foundation and preparing the Orthodox people.”<sup>16</sup>

At a time when the world needed one more than ever, Bishop Sava gave to it a Saint as its intercessor.



Archbishop Averky Taushev of Jordanville (1906–76).

## *A Prophet of Suffering Orthodoxy*

*I have never at any time been so grieved as I am now, on hearing of this confusion of the laws of the Church. Pray only that the Lord grant me to take no step in anger, but to maintain charity, which does not behave itself unseemly and is not puffed up (I Cor. 13:4–5). Only look how men without charity have been lifted up beyond all human bounds and conduct themselves in an unseemly manner, daring deeds which have no precedent in all the past.*

—St. Basil the Great (t379), Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia<sup>1</sup>

**O**F all Orthodox writers contemporary to Fr. Seraphim, probably no one influenced him more than Archbishop Averky of Jordanville. Fr. Seraphim remembered Archbishop Averky well from the time he came to San Francisco for Archbishop John’s funeral and visited the Brotherhood’s shop; and although he was never to see him in person again after that, he always regarded him with the highest admiration. “Up until his death in 1976,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “Archbishop Averky was a constant source of moral and theological support for the Brotherhood.” The fact that Fr. Seraphim took Archbishop Averky for a model as an Orthodox writer is seen in the subject matter of Fr. Seraphim’s writings, in their approach and thrust, and even in their literary style in some places. Looking back after many years and noting how closely Fr. Seraphim aligned himself with Archbishop Averky’s life’s work, one can see the wisdom of Archbishop John’s counsel back in 1965, when he directed Fr. Seraphim to Archbishop Averky as his faithful guide in presenting true



Orthodoxy through the printed word.<sup>[a]</sup>

As a person as well as a writer, Archbishop Averky was very much like Fr. Seraphim. His manner bore witness to an innate nobility of character, to a quiet spiritual dignity. He was never hurried or scattered. One could never find him in a casual position or mood. He did not care what people thought of him, and never tried to impress or hurt anyone in order to exercise personal power. Although he was very much aware of the principles of earthly life and had a realistic attitude toward what went on around him, he was obviously detached from earthly things. There was nothing worldly to be seen in him.

Those who knew Archbishop Averky when he was Abbot and Rector of Holy Trinity Monastery/Seminary remember his striking physical presence. He was tall, with a thick white beard, flowing hair and remarkably bushy eyebrows. His large eyes seemed to look right into one's soul and conscience, causing some people to comment on how much they reminded them of Fr. Seraphim's eyes. He was hard of hearing — which deficiency helped keep him from polluting his mind with worldly talk. Whenever there were petty squabbles or meaningless conversations going on nearby, he would deliberately turn his hearing aid off. In church he would stand with his eyes closed in prayer.

As Fr. Herman recalls, “Archbishop Averky was a true Christian pastor. He did not just say, ‘do this, don’t do that,’ but gave the ‘whole picture’—the whole Orthodox philosophy of life whereby people could understand *why* they should do one thing and not another.”

Although Archbishop Averky and Fr. Seraphim were quiet and retiring in person, the writings of both of them contain a bold exposure and indictment of the apostasy of our times. About his preceptor, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “Archbishop Averky’s view of the contemporary world was sober, precise, and entirely inspired by the Sacred Scripture and Holy Fathers of the Church: He taught that we live in the age of the Apostasy, the falling away from true Christianity, when the ‘mystery of iniquity’ has entered its final stage of preparation for the ‘man of sin,’ Antichrist.”<sup>2</sup>



Like Fr. Seraphim, Archbishop Averky had made an extensive study of the philosophical roots of the apostasy. As Fr. Seraphim noted: “Archbishop Averky traced the development of this Apostasy in particular from the time of the schism of the Church of Rome (1054), through the era of Humanism, the Renaissance and Reformation, the French Revolution, nineteenth-century materialism and Communism, culminating in the Russian Revolution of 1917, which removed the last great barrier to the working of the mystery of iniquity and the coming of Antichrist.”<sup>3</sup>

As we have seen, Archbishop Averky was in the direct spiritual line of the nineteenth-century Russian prophet St. Theophan the Recluse, whose prophecies — like those of his contemporary St. Ignatius Brianchaninov — he saw unmistakably being fulfilled around him. St. Theophan had prophesied the fall of the Orthodox Tsar and its terrible aftermath, which he said must come as a punishment for the faithlessness, freethinking, amorality, and blasphemy among his countrymen. “When royal authority falls,” Theophan had said, “and the people everywhere institute self-government (republics, democracies), then there will be room for the Antichrist to act. It will not be hard for Satan to prepare voices in favor of renouncing Christ, as experience showed during the French Revolution. There will be no one to pronounce the authoritative veto. And so when such regimes, suitable for disclosing the Antichrist’s aspirations, are instituted everywhere, then the Antichrist will appear.”<sup>4</sup>

This was exactly what Archbishop Averky saw happening in the contemporary world. “The fundamental task of the servants of the coming Antichrist,” he wrote, “is to destroy the old world with its former concepts and ‘prejudices,’ in order to build in its place a new world suitable for receiving its approaching ‘new owner,’ who will take the place of Christ for people and give them on earth that which Christ did not give them.”<sup>5</sup> In the words of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, “The Antichrist will be the logical, just, and natural result of the general moral and spiritual direction of mankind.”

Like his beloved St. John of Kronstadt, Archbishop Averky found that the

most difficult thing to endure as an Orthodox pastor was to witness the apparent *triumph of evil* in the world. He saw Christians of all different denominations “keeping step with the times,” unconsciously collaborating with the servants of the coming Antichrist by preaching humanistic, chiliastic ideas of “world progress” and earthly blessedness — ideas which appear motivated by “Christian love,” but which are in reality profoundly foreign to true Christianity. “Bearing one’s cross is the natural way of every true Christian,” Archbishop Averky affirmed, “without which there is no Christianity.”

Archbishop Averky was especially wounded at heart when he saw Orthodox leaders trying to keep up with these apostate trends for the sake of “ecumenical” progress, thus contributing to the “new Christianity” of the Antichrist — a “Christianity without the Cross.”

From his Jordanville days, Fr. Herman recalled how once, while working in the seminary office, he had heard Archbishop Averky pacing for a long time in the hall. “Evidently His Eminence is weighed down by something,” remarked Fr. Vladimir, who was also working in the office at the time. Fr. Herman (then Br. Gleb) went out to check. As he approached the Archbishop, he found him pondering deeply. “Oh, Brother Gleb,” said the Archbishop, looking up with a worried countenance, “I’ve been thinking... The term ‘Orthodox’ is no longer meaningful today. *Unorthodoxy* is now disguising itself behind the external mask of Orthodoxy. There is a need to coin a new phrase for that which we call Orthodoxy, just as there once had been a need to coin the term ‘Orthodox.’— And that is not so easy.”

Fr. Herman also remembered how Archbishop Averky, trying so desperately to communicate the savor of otherworldly Christianity to Orthodox people who were losing their “salt,” would weep with contrition while delivering his sermons. Tears would roll down the righteous archpastor’s cheeks as he would effortlessly pour forth profound teaching in beautiful, classical Russian.

In the early 1970s, when Archbishop Averky was already infirm and approaching death, his pastoral exhortations were more powerful than ever.

Reading his articles in *Pravoslavnyaya Rus'*, Fathers Seraphim and Herman rejoiced to see this venerable hierarch speak openly, not only about the obvious threats to Orthodoxy of ecumenism, renovationism, and chiliasm, but also about subtle church problems which few, it seemed, were willing to acknowledge much less talk about. The Archbishop spoke about the spiritual deadness that creeps in when we begin to view the Church first of all as an earthly organization, and about party politics entering into church life under the guise of righteous "correctness." "True Orthodoxy," he wrote, "is alien to every dead formalism. In it there is no blind adherence to the 'letter of the law,' for it is *spirit and life* (John 6:63). Where, from an external and purely formal point of view, everything seems quite correct and strictly legal, this does not mean that it is so in reality."<sup>6</sup>

What perhaps hurt Archbishop Averky most at the end of his life was to behold, within the Russian Church Abroad to which he belonged, a rising new generation of Orthodox leaders that was comprised, not of humble people who only wanted to receive and hand down the Tradition, but of opportunists whose "zealotry" was motivated by power-politics. In 1975, only a year before his death, he himself became a victim of this *zeal not according to knowledge* (Rom. 10:2), when he began to be attacked by the super-correct faction. He was criticized first of all because of his personal friendship with a Greek bishop in New York named Petros, whom the faction regarded as a rival authority for the Old-Calendar Greeks in America. Knowing that Archbishop Averky was concelebrating with Bishop Petros, they sent one of their notorious "Open Letters" to the Archbishop, and then actually "broke communion" with him, at the same time trying to undermine his theological authority by spreading rumors that he was "under Western influence," "scholastic," etc.

Archbishop Averky personally informed the Platina fathers about what was happening. Obviously he was very upset over the tone of "brazenness" (as he called it) that was being set in the Church. As Fr. Seraphim later recorded: "He wrote to us in his distress... a heartbreaking letter which shows how great the

gulf is between the great elders of the Church and the younger generation, which has not received its guidance from them and now thinks it ‘knows better’ than they.”<sup>7</sup>

On September 10, 1975, the anniversary of Archbishop John’s blessing of the Brotherhood, Bishop Nektary came to the monastery to serve the Divine Liturgy, and afterwards shared with the fathers his grief over the recent events. Bishop Nektary, too, admired Archbishop Averky greatly, to the point of regarding him as a living saint. The campaign against him, Bishop Nektary told the fathers, indicated how narrow and sorrowful is the path of true Orthodoxy today. “In the trials ahead,” commented Fr. Seraphim after Bishop Nektary’s visit, “we are still rather alone! But we do have the shining examples of these last great monks — Archbishops Averky and Andrew,<sup>[b]</sup> and Bishop Nektary. May God preserve us in His true flock!”<sup>8</sup>

Even as the campaign against Archbishop Averky was going on, Fathers Seraphim and Herman decided to dedicate an issue of *The Orthodox Word* to him, complete with a photograph of him on the cover, a short article by Fr. Seraphim calling him a “living link with the Holy Fathers,” and an article by Archbishop Averky himself, entitled “Holy Zeal.” “We had planned for a year,” noted Fr. Seraphim at the time, “to have Vladika Averky on the cover — but the final push came just now! Let them think what they will—*this* is a real Orthodox archpastor and theologian without any fakery or politics whatever, and he has suffered directly himself from ‘politics’ in the Church. We find the cover very comforting — we’ve done our duty by this righteous man!”<sup>9</sup>

Appropriately, Archbishop Averky’s inspiring article on “Holy Zeal” concluded by making a clear distinction between true Orthodox zeal and that false zeal that conceals personal interests and “the foaming of ordinary human passions.” “*ONLY HOLY ZEAL FOR GOD, FOR CHRIST,*” the Archbishop wrote, “*without any admixture of any kind of slyness or ambiguous cunning POLITICS, must guide us in all deeds and actions.*”<sup>10</sup>

Two months after the Archbishop Averky issue of *The Orthodox Word* was

completed, Fr. Seraphim wrote in a letter: “Our Vladika Averky cover seems definitely to have put us into a certain ‘category’—which is probably for the best. We feel now some indefinable ‘weight’ resting on us, as if we are carrying the brunt of a ‘battle’ whose front lines are not clear. Probably our isolation (in several senses) makes us better able to bear this weight, so we thank God. Around [the super-correct group] there seems to be some cloud that prevents even sober people from thinking too clearly or somehow ‘handling’ the situation, and we have received several indications that the old generation expects us to say the right ‘word’ when the time comes. May God give us strength.”<sup>[11](#)</sup>

Archbishop Averky did in fact look to the St. Herman Brotherhood to say the right “word.” As Fr. Seraphim recorded: “Not long before his repose he told the fathers: ‘Your path is correct. I bless everything that you are doing.’” He also wrote to the fathers thanking them for their moral support in what he called “a very difficult time” for him.<sup>[12](#)</sup>

**B**EHOLDING church dissension over such an obviously righteous pastor as Archbishop Averky, Fr. Seraphim was led to do some deep soul-searching. A Chronicle passage written on Christmas, 1975, shows Fr. Seraphim trying to take stock of the church situation in general, seeking to find meaning in it all and yet refusing to take refuge in easy, superficial solutions. “Throughout the year,” he wrote, “we have heard news of disharmony in the Church. In one monastery (Jordanville) the monks say ‘we are sheep without a shepherd’—and yet what would they do if the Abbot suddenly became stern and demanding in order to produce oneness of soul? In another monastery (Boston) there *seems* to be oneness of soul, but the impression is that it is not too deep and it is too dependent on ‘opinions’—opinions of the holiness of the Abbot, or the rightness of the monastery’s theology (and the wrongness of everyone else’s), of the superiority of ‘Greek’ to ‘Russian,’ etc. And everywhere — in parishes, in families and small groups — there burst out animosities for no apparent reason, and the best and meekest people are subjected to persecutions.

“Where is the cause to be found of this universal phenomenon today? Are true leaders vanishing in the Church? Or are the followers refusing their trust to those who could become leaders? Both things, of course, are happening, and in general the love of many is growing cold, and both leadership and trust are collapsing in a world based on revolutionary brashness and self-centeredness.

“What is the answer? To gain a position of leadership and compel obedience?—Impossible in today’s world. To offer blind obedience to some leader, preferably a ‘charismatic’ one?—Extremely dangerous; many people follow Fr. Panteleimon of Boston in this way, and the end of it looks disastrous, producing disharmony and friction on the way.

*“To practice love, trust, and life according to the Holy Fathers in the small circle where one is—there seems to be no other way to solve the ‘spiritual crisis’ of today which expresses itself in absence of oneness of soul and mind. If one finds the mind of the Fathers, then one will be at one with the others who find it also. This is much better than just following what so-and-so says, taking on faith that he is somehow infallible. But how difficult it seems to find the mind of the Fathers! How many disagreements there are with others equally sincere! Or is this because we have not searched long or deeply enough?*

“May God give us the answer to this agonizing question! If our labors can help others find oneness of soul and mind in true Orthodoxy, thinking for oneself yet faithful first of all to the true thought of the Fathers — then our existence in the wilderness is justified. And yet our path to this oneness seems to lead through discord — for example, to a public disagreement over the question of Blessed Augustine as Orthodox Father and Saint. Will this temporary discord really produce a deeper harmony beyond? May God grant it — this seems to be the only alternative to the blind following of an un-Patristic Party Line!”<sup>13</sup>

A few months after the above passage was written, Fr. Seraphim wrote a letter in which he contemplated the same problems: “I sigh and think, is it really worth it to get across the real understanding of Orthodoxy, when there are so many now who ‘know better,’ and the ones who don’t are as weak as spaghetti?

Or maybe, as our young Thomas [Anderson] once brightly suggested: if everybody else thinks differently, then maybe we're really wrong? But then I think of Vladika Averky, Fr. Michael Pomazansky, and all that older generation that is now almost gone — and I want to weep for the young 'know-it-alls' that have missed the point. But the understanding comes only through real suffering, and how many can do that?"<sup>14</sup>

“**S**UFFERING ORTHODOXY”—a phrase of St. Gregory the Theologian — was often on Archbishop Averky's lips. This refers to two things: the cross that Orthodox Christians must carry while following Christ to Paradise, and also to the persecution that eternal Truth itself endures in this fallen world. As Archbishop Averky observed, “The one who follows his own conscience and the teachings of the Lord may end up paying dearly. And this is true in all aspects of modern life — at times even in the areas of religion and church.”<sup>15</sup>

Archbishop Averky tasted deeply of “suffering Orthodoxy.” When Fr. Herman visited Jordanville in 1973 and asked the ailing Archbishop about his condition, he was met with this reply: “How can I feel, when the glory of Orthodoxy is diminishing, evil is triumphing, Christians are becoming so hateful and spiteful, and Orthodox Christians are no better — perhaps worse because they have been given more... And who will stand up in these terrible last times for poor *suffering Orthodoxy*?”

In his last book, Archbishop Averky mentioned how his pastoral concern for the “spiritual devastation” of his times contributed to his prolonged and final illness: “As a result of all the emotional distress I endured over all that is taking place nowadays, I was beset (at least, that is what the doctors say) by several serious illnesses which almost took me away from this temporary earthly life, because I could not come to terms with everything happening around me and approach it indifferently.”<sup>16</sup>

Later he concluded: “I will be judged, as we all will be, by the impartial God. But I can say one thing: I did everything honestly, according to my

conscience, and without regard to personalities.”<sup>17</sup>

Freed of his pastoral burden at last, Archbishop Averky reposed on March 31/April 13, 1976. During the last day of his final illness, he would doze off and be heard to say, “Lazarus is sick.” Evidently this was a kind of mystical identification with Christ’s friend in the Gospels, since Archbishop Averky reposed on the very day when the Church commemorated the death of Lazarus. He was buried three days later, on the eve of Lazarus Saturday — the day of Lazarus’ resurrection from the grave.

The day after the Archbishop’s repose, Fr. Seraphim wrote in his Chronicle: “The brothers are informed of the death of our spiritual and theological guide, Archbishop Averky of Jordanville, leaving us now truly orphans... An ‘interregnum’ period comes, when it is not certain whether anyone will carry on the ‘Jordanville ideology.’ Our Brotherhood now is placed in a much more responsible position. All the more important does it become for us to hand down the true teaching and spirit of Patristic Orthodoxy.”<sup>18</sup>

Two days later Fr. Seraphim wrote again of Archbishop Averky’s death: “This is a great, great loss to us. We thank God that we were able to present him as a ‘living link’ while he was still alive rather than (as usual) waiting until he is gone before starting to appreciate him.”<sup>19</sup>

Fr. Herman flew to New York with Archbishop Anthony, Bishop Nektary, and Bishop Alypy of Cleveland in order to attend Archbishop Averky’s funeral at Holy Trinity Monastery. There he found that, even in death, Archbishop Averky was not left in peace. During the funeral — at which Averky’s friend, Bishop Petros, served — priests from the super-correct group stood rigidly in the altar with their arms folded across their chests, refusing to take part in the service. Simple people who loved Archbishop Averky were both shocked and hurt to witness such brazenness. These visiting priests were using a *liturgical service*—not to mention the funeral of a righteous man — in order to make a political demonstration. As Fr. Seraphim noted in a letter: “Fr. Panteleimon of Jordanville,<sup>[c]</sup> when he saw this, told Fr. Herman (who was able to be present to



bid farewell to his Abba): ‘Look what kind of monks we have now. They came here to make a *demonstration*. It must be the end of the world.’”<sup>20</sup> Their actions were reproved by the words of Archbishop Averky himself, who stressed that “the Church was given to us for the salvation of our souls and for nothing else! We cannot make it a tool or an arena for the play of our passions and for the settling of our personal accounts.”<sup>21</sup>

When Fr. Herman returned from his trip, he brought with him a tape recording of Archbishop Averky’s funeral. Sending the tape to Alexey Young and his community in Etna, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “This will be our Paschal gift to your community; you will thus have contact with a real spiritual ‘event’ in our Church. I can hardly listen to it; I only want to weep. He was a righteous man, and we are suddenly shocked to realize that very few treasured him.”<sup>22</sup>

From an earthly point of view, Archbishop Averky’s death appeared as a defeat. The war of Satan against all forms of righteousness goes on, and will culminate in a reign of evil. But in the Kingdom of Heaven, Archbishop Averky was already a victor. He had lived a godly life, preparing himself to be among the saints. His words, written only a year before his death, inspire others to follow him: “Let devoutness and piety be the only torches which we hold in our arms — as did the elder Symeon, then in a more mysterious way — in the depth of our hearts and souls. Then we will from our hearts be able to proclaim, upon departing this life, *Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation!* (Luke 2:29–30)”<sup>23</sup>

Despair — belief in the absence of Truth and love — was not in Archbishop Averky’s heart when he reposed. He had lived in the presence of this Truth and love, and he knew that it would someday defeat the Antichrist after he had reigned for *a short time* (Apoc. 12:12). “The servants of Antichrist,” he had written, “will try, *if possible, to deceive the very elect* (Matt. 24:24). The thought of this, however, should not oppress or crush us; but on the contrary, as the Lord Himself says, *Then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth*

nigh (Luke 21:28).”<sup>24</sup>

**F**ATHER Seraphim was very conscious of the fact that, with the repose of Archbishop Averky, the Brotherhood had gained another heavenly intercessor. Only two days after the righteous Archbishop passed into the other world, Fr. Seraphim wrote in a letter: “We trust in the prayers of Vladika John, and now Vladika Averky in heaven.”<sup>25</sup> Fr. Seraphim now kept a photograph of Archbishop Averky in the icon corner of his cell.<sup>[d]</sup>

In November of 1976, Fr. Seraphim received an assurance from God that Archbishop Averky was indeed in heaven with Christ and His saints. As Fr. Herman recalls: “Fr. Seraphim came to church for the morning services and told me of a wonderful dream he had had the night before. He had seen his beloved Archbishop Averky standing on beautiful grassy terraces which led upwards. There were huge crowds of people as if at an outdoor gathering, and Fr. Seraphim was with them. Archbishop Averky looked radiant. He was vested all in dazzling white as was everyone, including a nearby deacon and Fr. Seraphim himself, who stood a little lower but right in front of Archbishop Averky. Some kind of joyful celebration was taking place. The deacon was supposed to help the Archbishop serve, but he did not know what words to chant. Fr. Seraphim knew the words, however, and looked up at Archbishop Averky — meaning to say that he had the right words. Then the Archbishop hinted to him that he should sing them aloud.

“*‘Let God arise!’* Fr. Seraphim loudly sang, setting to a special melody a Psalm verse that is used during the services of Pascha, the Resurrection of the Lord. *‘And let His enemies be scattered! Alleluia!’*<sup>[e]</sup> As soon as he sang this, it was repeated by the huge chorus all over; it thundered, rolling like billows far and wide. At this moment Archbishop Averky smiled in deep gratification. He began slowly to ascend while swinging a smoking censer. And as the magnificent thousand-voiced choruses continued, Fr. Seraphim somehow knew that this was a new service and that this grand, Pascha-like celebration had never

been held before.”

After Fr. Seraphim had related his dream, Fr. Herman pointed out to him that that very day was the feast of St. Averky, Equal-to-the-Apostles: the first nameday of Archbishop Averky in heaven. Also commemorated on that day were the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, whose lives prefigured the General Resurrection, together with the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God, through which Russia had been saved many times from foreign invasion. Thus, suggested Fr. Herman, the new, unheard-of service in Fr. Seraphim’s dream was the celebration of the Resurrection of Russia.<sup>[26](#)</sup>

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM refused to let Archbishop Averky’s message be drowned out and forgotten. Soon after the Archbishop’s death he composed an article in Russian for the periodical *Pravoslavnaya Rus’*, entitled “A Chrysostom of the Last Times: The Significance of Archbishop Averky.” Here he paid the following homage to his great teacher:

“Archbishop Averky was one of the last giants of twentieth-century Orthodoxy, not merely of the Russian Church Abroad, and not merely of Russians abroad, but of the whole of universal Orthodoxy in the twentieth century. We have grown so used to his flaming and bold words, directed against the apostasy of our time, that we have not noticed that he was virtually the only hierarch in any Orthodox church writing in any language with such boldness and uprightness in defense of the truth of holy Orthodoxy...

“Truly, there is a lack of righteous ones in our pitiful times. But even if we do not see about us such upholders of truth, his teaching remains with us and can be our guiding beacon in the even darker days ahead which he foresaw, when the Church will have to go into the wilderness, as it says in the book of the Apocalypse.<sup>[\[f\]](#)</sup>

“For those who sincerely thirst to remain true to Orthodoxy, there is no more righteous voice than that which issues forth from the golden mouth<sup>[\[g\]](#)</sup> of Archbishop Averky.”<sup>[27](#)</sup>

## *The Royal Path*

*It will be a great struggle at that time, brethren, especially for the faithful.... Soon one will see every person shedding tears and asking with longing, “Is the word of God left anywhere on earth?” and one will hear the answer: “Nowhere.”*

St. Ephraim the Syrian (†372), Homily on the Last Times<sup>1</sup>

**D**URING Fr. Seraphim’s lifetime, the most difficult year the Brotherhood experienced was 1976. This was the year when the old underlying question of “what’s the use?” was felt more keenly than ever.

A week after the repose of Archbishop Averky, the fathers were left virtually alone at their hermitage. The last remaining novice left for Jordanville at this time, leaving only the twelve-year-old Theophil to stay with the fathers. When Pascha arrived four days later, Fr. Seraphim wrote in his Chronicle: “Thoughts arise: we are abandoned by everyone. But it is obvious that God has given us this opportunity of solitude to do something which is not so easy to do in the world with its conflicting opinions and fashions: perhaps we are here as firstfruits of the ‘desert’ to which the last Christians will have to go. In any case, we must remain independent and Patristic in our outlook, handing down the true Orthodoxy which the Holy Fathers and our own fathers have given to us.”<sup>2</sup>

The fathers’ physical abandonment, which was actually a blessing, would not have bothered them at all had it not been accompanied by a deeper feeling of aloneness: the feeling that, with the death of Archbishop Averky, they now had less support in taking a stand for sober, sound, Patristic Orthodoxy. Fr. Seraphim

had called Archbishop Averky “the greatest pillar of our Church.”<sup>3</sup> Such a righteous and bold confessor was badly needed now, for it was a time of some distressing developments in the Church. The super-correct group seemed now to be at the height of its influence, and had begun to promote its ecclesiastical views by rebaptizing people from other Orthodox Churches, beginning in England. Nineteen seventy-six was the year when many — including the dying Archbishop Averky — feared that the super-correct faction might eventually conform the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad to its own brand of sectarian church politics. After Archbishop Averky’s death, however, it seemed that no one else dared take up the fight against this, at least in print.

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM was frankly bored with these juvenile, “college-boy” politics. They were so much of this world, and he wanted heaven. He would have much rather just forgotten about them and reveled in his desert solitude. But, in view of the people to whom his mission of true Orthodoxy was directed, could he afford that?

One bright June day, the fathers sought to literally “rise above” these problems and get a better perspective, looking to God for an answer. It was the day after Pentecost, the Day of the Holy Spirit, the main feast day of Archbishop Averky’s Holy Trinity Monastery. The fathers decided to leave early in the morning with Theophil on a trip to Mount Shasta. On the way they read the morning services in the truck, and when they arrived they joyfully sang the service of Typica.<sup>[a]</sup> They sprinkled several places on the mountain with holy water, singing more hymns as they went.

“During the weeks preceding this,” Fr. Seraphim recorded in his Chronicle, “the fathers have been troubled at the words and actions of the ‘zealot’ faction in our Church, who are trying to promote a stifling uniform ‘correctness’ which is clearly a product of human logic rather than of the Church’s living tradition. Our great Russian bishops and theologians are being looked down upon because they are not always ‘correct’ in this party sense, and our very labors here in the

wilderness seem now to be called into question: we speak about ‘zealotry,’ but this seems to aid the formation of an extremist ‘party’ in the Church; and our ideal of getting away from worldly and party interests and being inspired by the wilderness and its saints does not seem to be understood by many; and also we do not fit into the ordinary ‘Russian’ picture of people useful to the ‘organization,’ willing to fill the Church and parish ‘vacancies.’ We feel spiritually somewhat alone, even though there are those who look to us for guidance: Even this trip to Mount Shasta — does it make sense in our ‘up-to-date’ missionary activity?

“With such thoughts we read the Epistle of the day in the forest, in the midst of snow at 7,500 feet with the white peak towering above us: *And be not drunk with wine... but be filled with the Spirit, speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord* (Eph. 5:18–19). And then the Gospel: *If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father Who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them* (Matt. 18:19–20). The fathers were struck by such a message which spoke directly to their hearts and answered their perplexity: indeed, it is where two or three are gathered together in oneness of mind and soul that the work of God can be done. Let us not then be weighed down by doubts and party-strife, but continue on the path which Vladika John has blessed, knowing also that there are others who look to us for encouragement and inspiration.”<sup>4</sup>

As this passage shows, the memory of Archbishop John was especially close to the fathers during this period of uncertainty. On June 19, when they had just published Bishop Sava’s book on Archbishop John, Fr. Seraphim noted: “We have been downcast in these weeks and are especially asking Vladika John’s help now: what to do? How to proceed? How to help our feeble missionary movement to stay genuine and not be lost on the path of outward success, to the detriment of true Orthodoxy?”<sup>5</sup>

A week later, shortly before the tenth anniversary of Archbishop John's repose, the fathers were sent a sobering warning which renewed their determination to continue. On Sunday, June 27, a fire broke out southeast of the monastery. By Tuesday it had come within two miles, endangering the mountain. The townspeople told the fathers that if they were to see flames through the smoke on the other side of the gulch, they were to evacuate. Vladimir Anderson and his family were visiting the monastery at the time. They departed on Tuesday afternoon, volunteering to return to help in the evacuation if necessary, and leaving their boy Thomas to help the fathers for a few days.

"By late afternoon," Fr. Seraphim recorded in his Chronicle, "preparations are begun to remove our most precious books and manuscripts to Redding, to Mrs. Harvey's. Then the fathers with the two boys, Thomas and Theophil, walk over the whole mountain sprinkling holy water and carrying the relics of St. Herman and icons of Archbishop John and the Mother of God 'The Unburnt Bush,' leaving the latter at Split Rock at the eastern edge of our mountain, facing the fire. The two boys, in the excitement of the moment, are heard to say: 'I want to stay here and burn with you.'" <sup>6</sup>

When everyone reached a vantage point on top of Noble Ridge, Thomas was heard to exclaim: "I see it! I see the fire!" All began to pray fervently, with a feeling of great danger in the air. Suddenly they noticed that a wind had sprung up from the west. "By Vladika John's prayers," Fr. Seraphim recorded, "the fire was turned back... Soon the wall of smoke to the east was blown away and the danger greatly lessened." <sup>7</sup>

After everyone returned to the monastery and gathered in the church, Fr. Herman suggested that they make a vow to build a shrine for all their relics of saints. This reliquary was completed within a few days, by which time the fire had completely burned out.

Thankful to God and the monastery's patrons for the averting of this disaster, Fr. Seraphim reflected on it in his Chronicle:

"We accepted this experience 'mystically': there is a 'fire' in the Church,

great danger, and it is coming close to our Brotherhood. We had felt tense for weeks before the coming celebration of the tenth anniversary of Vladika John's repose, and had even asked a number of people to pray especially for us in these days. In the midst of the danger we felt a firm resolve to continue our labors no matter what, and all the more did we beg Vladika John to help us in what we feel are crucial days for us, to show us how to continue.”<sup>8</sup>

The fathers were further emboldened in their labors when, right after the fire danger had ended, they went to San Francisco to attend the annual Liturgy in Archbishop John's Sepulchre. Unlike their trip on the same occasion two years before, this trip was inspiring for the fathers, who received some welcomed support from Archbishop Anthony. “The Liturgy,” Fr. Seraphim recorded, “is splendid as usual, with both bishops, three priests, and a deacon. Earnest prayer is offered at Vladika's tomb, and long talks are had with both bishops afterward. Archbishop Anthony was very well disposed, giving for our church the material from the old iconostasis in the Cathedral and being encouraged to see that we are against ‘zeal not according to knowledge’ which seems to be troubling him also; Fr. Mitrophan, who gave us the newly printed portraits of Archbishop John with English text on the back,<sup>[b]</sup> encouraged us to continue spreading the veneration of Archbishop John no matter what (his enthusiasm for this seems to be the most lively thing that is happening in the Russian-language part of our Church today); and Vladika Nektary, after telling us that we alone are doing anything at all in today's stifling church atmosphere and alone are really free, counseled us only to place the spiritual side of things always first.

“We returned late at night from this feast day rather encouraged — but still without the clear answers as to our future activity that we had hoped for. The answer seems to be that there is no answer, no formula, and we must simply place all our trust in God and continue in the same spirit.

“But the ‘fire,’ the danger, continues to rage in our Church, and we remain uneasy for the future. News of the ‘rebaptism’ controversy in England is upsetting many people, and one wonders, especially after the death of



Archbishop Averky: who will set the tone of true zealotry for the future? We feel the need to express the ideal of sober and prudent zeal which our Church stands for, but it is already obvious that this will cause trouble with the [super-correct] faction.”<sup>9</sup>

**B**Y this time, the fathers had concluded that, if no one else was going to take up where Archbishop Averky had left off, they would have to do it themselves. For the first time in the pages of their magazine, they would dare to confront directly the problem of super-correct zealotry — and face whatever consequences this incurred. In a preface to an article by the current chief hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad, Metropolitan Philaret, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “There are those who wish to make everything absolutely ‘simple’ and ‘black and white.’ They would wish [Metropolitan Philaret] and his Synod to declare invalid the Mysteries of New Calendarists or Communist-dominated Churches, not realizing that it is not the business of the Synod to make decrees on such a sensitive and complex question.”<sup>10</sup>

Fr. Seraphim wrote only one paragraph concerning such “zeal not according to knowledge,” but that was enough to evoke quite a heated reaction. One priest wrote to the fathers that “the article has seriously damaged the integrity, clarity, and position of *The Orthodox Word* as a traditional Orthodox publication. In your article you take the ecumenist position that there are three groups of Orthodox Christians: the right wing, the left wing, and the middle-of-the-road... From your point of view, as well as the ecumenists’ viewpoint, we now have an Orthodox branch theory. This is what your article teaches. What else can it be saying to us? If all the other ‘Orthodox’ groups are part of the Church with Mysteries... then I confess that we are worlds apart from them and have no share in their Mysteries... These people have crossed the bridge and there is no return... All the patriarchs have lapsed into heresy... It is my prayer that you will realize the damage done by your article and that in future issues you will offer some explanation to the many Orthodox who have been

scandalized by it.”

Another priest in the super-correct group wrote: “Now I, the least and most sinful of God’s priests, declare that my soul is grieved and scandalized along with that of my flock.” In the same letter, this priest maintained that it was “better for a millstone to be tied around one’s neck and be cast into the sea” than for one to pray openly alongside anyone who so much as *commemorates* the Patriarchs of Russia and Constantinople.

As Fr. Seraphim observed in a letter, these priests “simply have *no idea* that there can be any such thing as a ‘temptation on the right side.’”<sup>[11](#)</sup>

**W**HEN Archbishop Anthony visited the hermitage on August 11, he gave encouragement to the Platina fathers for the stand they had taken in their magazine. In his Chronicle Fr. Seraphim recorded:

“In the evening, Deacon Andrew Papkov and Matushka<sup>[10](#)</sup> Natalia arrive, bringing news that Archbishop Anthony and Bishop Nektary will arrive the following morning. Archbishop Anthony serves Liturgy.... Bishop Nektary leaves in the morning for Seattle,... while Archbishop Anthony for the first time spends the night with us, and in general has his best visit with us. In the afternoon Deacon Andrew takes Vladika for a drive to Pattymocus Lookout, where traces of our recent forest fire can be seen, and then for three hours he discusses questions of ‘rebaptism’ and the like with the two fathers. He finds himself in complete accord with them. They translate for him all the ‘controversial’ passages in their Metropolitan Philaret article, after hearing which he crosses himself and thanks them for writing it. It is obvious that the ‘zeal not according to knowledge’ is becoming a matter of some concern for him and many of our bishops, and I’m afraid the solution to it, if any, will not be easy....

“Archbishop Anthony is obviously well-pleased with his visit and in the twilight before Compline is seen strolling and singing to himself in the monastery courtyard....”<sup>[12](#)</sup>

**A**LTHOUGH the fathers had been bold enough to challenge the “super-correct” positions in print, it was not at all pleasant for them to have people upset with them, especially people in their own Church who shared their mission to the English-speaking world. As Fr. Seraphim concluded in a letter to one priest at this time: “Believe me, Father, this letter is written in blood.”<sup>13</sup>

When the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God (August 15/28) arrived, Fr. Seraphim wrote in his Chronicle: “The two fathers with Br. Theophil spent the feast alone, celebrating the seventh anniversary of their move to the wilderness. The devil has attacked strongly in these days after the Divine Liturgy was celebrated,<sup>[d]</sup> and once more the thought occurs to the fathers: of what use are these labors in the wilderness? Is anyone really benefitted by them, so as to justify the labor necessary to continue them, as well as the being ‘out of fashion’ and out of harmony with ‘public opinion’ which accompanies them? They resolve to go ahead with trust in God, following Vladika John’s advice that if what we do is not pleasing to God, it will meet insuperable obstacles. The threat of a fierce winter ahead makes this perhaps a crucial year for our wilderness ideal.”



Archbishop Anthony at the St. Herman Monastery in 1982.

Fr. Seraphim felt he could not stop or back down. “We see the necessity,” he wrote, “for the formulation of a sound ‘moderate’ stand that will emphasize true Orthodoxy, firmly oppose ecumenism and modernism, but not go overboard in ‘defining’ such things as the presence or absence of grace, or practicing ‘rebaptism’ of those already Orthodox.”<sup>14</sup> To explain this position, Fr. Seraphim realized, would require more than a paragraph or two. A whole article needed to be written, one that would at the same time not alienate people unnecessarily. “This will be extremely difficult to do,” Fr. Seraphim said, “but with God’s help and the prayers of our patron saints we will try our best to do our little bit.”<sup>15</sup>

Truly, this was an article Fr. Seraphim had to “suffer through.” Visiting Fr. Seraphim’s “Optina” cell one evening, Fr. Herman found him with a gray,

worried face. “What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Why—?” asked Fr. Seraphim in turn, repeating the poignant question which the attacks on Archbishop Averky had aroused in him: “—Why does there have to be such a gulf between the great elders of our Church and the younger generation? And how do we know that we’re right?”

Fr. Herman could see how much his co-laborer was feeling the weight of his responsibility, which was made heavier by the lack of others to carry that weight. Like most converts, Fr. Seraphim feared not being wholly Orthodox in spirit, and thus he often turned to Fr. Herman for reassurance. But in spite of his misgivings, he ultimately knew that he was on the right path, for it was not *his* path, but that of his fathers in the Faith. He had followed their path thus far, and now they had left it to him to lead others along it.

The article that Fr. Seraphim finally wrote and printed was entitled “The Royal Path: True Orthodoxy in an Age of Apostasy.” As he demonstrated at the outset, the teaching of the “Royal Path” was not part of some novel “Orthodox branch theory,” but was the teaching of the Holy Fathers of the Church. He began with a quote of St. John Cassian: “As the fathers say, the extremes from both sides are equally harmful... (We must) go on the royal path, avoiding the extremes on both sides.”

“Applying this teaching to our own situation,” Fr. Seraphim wrote later in his article, “we may say that the ‘royal path’ of true Orthodoxy today is a mean that lies between the extremes of ecumenism and reformism on the one side, and a ‘zeal not according to knowledge’ (Rom. 10:2) on the other... Perhaps no Orthodox teacher in our own days provides such an example of sound and fervent Orthodox moderation as the late Archbishop Averky of Jordanville; his numerous articles and sermons breathe the refreshing spirit of true Orthodox zealotry, without any deviation either to the ‘right’ or to the ‘left,’ and with emphasis constantly on the *spiritual* side of true Orthodoxy.”<sup>16</sup>

**H**AVING (in Fr. Seraphim’s words) “stuck their necks out” with the royal

path position, the Platina fathers received a number of assurances that they were indeed not alone in it. Alexey Young, who was visiting England at the time the infamous “rebaptisms” were taking place there, sent word that such fanaticism was the exception rather than the norm among English Orthodox Christians. “You should know,” wrote Alexey to the fathers, “that they (many people in our Church in England) really *are* waiting on *you* to ‘show the way’ in these difficult matters, and so any advice, encouragement, and *direction* you might send would be most gratefully received. They really do all feel most terribly alone here, and fear for the future.”<sup>17</sup>

Another letter, this time from a believer in England, confirmed this: “The Brotherhood of St. Herman and *The Orthodox Word*... are highly thought of here. You have a very great and grave responsibility even here, six thousand miles away, for many look to you for precisely the right tone and attitude.”<sup>18</sup>

On November 13, 1976, Fr. Seraphim wrote in his Chronicle:

“Approaching the Nativity Lent, the uncertainties and forebodings of the spring and summer seem to be gradually dissipating for the Brotherhood, but a feeling of unsettledness remains. Very important for us have been the letters of recent months indicating that our labors are not entirely in vain, that despite ‘crazy converts’ and a very discouraging air of ‘officialness’ in many church circles, our ‘message’ is still getting through to some people....

“In mid-October we received from M. M. (Sayville, N.Y.) this note:

‘Thank you again for your strong and straightforward publication *The Orthodox Word*. May our Lord bless you and those who faithfully preach and uphold the “Word of Truth” in these thickening days of apostasy... The work is great but the harvest is few; nevertheless the few are very important and it is to this aim that you have committed yourselves...’

“On Lazarus Saturday Alexey Young of Etna wrote us the following:

‘You do indeed have a great burden of responsibility resting on your

shoulders, and, with God's help, you must not let anyone down!! The Brotherhood is, for us, an electric generator, with circuits and lines going out in many directions, providing light to many who dwell in darkness. Some have "tapped" into that "line" along the way, perhaps without yet realizing what the source of that light is, and so many depend ultimately on you for illumination in the hard days to come. May God help you!"

**T**OWARD the end of 1976, the fathers received yet more encouragement, this time through two young women pilgrims who came to the monastery, zealous to take part in some kind of Christian work. On November 27, Fr. Seraphim recorded:

"Unexpected guests arrive: Mary Mansur, a young woman (28) of Russian background who has been for several years with 'Gospel Outreach' (a Protestant organization) in Eureka [California], but now has decided she must abandon it to serve Orthodoxy. She with her friend Solomonia Minkin, a recent convert from Judaism (baptized by Fr. Ioannikios in Jordanville), plan to go to Novo-Diveyevo<sup>[e]</sup> and begin some activity under Vladika Andrew. Fr. Seraphim walks to St. Elias Skete with them and has a talk with them, and is very impressed with their fervor and desire to serve God in Orthodoxy with all their heart and soul. They were attracted to a Protestant organization because they found no outlet for their fervor in 'normal' Orthodoxy (as it is understood nowadays). Is this an indication of a new 'Sergei Kourdakov' generation of Russians, with freshness and fervor?<sup>[f]</sup> How to direct them in a fruitful path? And why should fervent young women now be coming to us, when the young men do not seem interested? May God grant us knowledge and wisdom to help them!"<sup>19</sup>

When these two pilgrims came to the monastery for the first time, Barbara McCarthy stayed up most of the night talking with them in the guesthouse. Somehow they were able to grasp the beauty hidden in the fathers' struggles in the wilderness, devoid as these were of outward glory.

Although the fathers had, in Fr. Seraphim's words, felt "spiritually

somewhat alone” during the difficult year of 1976, they had never been abandoned by God, Who continually sent them signs of His care and protection. The temptation and struggle of feeling forsaken — which according to the words of St. Ephraim the Syrian will be the common experience of true Christians right before the end of the world — had been allowed them by Providence. As it would happen, their most difficult year would be followed by the “year of grace”: the beginning of their priesthood and of a whole new era for the Brotherhood.



## Ordination

*My son, if thou art preparing to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptations (Ecclesiasticus 2:1). You should remember well these words of the most wise Sirach and expect some kind of temptations either before your ordination or soon afterward. The enemy of our salvation always attempts to deflect from the Lord's work him who is about to undertake it, and tries to plunge the beginner into faintheartedness by means of all kinds of adversities, sometimes real and sometimes only appearing as such to him. But if he endures and proves to be faithful to the Cross of the Lord and is not frightened by the snares of the tempter, the grace of God will abundantly uphold the strength of him who takes upon himself the yoke of Christ.*

—Archbishop John, in a letter to Fr. Mitrophan prior to the latter's ordination in 1954<sup>[1](#)</sup>

**S** EVEN years had passed since Fathers Seraphim and Herman had first entreated not to be ordained as priests. When they were tonsured as monks back in 1970, Fr. Seraphim explained, “First attention was given to the unhindered leading of monastic and spiritual life without the worldly attachment and obligations which priesthood brings.”<sup>[2](#)</sup>

In his heart Fr. Seraphim felt that it would be the consummation of his life to be an actual minister of the Lord's sacraments. At the same time, he had a deep-seated sense of being unworthy of the exalted calling of priesthood — a genuine fear of God. And for him and Fr. Herman, there was also the fear of

having to move away from the monastery in order to be used as priests for other needs — an eventuality which would, as Fr. Seraphim wrote in 1970, “weaken or even destroy the integrity of the monastery.”<sup>3</sup>

As the years went by, the fact that the fathers were not yet priests was appearing increasingly odd to church people outside. Some even began calling the fathers *bezpopovtsi*, “the priestless ones,” likening them to the Old Believer sect of that name. But the fathers, not wanting to lose their desert, continued to avoid — or at least postpone — being ordained priests. In this Fr. Herman looked to the example of Saints Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian, who at one time had vowed to each other that they would not be ordained; while Fr. Seraphim looked to the early Gallic desert-dwellers of the Jura Mountains, who had declined to be raised to the clerical ranks.<sup>[a]</sup>

Helen Kontzevitch and Barbara McCarthy supported the fathers in their position. Helen told them that the priesthood would forever tie them to an ecclesiastical “noose,” while Barbara McCarthy, with her love for the desert, maintained that they would sacrifice much of their silence and seclusion from the world if they became priests. Both these women were right in a way. But if the fathers were to make that sacrifice, not for themselves but for the souls of others, God would work through them in new ways.

Over the course of time, Fr. Seraphim felt the desire growing in him to feed Christ’s flock as a priest. In December 1974, after Archbishop Anthony had visited the monastery and served the Divine Liturgy,<sup>[b]</sup> Fr. Seraphim wrote in his spiritual journal: “[I] received Holy Communion, and the peace of heart and mind which It brought was palpable, lasting for several days, giving hope for the future. How one must watch over the heart and preserve its good feelings and correct the bad ones! Thoughts arise — the desire to be a priest and give to others this Divine food. May God’s will be done, in His own time!”

In a few years that time came. On October 13/26, 1976, the eve of the sixth anniversary of their tonsure, the fathers were visited by Bishop Nektary. After serving the Divine Liturgy, the Bishop spent the greater part of the afternoon

talking with the fathers in the “Tsar’s Room.” Metropolitan Philaret and the Sobor of Bishops of the Russian Church Abroad, he said, had commissioned him to ask them both to accept the priesthood so that all the people coming to the monastery could receive confession and Communion. “Then you will be able to practice what you preach,” the Bishop pointed out. “You preach grace, and a priest is a disseminator of grace.”

Bishop Nektary said that he was not pushing them into anything. “Archbishop Anthony promised me that he would not push you into anything, either,” he reassured the fathers. “You already function as a community of monks, and many people look to you with hope. Why not serve Liturgy by yourselves here in your monastery? If you *don’t* become priests, Archbishop Anthony may appoint a priest to be in charge here and administer the sacraments to your pilgrims, and that man might have a soul foreign to yours. This has happened many times in the past in monasteries, bringing disorder and fights. In order to avoid this, Metropolitan Philaret strongly suggests that you be ordained. He values your common *podvig*, and wants you to protect it with the established outer form of a monastery. And I, knowing you, can only agree, and bless you to accept the priesthood. The Optina fathers also accepted priestly rank, even in the Optina Skete. If you become priests, you can effectively bring people the real tradition, the tradition of Optina.... As for how often to liturgize, you’re not compelled to do it daily. You can serve Liturgy when needed, and still perform the daily cycle of services, to which you’re already accustomed.”

The fathers could not help but be swayed by their Bishop’s humble and sensible counsels. As Fr. Seraphim later noted in his Chronicle, “In principle the fathers agree to this [request], with the understanding that they will be allowed to continue their labors in the wilderness.”<sup>4</sup>

It was as he was leaving the monastery on this occasion that Bishop Nektary spoke his enigmatic words about the restoration of Optina Monastery in Russia through the fathers’ labors in Platina.

It was indeed true, as Metropolitan Philaret had said, that the fathers needed

to minister to the people who came to them. And there were new people coming. Not long after the first visit of Mary and Solomonia, the fathers were visited by two more fervent young Russian Christians, Eugene and Marina, which made Fr. Seraphim wonder if this was again a sign of a rising new generation of Russian zealots.

Fr. Herman decided to write a letter to his spiritual father, Archbishop Andrew (formerly Fr. Adrian), saying that he was under pressure to become a priest and asking what he should do. To this Archbishop Andrew replied: “The Metropolitan knows your life.... Trust him.”

Finally, the fathers decided to stop thinking about what might occur. They considered that, if they needed to become priests, God would make it happen. They could not know that, within a few short months, the grace of the priesthood would already be upon them.

**S**UCH outpourings of grace, however, are usually not given without trials. The “most difficult year” was still not over yet. Before the ordinations would take place, the envious devil would plague the fathers with one bothersome temptation after another.

According to Fr. Seraphim’s formula, “the devil attacks first through cars, then novices.” At this time the fathers had one green pickup truck; and, although they had no novices, they did have one monastic aspirant, an amateur car mechanic named David.

When David told the fathers that he wanted to learn about “responsibility,” they decided to send him to San Francisco in their green truck to pick up the remaining parts of the Cathedral iconostasis that had been donated to their church. David left and then returned the next day, but now he had a large rented truck.

“Where’s the green truck?” the fathers asked.

“In Vacaville,” was the reply. “It needs a new engine.”

Soon David left for Etna to visit his family, leaving his own truck with the

fathers and promising to get their green truck as soon as he returned.

The fathers' car troubles, however, were far from over. "On Tuesday," writes Fr. Seraphim in his Chronicle, "Barbara goes in David's truck to Redding to do some errands for us. On the way there a wheel comes off the truck. She begins walking to town, and before reaching it meets David, returning from Etna in Alexey Young's jeep, which he is loaning us for the winter. He is returning to tell us that he has decided against monasticism and is taking a \$500 veteran's payment in order to finish his electrical school. He apparently planned merely to pick up his truck and leave the green truck for us to take care of — but Barbara gives him a lecture in such strong language that he is stunned, and at least agrees to get our green truck back for us. For three days he and Barbara go back and forth to town trying to fix the wheel on the truck. In the meantime, [the pilgrim] Constantine returns (on foot with backpack), thinking to spend a little time with us recovering from his problems. Being a mechanic, he agrees to stay and install the new engine in our green truck. On Friday, November 20/December 3, he goes to Redding with Fr. Seraphim and David to fix the wheel on David's truck (which David has made worse by putting on a new part backwards). They are unsuccessful, and on the way back the jeep also ceases to run... The Protestant minister from Wildwood who visited our monastery some months before stops with a school bus and offers to help, but when it is seen that the jeep will not start, Fr. Seraphim puts his two helpers on the school bus, which is going through Platina, and stays with the jeep waiting for the AAA[\[c\]](#) to tow it away, thinking to hitchhike back himself. But he goes to Redding with the towed jeep, only to find that it cannot be repaired until Monday, if then. Thus, totally stranded and with evening coming on, he phones Mrs. Harvey, and she, after giving him dinner, brings him back to the monastery in time for the end of the Vespers of the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos."<sup>5</sup>

On Sunday Mrs. Harvey returns to the monastery to get David, who is to pick up his repaired truck on Monday and tow the jeep back. When David finally makes it to the repair shop, however, he is not allowed to take the jeep, not being

the one who brought it in. Nonetheless, he does manage to return to the monastery with a tow bar, which will be used the next day on a trip to San Francisco.

The next day is the feast of the Great Martyr Catherine. After services in the morning, Fr. Seraphim and David leave for San Francisco in David's newly fixed truck. Their mission: to deliver all the copies of the *Chronicle of the Veneration of Archbishop John Maximovitch* to the bindery in the city, and then, on the return trip, to get the green truck and tow it back to the monastery.

"They are very concerned," Fr. Seraphim continues in his Chronicle, "especially since one tire is very bald, but the trip to San Francisco is without incident. After a brief trip to the Berkeley library, they return by way of Vacaville, where they pick up the green truck and begin towing it — noticing the strange coincidence that the garage where the truck has been stored is on *Catherine Street*, and today is the feast of St. Catherine!

"David's truck wobbles very much under the load of towing, and David is afraid to drive. Fr. Seraphim drives and notices that it is very difficult and nerve-racking, and that the trip will last well into the night. Then, on the two-lane road only thirty miles or so from Vacaville, he loses control of the truck; it swerves over into the oncoming lane of traffic (thanks to God, the lane at that moment was empty), then swings entirely around and crashes into the bank at the side of the road. The green truck overturns and gasoline is pouring from it, while David's truck is sitting on top of it on the rear wheels, still attached with the tow bar. Neither Fr. Seraphim nor David was scratched or even in the slightest shaken by the accident, and Fr. Seraphim tells him: 'You have just witnessed a miracle!' The feeling is very strong that the devil is trying very hard to destroy us — and God is preserving us by His grace in a most evident manner. We must be preparing for something important ahead!

"The police are called and do not even give a ticket, because no one else was involved in the accident, and there were no injuries and no insurance problem. The green truck is towed to Winters, twenty-five miles away, and Fr.

Seraphim and David return safely late at night in the dented blue truck.

“[The following day] Fr. Seraphim, with David and Constantine, go to Redding to pick up the jeep and buy a new truck. More mechanical difficulties (both batteries go dead), but they do find a suitable truck for \$850, arrange to pick it up the next day, and return in the evening...

“[The next day] Fr. Seraphim and Constantine pick up the new white truck — but the owner has failed to fix the pulley holding the fan-belt, which later causes us much new trouble.”<sup>6</sup>

As if all this were not enough, in the following weeks there were new problems, especially with one part of the Linotype, which Fr. Seraphim repaired only with great and complex difficulties. At the same time, for three months there had been a drought in California, which by December had become critical. As Fr. Seraphim noted in his Chronicle: “It is somehow bound up with the trials we have been experiencing!”<sup>7</sup>

Another trial came through the young man Constantine. He stayed at the monastery for about a week altogether, fighting the temptations of drinking and smoking — but not very successfully. “Several times,” writes Fr. Seraphim, “he goes to Platina at night to drink. And then he begins to be deeply and bitterly hostile against Fr. Herman (a part of his rebellion against ‘authority’). Finally it becomes too much for him, and one night he breaks Fr. Herman’s staff into pieces and walks along our road shouting obscenities. One weekend we have guests and he leaves his cell to sleep outdoors near the ‘first bend’ in our road, where the guests see him when taking a walk. Finally he is told that his behavior will have to change if he wishes to stay with us, and he is offered a ride to Redding. He tells Fr. Seraphim of his deep hostility and suspicions — that we wish his money, etc. The day after his night-shouting, he is frustrated at work in our ‘barn,’ and he rushes out shouting, ‘When is the next bus to Redding?’ Fr. Seraphim immediately takes him to the bus in Redding, giving him money and food for his trip to San Francisco. He apparently cannot live for anything but pleasing himself. With him there departs as it were a last demonic temptation

before the outpouring of grace which is unexpectedly to begin in a few days.”<sup>8</sup>

**O**N December 11/24, the eve of the commemoration of St. Herman of Alaska, many pilgrims came for the monastery’s patronal feast. Theophil’s mother Julia, along with her two other sons, was the first to arrive, but not without (as was par for the course at that time) her car breaking down three miles from the monastery. Then in the evening, just before services were about to begin, Archbishop Anthony arrived unexpectedly with his deacon Andrew.

Fr. Herman, with his fears and doubts about the priesthood, had been begging God that the Archbishop would not come. “I bet he’ll try to ordain us right away,” he nervously told Fr. Seraphim before the Archbishop walked through the gate.

Fr. Herman met the deacon first. “Archbishop Anthony will beg you to become priests,” the deacon whispered into his ear. “Be at peace whatever you do.”

As the Archbishop entered the monastery, he saw a group of pilgrims walking up the road. Fr. Herman could hardly argue against ordination as he had at his and Fr. Seraphim’s tonsure. Now it was no longer a matter of just two isolated strugglers in the forest. In the Archbishop’s view, these other people were their parishioners — and parishioners need a priest.

Archbishop Anthony asked to speak with Fr. Herman alone. When they had gone into the Tsar’s Room, he said, “Dear Father, Bishop Nektary said that you might not mind being ordained. The Metropolitan asked me to implore you. Otherwise people will say you’re proud. I didn’t bother you much all these years, you know...”

Fr. Herman went out to tell Fr. Seraphim, and then brought him into the room with him. Suddenly the Archbishop slipped off his seat on the sofa and for a brief moment fell on one knee before them. “I beg you,” he said to the fathers after he had returned to his seat, “accept this.” He told the fathers that they had already gone too far in their activity to back down, and that if they did so now



they would be like deserters.

The fathers remembered the words of Bishop Nektary. They felt that the call had come for them not only to serve the sacraments to people at the monastery, but also to create new “deserts in the backyard,” with an outreach to American spiritual seekers who otherwise would have no dealings with Orthodox churches. With this in mind they told Archbishop Anthony that they agreed to accept ordination.

Fr. Seraphim, however, stated that he wanted Bishop Nektary to be the one to ordain them. “Fine,” responded Archbishop Anthony. “But how about if I make Fr. Herman a deacon tomorrow?”

During the Divine Liturgy on the following day, Archbishop Anthony ordained Fr. Herman to the diaconate. Alexey Young was in time to witness this unexpected event, having arrived in the morning with his family. After the Liturgy there was a triumphant procession around the church and then a festive meal.

The general rejoicing was marred by Julia, whom, as Fr. Seraphim noted, “the devil picked to attack out of his envy at the spiritual benefit of the feast.” Julia had been attending one of the parishes of the super-correct group. When Archbishop Anthony had arrived the day before, she had screamed that he was a “heretic” and a “Catholic” for allowing Western-style icons in his churches. She insisted that the Brotherhood would likewise be drawn into “compromises” and that only the “Greeks” remained pure and unaffected. Hiding in the back of the fathers’ truck for twenty-four hours, during the whole time Archbishop Anthony was at the monastery, she refused to attend the Liturgy. “Her attitude,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “is obviously ‘crazy,’ but it is a sign of the unhealthy direction in which [her spiritual authorities] have been directing those who follow them — probably a bad sign for the future; but God is obviously sending us His grace to battle this and other temptations ahead.”<sup>9</sup>

While this was going on, there was occurring yet another disturbance, which was also taken as a sign of the devil’s envy at the ordination. Right about

the time Archbishop Anthony had first arrived, eerie, bloodcurdling screams began to issue from the surrounding forests. Thinking that it might be a trapped animal, Fr. Herman sent people to look around, but it was discovered that the mysterious source of the wailing kept moving. The wailing was heard sporadically throughout the night, continuing the next morning during the Liturgy and ordination, and ceasing only after the Archbishop had left. It perhaps came from a mountain lion, whose howling has been known to sound like the high-pitched shriek of a woman. But the fact that they heard it at this particular time, having never before or after heard such a sound during their many years in the wilderness, inclined them to give it some spiritual significance.

The day that followed the feast brought new agitations. Because Julia now considered the fathers to have compromised themselves with a “heretic” hierarchy, she wanted to take her son Theophil away from the monastery. When the fathers told Theophil that his mother wanted him to go, the boy did not hesitate to affirm his wish to remain. Fr. Seraphim had a long talk with Julia, trying to persuade her not to take the boy. When she left in the afternoon with her other two children, she made no mention of Theophil. Later she sent some money to the fathers in gratitude for taking care of her son.

On the next day, a Monday, Fr. Herman telephoned Bishop Nektary in Seattle. Fr. Herman did not want to go to Seattle for priestly ordination; and, as Fr. Seraphim noted, there were “last minute doubts about what is the will of God.”<sup>10</sup> But Bishop Nektary agreed to come to the monastery on Thursday. Since another priest was required to be present at the ordination, Fr. Alexey Poluektov likewise agreed to come.

December 17/30, the feast of the Prophet Daniel, was the date set for the ordination. On the eve of this day it began to snow, the first precipitation since September, thus breaking the unusual four-month drought. After all the temptations leading up to the ordinations, the fathers took this life-giving water from heaven as a sign of grace.

With snow now covering the road, the fathers at first doubted that the

ordination would take place as planned. But only a few inches fell overnight, so that Fr. Seraphim was able to bring Bishop Nektary up the road in the monastery truck. Fr. Alexey Poluektov arrived with his son Elias, as did Barbara McCarthy, Vladimir Anderson with his family, and Alexey Young with his family and Etna community members.

In addition to ordaining Fr. Herman priest, Bishop Nektary ordained Vladimir Anderson and another man, George Williams, to the rank of reader. There were twenty-two people at the meal afterward, and, as Fr. Seraphim noted, “much spiritual joy.” When on the following day Fr. Herman served Liturgy for the first time, Fr. Seraphim observed that it was “literally in fear and trembling.”<sup>[11](#)</sup>

**D**URING Bishop Nektary’s visit, it had been decided that the Bishop would ordain Fr. Seraphim to the diaconate on Sunday, in the San Francisco Cathedral. On Saturday afternoon Fr. Seraphim set out, leaving three pilgrims to sing in the choir on Sunday and to receive Holy Communion from the newly ordained Fr. Herman. Just as Fr. Seraphim was leaving to be ordained, it again began to snow. “This weekend,” he recorded later, “there is eighteen inches of snow, and constant rain in San Francisco — somehow bound up with the grace of ordination, and with all that has been happening to us.”<sup>[12](#)</sup>

Describing his three-day trip to the city, Fr. Seraphim wrote the following:

“Fr. Seraphim arrives a little late at the San Francisco Cathedral Saturday night, and stands on the kliros for the whole service, helping with the reading and singing... Two Protodeacons serve, and the services are extremely rich and pompous, especially in the magnificent Cathedral with its beautiful frescoes.<sup>[\[d\]](#)</sup> The effect is overwhelming — but Fr. Seraphim feels himself a stranger to it, rather like a sacrificial lamb being offered. After the service he went for confession to Fr. Spyridon in Palo Alto, who also took from him the oath of loyalty and obedience to the Synod of Bishops. Fearing that the ‘obedience’ might be too difficult for Fr. Seraphim (if he should simply be commandeered

somewhere against his will), he told him that he would defend him and say that the oath was taken somehow with reservations, if need be. But the oath did not bother Fr. Seraphim, who enters the Church clergy with no idea of simply ‘soulless obedience.’”<sup>13</sup>

The day of Fr. Seraphim’s ordination to the diaconate, December 20/January 2, was the commemoration of the repose of St. John of Kronstadt: a day which, for reasons mentioned earlier, was closely bound up with Archbishop John. “After very little sleep,” the Chronicle continues, “Fr. Seraphim arrives at the Cathedral just before the Liturgy, asking Vladika John’s blessing at the Sepulchre first. The clergy are cool but not hostile to him; Fr. Nicholas Dombrovsky tells him: ‘Now you will be like us,’ and the Protodeacons, especially Fr. Vitaly, are very helpful to him. Vladika Nektary trembled during the ordination, but not as he had on ordaining Fr. Herman. The Cathedral was filled, with the ex-Soviet ballet star [Natalia] Makarova present with her Arab husband. After the Liturgy, Vladika Nektary gave a brief sermon to Fr. Seraphim on the Ambo, giving him a prayer-rope and blessing him to continue his doubly-churchly life (*sugubo-otserkovlennaya-zhizn*) in the wilderness. After consuming the Holy Gifts, Fr. Seraphim accompanied Vladika Nektary to the Sepulchre of Archbishop John, where together they served a Pannikhida with a few people, including the Andersons.”<sup>14</sup>

Fr. Seraphim spent the whole afternoon with Bishop Nektary, eating lunch with him and visiting the Bishop’s sick sister Vera. In the evening he served his first service as deacon — the Polyeleos (Vigil service) for St. Peter, Metropolitan of Moscow. The next morning he served at Liturgy with Fr. Nicholas — “rather unsure of himself,” as he wrote later, “but without incident.”

Having spent some more time with Bishop Nektary on Monday, Fr. Seraphim went to pick up Julia’s two boys, who wanted to come to the monastery for Christmas. Then, after a brief visit with Helen Kontzevitch in Berkeley, he set out for home. “Already in San Francisco,” he recorded in his Chronicle, “Fr. Seraphim noticed that the motor sounded strangely, and the

whole trip back was extremely difficult and tense, with something obviously wrong with the truck. At night, somewhere near Williams, he was stopped by the Highway Patrol, after numerous complaints of truckers (who flashed their lights at him) that his car was weaving like a drunkard. Fr. Seraphim was tested briefly for drunkenness and then warned to drive more carefully — the devil’s revenge for the grace poured out in these days. To receive the Holy Spirit and then to be accused of drunkenness!<sup>[e]</sup> But God is with us, and Fr. Seraphim arrived safely with the boys at the bottom of Mount St. Herman after midnight — to find eighteen inches of snow on the road. They slept most of the night in the cold truck and then set out with chains after sunrise. The truck made it more than halfway up the hill, and they walked the last half through the snow, tired but happy. At the monastery, Matins had just ended and there was to be no Liturgy because there was no *prosphora*,<sup>[f]</sup> but since Fr. Seraphim had brought some from San Francisco, Fr. Herman served after all.”<sup>15</sup>

**H**AVING become a deacon, Fr. Seraphim was now able to help Fr. Herman serve the Liturgy. Fr. Herman had begun, as is the custom in the Church, to celebrate the Liturgy every day during his first forty days as a priest. “We now have the special consolation of the Divine Liturgy,” Fr. Seraphim wrote in a letter, “which is truly a heaven on earth. On the days when Barbara [McCarthy] has visited us, I have been able to serve as deacon instead of just being on the kliros;<sup>[g]</sup> and then indeed one forgets everything else.”<sup>16</sup>

Within a few days after Fr. Seraphim returned from the city, the Feast of the Nativity of Christ arrived. In the afternoon of Christmas day, Fr. Seraphim recorded, “there is tea in the Tsar’s Room, and an abundance of gifts. The boys are delighted, and the pilgrims enter fully into the spirit of things — our most festive and happy Christmas yet in the wilderness.”<sup>17</sup> — A fitting end, to be sure, of the “most difficult year.”

When the Feast of Theophany came two weeks later, water was blessed for the first time by one of the monastery’s own fathers, and processions were made

to bless faraway places in the forest with it. It was now with the grace of the priesthood that the fathers were able, as Fr. Spyridon once told them, to “sanctify the atmosphere.”

A few weeks later, an unusual incident occurred. Up until this time Mary and Solomonia, although they had already decided to serve God in Orthodoxy, still had ties with the Gospel Outreach organization. They were told by the organization’s leaders that they could not leave until they had replacements to take over their jobs. This, they felt, was right and reasonable, and they wanted to comply. Then, in the evening of February 6, a young man drove up Noble Ridge and past the monastery. Later he came to the monastery gates, asking someone to help him pull his car out of the snow. The fathers succeeded in getting it out for him. As it turned out, this man, Walter by name, was on his way from New York to the California coastal town of Eureka, in order to join Gospel Outreach. Wanting to look at the California scenery on the way, he had driven up the snow-covered monastery road “by chance.” And — what was most amazing — he was the very man who had been sent to replace Solomonia! He was as surprised as the fathers were. “What is the meaning,” Fr. Seraphim asked in his Chronicle, “of this strange ‘coincidence?’”<sup>18</sup>

In a few weeks Mary and Solomonia were freed of their responsibilities at Gospel Outreach, and Barbara went to pick them up in Eureka. At the hermitage they began an informal course on the Orthodox worldview, which consisted primarily of listening to cassette tapes of Fr. Seraphim’s “Orthodox Survival Course” in 1975. At this point their plan was to stay in the guesthouse outside the hermitage for the duration of Great Lent, and then to move near Archbishop Andrew and the New Diveyevo Convent.

Mary and Solomonia later brought their friends at Gospel Outreach to the hermitage. “We have been visited by about fifteen of the Protestants [from this group],” Fr. Seraphim was to write, “including several of the ‘elders.’ What it means, I don’t know. Some of them have many of the right Christian ideas, and we would love to give them the whole of Christianity, Orthodoxy — but so far

we are just sowing seeds.”<sup>19</sup> In time, five people from this group embraced the Orthodox Faith.

**G**REAT LENT, 1977, brought new hardships for the monastery. Having fallen behind in their printing work because of their ordinations, their increasing number of pilgrims, and their Liturgies, the fathers were exhausted most of the time. The long Lenten services in the cold church were a struggle for all. Heavy snowfalls during this period made things yet more burdensome: since it became impossible to drive cars up the mountain, the fathers had to take several hikes through the snow in order to bring their heavy printing type to the monastery. The snow also prevented Bishop Nektary from stopping on his way to Seattle, in order to take Fr. Seraphim there for priestly ordination. Because of this, it was decided that the ordination would take place in the monastery after Pascha.

When Pascha finally came, the fathers, along with the fourteen pilgrims who were then present, found that the hardships of Lent only made the Feast more joyful. All received Holy Communion. Traditional Paschal breads and eggs were served, and at dawn nearly everyone walked up the road to watch the dancing sun.

With Fr. Seraphim’s ordination now approaching, he was required to take an oath before the Gospels in which he was to confess sins or other deficiencies which might prevent him from becoming a priest. This he did in the presence of Fr. Herman.

“I feel unworthy to serve,” he told his brother afterward.

“I’m much worse than you are,” objected Fr. Herman.

“No,” Fr. Seraphim continued with pain in his eyes, “I’m worse. I bowed and prayed to pagan idols.” At this he began to weep. Fr. Herman was deeply moved and also amazed to see such deep repentance in Fr. Seraphim over sins he had committed nearly two decades before, when he had been worshipping in Buddhist temples. He could see that Fr. Seraphim actually felt he had defiled himself, having at that time rejected the living Christ and bowed before cold,

lifeless pagan statues — the masks of demonic powers. The memory of this youthful apostasy would always be a humbling one for Fr. Seraphim, as would the other sins of his youth. He would never feel “worthy” of his priestly ordination, but would always look on this sacrament, like his reception into the Church, as a totally unmerited blessing of the merciful God.

**B**ISHOP NEKTARY arrived on the eve of Fr. Seraphim’s ordination, so as to be present at the last Liturgy in which the fathers would serve together as priest and deacon. After the Liturgy, he spoke to the fathers in the Tsar’s Room, and just at that time there arrived a man from the town of Hayfork, a dowser whom the fathers had expected to come on the previous Saturday to search out a site for a well. As it turned out, the dowser had attempted to come then — but had failed to find the monastery! “Apparently,” observed Fr. Seraphim, “it was God’s will that he come when Vladika Nektary was present.”<sup>20</sup>

Walking unannounced through the monastery gate with two long, metal “antennae” sticking out of him, the dowser presented quite a strange spectacle. As Fr. Herman recalls, “He looked like a man from Mars!”

“Who is *that*?” asked Bishop Nektary.

“That’s our dowser,” replied Fr. Herman.

“Ah!” the Bishop smiled. He then raised both his hands and blessed the dowser. If the man *did* find an underground spring, the fathers would no longer have to haul water several miles up from the bottom of the mountain.

Also, Bishop Nektary loved water. From childhood, his greatest pleasures were boating and fishing in Optina. To console the Bishop, Fr. Herman had had a hole dug in the middle of the monastery, with the idea that it would later be filled with water and turned into a little fifteen-foot-wide pond. He used to joke with the Bishop that one day he (the Bishop) could put a boat in the pond and float around in it.

The dowser, Fr. Seraphim recorded, “turned out to be a religious man, who regards his work not as ‘witching,’ but simply as a natural talent given by God,



and he said a prayer before beginning work. Vladika Nektary with all the pilgrims went to church to serve a Moleben,<sup>[h]</sup> while Fr. Seraphim accompanied the dowser on his search, which was made with the aid of two rods which indicate where the underground water is and how deep one will have to dig for it. He immediately found an underground stream just outside the church, which he said was 78 feet deep with about 20 gallons per minute of water, and then (after Fr. Seraphim pointed to our pond and said we would like to have water as close as possible to it) he found (so he said) a second stream right next to our pond, at the best possible place, easily accessible to a crane; this was at 80 feet, with about 25 gallons per minute. He also found the place where the two streams apparently join, just above our 'library,' with much more water at 90 feet, but much more difficult of access. For the next half hour he and Fr. Seraphim went to various places on the monastery land — east beyond the cemetery, west to Lindisfarne and beyond; many sources of water were found, but all were deeper and with less water than the original site next to the pond. Within an hour Fr. Seraphim called a well-digger in Hayfork and began preparations for having him come to dig a well.”<sup>21</sup>



Fr. Seraphim serving as a deacon in the St. Herman Monastery church on the day of his ordination to the priesthood, Sunday of the Myrrhbearing Women, April 11/24, 1977. *Photographs by Thomas Anderson.*





Fr. Seraphim during his ordination to the priesthood by Bishop Nektary.  
St. Herman Monastery church, Sunday of the Myrrhbearing Women, April 11/24, 1977.  
*Photograph by Thomas Anderson.*



The continuation of the Divine Liturgy following Fr. Seraphim's ordination.  
Fathers Herman and Seraphim hold the aer over Bishop Nektary's head during the singing of the  
Creed. *Photograph by Thomas Anderson.*



Fr. Seraphim at the conclusion of the Liturgy at which he was ordained to the priesthood.

Thus, the grace of this ordination, too, came to be connected unexpectedly with life-giving water. Immediately an outdoor altar-table was placed on the site of the future well, and many prayers were read and sung there, before an icon of the Mother of God, “the Life-giving Spring.” By this time many new pilgrims had arrived, including Fr. Herman’s sister and her family. A Vigil was then celebrated in church. In his sermon Fr. Herman told everyone to pray hard on the occasion of this important event, a priestly ordination.

Fr. Seraphim was ordained on the following morning of April 11/24, 1977, with about forty pilgrims in attendance. This was the “Sunday of the Myrrhbearers,” and, of the four women who composed the choir that day, three of them bore the names of Myrrhbearing women: Mary, Solomonia (Salome), and Susanna. Also, Alexey Young was tonsured a Reader on this day, when Righteous Nikodemos, the patron saint of his magazine, is commemorated with the Myrrhbearers.

“That day,” Alexey recalls, “there was a beautiful light covering of snow all

over the mountain-top and around the skete, a symbol of purity and God's grace. Just before the services began, I asked Fr. Seraphim how he felt about the ordination and he replied quietly, 'Very peaceful.'"<sup>22</sup>

Bishop Nektary tonsured Alexey as a Reader during the service of the Hours before the Divine Liturgy. After the tonsure, according to custom, the Bishop opened the New Testament Epistles at random and gave the Bible to Alexey to read. The passage to which Bishop Nektary pointed, and which Alexey then read, was I Corinthians 15:47–51: *The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly, etc.*

Fr. Seraphim's priestly ordination occurred at the Great Entrance during the Divine Liturgy. At this solemn moment Fr. Seraphim kneeled and pressed his forehead to the corner of the altar-table. He held up the text of the service, which was being sung by Fr. Herman as the Bishop performed the ordination. Bishop Nektary placed his episcopal stole and then his hands on the head of Fr. Seraphim. He was concentrating intensely. His face was red; sweat was pouring down his forehead. As Fr. Herman watched, his eyes suddenly met the Bishop's.

"I wish," whispered the righteous hierarch. "I wish only one thing. If only I could *transmit, transmit*—and then die!" Bishop Nektary was using all the power and life that God had breathed into him, in order to transmit the apostolic grace of the Holy Spirit, and the holiness of Optina.

Fr. Herman was in awe. This man, he thought, truly wishes Christianity to progress! This is the culmination of his life — to give to the next generation what Christ once bequeathed to His Apostles. There was nothing else, nothing more important.

Bishop Nektary was at that time old and sickly, and he knew he would not live much longer. Before him was a man, Fr. Seraphim, in whom he had placed so much hope for the future of Christianity. He knew that the "spiritual famine"

— predicted by his beloved Elder Nektary in Optina — had already descended upon the world; and thus he perceived the rarity and uniqueness of the man before him. Bishop Nektary felt lonely in his confession of the true spirit of Christianity; life for him had become a path of struggle and suffering which he endured out of his love for God. He was, as we have said, a meek and gentle soul, but at the same time he was a living Apostle of Christ. And the unutterable, unearthly power he possessed, which was hidden from the eyes of the world under the cloak of meekness, was now being mystically passed on. It was the power of Christ, and nothing could destroy its living continuation, its apostolic succession, until the consummation of time.



Fr. Seraphim after his ordination to the priesthood, with Bishop Nektary and newly ordained Reader Alexey Young. St. Herman Monastery church, Sunday of the Myrrhbearing Women, April 11/24, 1977.

**L**ATER that day, after the services and festal meal had ended and most of the pilgrims had left, there occurred something extraordinary which was perhaps



connected with the grace Fr. Seraphim had just received at his ordination. Barbara McCarthy asked the new Hieromonk Seraphim a question: Why, according to the Providence of God, had Bishop Nektary turned at random to that particular passage in the Bible about bearing *the image of the heavenly*, right after tonsuring Alexey Young a Reader? What did this Epistle reading mean for Alexey, how did it apply to him?

Unexpectedly and rather uncharacteristically, Fr. Seraphim replied to Barbara's question: "It means that Reader Alexey will one day become a monk."

When she next saw Alexey a few weeks afterward, Barbara related to him Fr. Seraphim's words. The words bewildered Alexey. At that time in his life, he was very happily married, both he and his wife were young and healthy, and he had no intention of becoming a monk. Since Fr. Seraphim's prediction did not make sense at the time, he soon forgot about it. It was only many years later — after both Fr. Seraphim and his wife had reposed, and after he had begun to seriously consider becoming a monk — that he remembered Fr. Seraphim's prediction. In July of 2002 he was indeed tonsured as a monk, and subsequently he has experienced great joy in the monastic life.<sup>[i]</sup> "I am amazed that Fr. Seraphim could have known this so many years before," he now says. Strangely enough, on his first nameday as a monk,<sup>[ii]</sup> it just so "happened" that one of the Epistle passages appointed to be read at the Divine Liturgy was the same passage from I Corinthians that Bishop Nektary had given him to read nearly three decades before — on the day he was tonsured a Reader and Fr. Seraphim was ordained to the priesthood.





Hieromonk (Priest-monk) Seraphim preparing to serve the Divine Liturgy at "Lindisfarne," St. Herman Monastery, Bright Week, 1978.



Fr. Seraphim at "Lindisfarne," Bright Week, 1978.

# PART X







The drilling of the monastery well, while the fathers hold a service of prayerful supplication, July 13, 1977.



Fathers Seraphim and Herman at the shrine, dedicated to Blessed Archbishop John, built over the monastery well.

## *Missions*

*... And the poor have the Gospel preached to them.*

—Matthew 11:5

*... And the common people heard Him gladly.*

—Mark 12:37

**Y**ES, I was ordained a priest on Sunday,” wrote Fr. Seraphim to one of his spiritual sons only two days after the event, “and I begin to feel the weight of the cross. Please pray for me harder than ever, that I may truly be able to help souls to salvation. The priesthood is not for me alone — I am supposed to pull those around me to heaven! But such a calling and responsibility!”<sup>1</sup>

Not long after this new burden was placed on the fathers, Archbishop John — the monastery’s undying benefactor from heaven — took another burden off them. The Archbishop John Memorial Society in San Francisco had offered the Brotherhood to pay for the digging of a well at the monastery, *if* water was to be found there. Now that the dowser had come and located an underground stream, people from the Society made a special trip to the monastery and donated the money they had collected, which amounted to several thousand dollars.

Soon thereafter, on July 13, 1977, a heavy truck with a huge drill arrived at the monastery. The fathers told the well-digger to start drilling at the exact place, near the church, where the dowser had assured them there was water eighty feet down. The motor began to roar; the drill began to pull up layers of earth and clay. After some time it reached the indicated eighty feet, but not a drop of water

was to be found. The well-digger kept going. Finally, at 125 feet, his drill hit a rock. “How much longer do you want me to drill?” he asked. The deeper he drilled, the more the fathers would have to pay.

Turning to Fr. Seraphim, Fr. Herman said, “This will already cost us over two thousand dollars — and that’s without the pump, which will cost another thousand.”

Both fathers felt miserable at the thought of having no water and yet having to pay such a large sum. As the drilling continued, the fathers and pilgrims went into the church to pray. Finally Fr. Herman said, “It looks like we aren’t worthy to have water. Whatever happens, glory be to God. Pray that we’ll at least have enough money to pay the man.”

Everyone went into the refectory, for they had not eaten all day. After the meal they returned to church to sing a Canon to the Mother of God. As they were praying they heard someone yell, “Water!” and, coming out, they saw water gushing from the earth. The well-digger told them that the water had been struck at 135 feet. He bent down to scoop up some of the bubbling water. “It’s good, sweet water,” he declared, and everyone rejoiced.

Before leaving, the well-digger gave the fathers the name of a “pump man,” who came soon to install a well pump. The well-digger and the pump man gave the fathers separate bills for the 160-foot well, twice the size they had anticipated. Adding these bills together, they compared the total amount with the amount of the check given by the Archbishop John Society. To their utter amazement they found that the amounts were almost exactly the same. “Obviously a gift from Vladika John!” Fr. Seraphim noted at the time.<sup>2</sup>

**T**HE new well was a great boon to the monastery. No longer did the fathers have to make routine trips to town to bring up water in a truck — or on their backs. It was as if the monastery’s spiritual father, Archbishop John, had told them that, in their first years here, they had needed the *podvig* of having no water in order to keep them struggling. But now that they had taken on the cross

of priesthood, they no longer needed this extra *podvig*. Now they would have to sacrifice themselves for the people.

Striking evidence of the change that the priesthood wrought in the Brotherhood is seen in Fr. Seraphim's Chronicle, where, immediately following his ordination, the daily entries become brief and scribbled. Where once he had had time to write down reflections on the state of the Church and the purpose and direction of the Brotherhood, he now only had time to jot down facts and names on scratch paper. And the names, after the ordinations, became far more numerous. Now that the monastery had clergy who could provide confession and Holy Communion, people expected more from it, and it therefore became sought out by increasing numbers of believers as a spiritual center. As usual, the fathers accommodated all who came to them, often having to deal with the complex spiritual problems of their pilgrims.

But the increased activity did not stop there. Since the fathers were now called to be disseminators of grace through the priesthood, their pastoral work was to naturally extend itself further beyond the monastery. The Brotherhood was about to enter a new phase, setting up mission stations and becoming Orthodox evangelists to the Northwest.

**T**HE first mission was begun in 1978 in the nearby town of Redding. As more and more pilgrims had begun coming to the monastery, Valentina Harvey's home in Redding had become a way station where people — including priests and bishops — would spend the night on their way to and from the monastery. By this time Valentina's mother and husband had reposed, and she lived with her daughter Alexandra. Often the pilgrims who stayed overnight would hold services in her small "prayer cell." Seeing that this prayer cell was not big enough to accommodate the growing number of pilgrims, Valentina once suggested to Fr. Herman that a chapel might be set up in her more spacious garage. The garage was a separate 60 × 40 foot building in her backyard, which she had been using as a storage shed. It had been built only recently, after a fire

had destroyed a chicken shed located on the same spot.

The impetus for the mission chapel came unexpectedly, much like the impetus of the Brotherhood itself. On Valentina's nameday in February of 1978, Fr. Seraphim drove to Redding with some monastery pilgrims in order to greet her with the feast. Later that night Fr. Herman set out separately with two brothers for the same destination, planning to serve the Ninth Hour and Vesper services in Valentina's home. When their truck broke down a few miles from Redding, Fr. Herman thought, "Ah, the devil strikes: something good must be about to happen!" They began walking along the road toward Redding in the dark. After having gone a few miles, they were picked up by Fr. Seraphim and the pilgrims, who were then returning to the monastery. In spite of the difficulties that had occurred, everyone was cheerful and inspired. Fr. Herman caught this inspiration, and felt that the time was ripe to strike out for the long-cherished hope of starting a mission in Redding. Everyone climbed into the truck and went to Valentina's house.

Upon seeing Valentina, Fr. Herman said, "Take us to your prayer cell." Candles were lit there and a Canon sung to the Mother of God. Then Fr. Herman gave a talk, telling all present that their meeting that night was reminiscent of the ancient catacomb services; that, like those catacomb believers, Christians of modern times had to separate themselves in spirit from the world. He reminded the people that Archbishop John had been in this home, in this very room. "You wanted a chapel in Redding, didn't you?" he asked Valentina. She nodded. "Then let's start a mission chapel here," Fr. Herman said, "so that the otherworldly Christianity that Archbishop John represented can thrive for laymen."

Fr. Seraphim was watching Fr. Herman with inward happiness. "Can I have the key to your garage?" Fr. Herman asked Valentina. When she brought it, he said, "Bring me the icon that Vladika John blessed you with — and a broom." Valentina was in tears. Smiling, she brought forth a tiny paper icon which Archbishop John had given her when she was a church school student in



Shanghai.

That night Fr. Herman swept out a corner of the garage and put up icons. “May this become the new Surety of Sinners Cathedral,” he declared, “in honor of Archbishop John!” He said this because Archbishop John’s Cathedral in Shanghai had been dedicated to the Icon of the Mother of God, “Surety of Sinners.” When he expressed the wish that the garage would be a “cathedral,” he had been thinking of Archbishop John’s archiepiscopal “cathedral” in France, which had also been a church built out of a garage.

Archbishop Anthony gave his blessing for the opening of the Surety of Sinners mission chapel in Redding. Soon afterward, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, Fr. Herman took all the young men from the monastery, and, after a procession with icons and banners, blessed the new chapel with holy water. On Bright Friday, Liturgy was served there for the first time. In the months that followed, Valentina, her daughter Alexandra, and other believers in the area worked hard to turn their former garage into a real Orthodox church.

Valentina now understood why, when she was considering leaving Redding many years earlier, Archbishop John had told her that she was in Redding for a reason. Even more remarkable was an incident she remembered from Archbishop John’s final visit to her home, which occurred only three days before his repose in Seattle. When he was about to get into the car to leave for Seattle, he suddenly stopped to bless Valentina’s chicken shed with the Kursk Icon of the Mother of God. Having blessed her property in all directions, he once more went to bless the chicken shed. “Why does he keep blessing our chicken shed?” Valentina’s mother asked, to which Valentina answered jokingly, “He must want us to have the most blessed chicken shed!” Archbishop John looked searchingly at Valentina several times before leaving, as if wanting to say something. It was only now, over twenty years later, when there was a chapel set up in her garage on the exact spot of the former chicken shed, that Valentina realized the meaning of the Archbishop’s strange actions.

**T**HE Platina fathers hoped that, by inspiring and starting small missions such as the one in Redding, they could infuse in them the principles of the “desert in the backyard.” “This will not be any ‘organized parish,’” Fr. Seraphim noted in a letter, “but just a mission station to serve (to begin with) those people in Redding and outlying towns who already come occasionally to our monastery for services.”<sup>3</sup> Those who wanted what the monastery had would no longer have to come all the way to Platina to see spiritual principles in practice. By struggling and praying at their own mission station, they could be living an otherworldly life while still dwelling in the world.



Fr. Herman and young brothers at the blessing of the Surety of Sinners Chapel, March 19, 1978.

The fathers would serve Liturgy at the Redding mission whenever they could, and no less than once a month. It was evident to all who were with Fr. Seraphim on these missionary trips that he poured all his heart into this work. Few people, however, realized what a sacrifice he was making. With his retiring disposition, he did not take up the task of a missionary pastor with the ease that

the outgoing Fr. Herman took it up. More importantly, as a true monk he did not wish to leave his monastery; he always kept his heart and mind in his beloved desert. Despite his reluctance to leave the hermitage, he sometimes had to conduct the Pascha and Christmas services in the world.

Fr. Alexey Young recalls: “A year or so before his repose, I drove Fr. Seraphim someplace where he was going to give a talk. We got out of the car and, as he was walking in front of me, he turned and said, ‘You know, this is really not for me.’ Now this is interesting because many think that he was really coming into his own, so to speak, in the last years of his life. And surely, in a sense, that’s true. But there was also a part of him that never really loved it at all, because he wanted to just be in the monastery. He did the work of missionary outreach because he knew God was calling him to it. It was his duty.... He kept his eyes fixed on Christ simply by doing his duty at every moment of every day, and never shirking it.”<sup>4</sup>

“Whatever God sends us,” Fr. Seraphim told the brothers at the monastery, “we must accept and do our best with. Every day brings a new struggle, a new chance to increase our prayers, and new ways to serve God.”<sup>5</sup> Such acceptance was not mere fatalism, for Fr. Seraphim realized that his only true fulfillment could be found in being sensitive to God’s will, and in being His obedient child. As Fr. Herman has observed, “Fr. Seraphim *forced* himself to give to others”; and it is precisely in such forcing of oneself that — according to the teaching of St. Macarius the Great cited earlier<sup>[a]</sup> — one is filled with spiritual fruit and *bowels of mercies* by the Lord. As we shall see, Fr. Seraphim did come to find fulfillment in his new obedience. He felt compassion for the people in the world whom he served, and, sensing the approaching end of all things, he wanted to do all he could for them.

FROM the beginning of the Redding mission, Fr. Seraphim strove to prevent it from becoming like many other parishes in the world, which often

become closed in on themselves and wrought with petty internal strife. At its first “parish meeting,” he set forth the following principles:

1. The term “parish” usually signifies something “parochial,” interested in itself. This is *not* the Christian ideal. We must be one with the whole believing Orthodox Church, not just buy furnishings for the church but regularly help others, both by money and work — helping Orthodox Christians in Uganda, Archbishop John’s “Orthodox Action” Society in Australia, etc.

2. Sacrifice: help out where needed; ideal of 10% of income given to God — whether directly to church or to the needy, etc. (but without phariseeism).

3. God comes first: if disagreements occur, let them be resolved in a Christian spirit; there must be willingness to give in to others and forgive. Let God’s will, not ours, be done.

From 1978 to 1984 the Brotherhood was able to begin more missionary parishes in Willits, California; Medford and Woodburn, Oregon; Moscow, Idaho; and Spokane, Washington. Like the mission in Redding, these new missions were the natural outcome of people wanting to experience the life of the Church in their own locales. The majority of the members of these missions were average Americans who had grown up never hearing of Orthodoxy. The fathers had started the missions specifically with the words of Christ in mind: *And the poor have the Gospel preached to them.*

Each of the fathers went to the missions in Oregon several times a year, and at least one of them made the longer trek to Washington and Idaho once a year. As Fr. Seraphim noted in his Chronicle, he had a “good, warm feeling” from the people he served in these places, who in most cases were struggling to live a spiritual life without the benefit of an established Orthodox church nearby.<sup>6</sup>

It was Fr. Seraphim who, in 1980 and 1981, made the first missionary trips

to Washington, blessing the property of the Orthodox Christians there and baptizing members of the mission. When Fr. Herman went to Oregon, Washington, and Idaho in 1982, he gave well-attended slide lectures in three universities. He was especially impressed with the mission in Moscow, Idaho, which had been started by people who had moved there from a small town not far from Platina: Forest Glen. By that time, members of the Moscow mission had rented a city storefront, inside of which they had a chapel and iconostasis. “While we were celebrating the All-night Vigil in the chapel,” Fr. Herman recalls, “a neighbor lady came down from her apartment to take out the garbage, and through the storefront window suddenly she beheld a microcosm of Byzantium: candles, censers, icons, and singing. Not knowing what she was seeing, she stood in awe, and, as she later said, she couldn’t keep herself from walking in and staying for the entirety of the long service. Through this chance encounter, her life was changed.”

The mission in Medford, Oregon, was composed of Russian, Greeks, and Serbs who wanted to form an Orthodox parish in southern Oregon, since there was then in that state no Orthodox church south of the city of Eugene. In 1978 the group had called Alexey Young, who lived about ninety miles to the south of Medford, and had told him of their wishes. Alexey had relayed the message to the fathers in Platina, who then had a meeting with the organizing families in Medford. Soon the fathers were going to Medford to serve the Divine Liturgy. The mission was dedicated to Saints Innocent of Irkutsk and Innocent of Alaska.

Not long after the inception of the Medford mission there arose a bit of a problem. Some of the people believed the Platina fathers were too strict in asking them to keep basic Orthodox observances such as fasts, etc. “This parish is not made up of monks!” they said, and decided to call in a priest from another Orthodox jurisdiction. When Fr. Seraphim served Liturgy there in February of 1979, near the beginning of Lent, he did not push one position, but merely told the people to make up their minds one way or the other. As it turned out, the new priest who came was so modernist that some of the people were shocked. As Fr.

Seraphim wrote, they “decided they wanted the ‘old Orthodoxy’ after all, and called us back.”<sup>7</sup>

Another responsibility of the fathers was the first mission they had inspired: Alexey Young’s little community dedicated to Saints Adrian and Natalie in Etna, near the California-Oregon border. For two years the fathers took turns going there to serve Liturgy. Bishop Nektary also visited the community at least once a year, sometimes bringing with him the miracle-working Kursk Icon. “On one visit,” Alexey recalls, “after serving a Moleben in the small chapel behind our home, Bishop Nektary placed his hand on my chest and said: ‘I know what is in your heart.’ He was acknowledging my great love for the whole idea of mission, a concept he also supported and encouraged.”<sup>8</sup>

All this while, the fathers had been cherishing the idea that Alexey would one day be a priest. Now that the mission in Medford had been founded, Alexey would be able to serve as a priest both in Medford and in Etna. When the fathers mentioned this to the people in Medford, the latter were, in Fr. Seraphim’s words, “overjoyed at the prospect.”<sup>9</sup>

On February 3, 1979, while visiting Etna, Fr. Seraphim talked to Alexey about ordination. Shortly thereafter, the Medford mission made a formal request for Bishop Nektary to ordain Alexey as a priest, and it was arranged for the ordination to take place during the second week after Pascha at the St. Herman Monastery.

Bishop Nektary ordained Alexey as a priest on Saturday, May 5, having ordained him as a subdeacon and deacon the day before. People from the various missions were present and, as Fr. Seraphim noted, there was a “triumphant celebration.” Years after the event, Fr. Alexey recalled: “A frightful spring storm had rendered the road to the Monastery of St. Herman of Alaska almost impassible — yet many pilgrims crowded the church for the ordination Liturgy. During the ordination itself, and then during the Anaphora,<sup>[b]</sup> Vladika Nektary — our Apostle — wept; never did he serve Divine Liturgy without being overcome with awe at the great Mystery before him. At the close of this Liturgy

he said to me, ‘Never, never be a “professional” priest’—by which he meant: Don’t let the priesthood be your ‘career,’ your ‘living’; let it be rather the air you breathe — and be less concerned about the material and financial aspects of your life than you are about giving yourself to Christ as His priest; *be ready to suffer.*”<sup>[10](#)</sup>



Fr. Alexey Young blessing the faithful after his ordination to the priesthood. At right, a radiant Bishop Nektary.

On Sunday Fr. Alexey served his first Liturgy, thus concluding what Fr. Seraphim later called “three very spiritual days” at the monastery.<sup>[11](#)</sup> In the afternoon Fr. Seraphim went with Fr. Alexey to Etna in order to serve Liturgies



with him and teach him how to liturgize. “Fr. Seraphim helped me for several days running,” Fr. Alexey recalls. “Always he was so patient and loving. He never corrected me during services or in front of others, but made mental notes and discussed these with me afterwards.

“He also tried to train our little ‘choir’—my Matushka and Barbara Murray!—and they really struggled along, pretty much bungling the chant. After one such Liturgy they apologized to him for being such slow learners, and his response was wonderful: ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘I’m sure your singing was pleasing to the angels!’ He was quite a man, a real father to me in many ways.”<sup>12</sup>

“Bishop Nektary was also always very encouraging to us. One time, just weeks after I had been ordained, he came through Etna with the Kursk Icon. Placing it in our chapel he asked that I serve a Moleben before it. Now the fact was, I hadn’t actually served a Moleben yet (although I had of course seen them served many times)! I admitted this to him and he conveyed to me in broken English that I would do just fine. So I served, being very self-conscious and feeling very inadequate and stupid. At the end of the Moleben he said (his driver translated), ‘You did that as though you had been a priest for ten years!’ Of course I knew this was not true, but I was so ‘encouraged’ that he had even thought to say such a kind thing!”<sup>13</sup>

Within a few years after his ordination, Fr. Alexey’s community in Etna had grown to five families. Fr. Seraphim was with him in the summer of 1981, when he baptized seven people in his small chapel. According to the original plan, Fr. Alexey served not only the Etna mission but also the Medford mission, to which he was geographically closer than were the Platina fathers.

As is clear from his letters and Chronicle entries, Fr. Seraphim was very pleased with the missions that had been begun, seeing them as another fruit of the apostolic vision of his preceptor, Archbishop John. “Although all our labors in the northern California-Oregon mission field seem small,” he wrote, “every little fruit is dear.... In everything that happens, God is obviously showing His mercy and Providence towards our humble missionary efforts.... Thank God for



the spirit which Blessed Archbishop John has given to our missions here!”<sup>14</sup>

**W**ITH the beginning of its mission phase, the Brotherhood undertook yet another venture. With the blessing of Archbishop Anthony, in 1977 the fathers offered the first in a series of “St. Herman Summer Pilgrimages” at the monastery. The pilgrimages occurred every year around the day of St. Herman’s canonization in August. Vigils were held, Divine Liturgies were served, and the entire cycle of Orthodox services was celebrated in English. Lectures were given by Fr. Seraphim, Fr. Herman, Fr. Alexey Young, and other invited speakers: hierarchs, clergy, and laymen. In 1978 Fr. Seraphim gave a talk on “Contemporary Signs of the End of the World,” and in 1979 on “Orthodox Christians facing the 1980s.” Both of these talks were later presented in condensed form in the pages of *The Orthodox Word*.<sup>15</sup>

Writing about the first pilgrimage in 1977, Fr. Seraphim outlined the purpose behind this and all subsequent pilgrimages: “The aim of the pilgrimage was to provide an opportunity for basic Orthodox education and inspiration in the context of a pilgrimage to an Orthodox monastery. Away from the distracting and worldly influences of modern city life, the pilgrims were able to go deeper into their own Orthodox Faith and became more aware of the riches it contains for their own and others’ salvation... The aim was not a ‘conference’ of academic lectures (which, of course, can also have its place in Orthodox life), but a learning experience on a simpler level, stemming not only from the formal talks, but also from the daily cycle of Church services and the labors in which many pilgrims shared.”<sup>16</sup>

Fr. Seraphim placed much hope and value on the pilgrimages. A few months before the pilgrimage in 1979, he wrote to Fr. Herman:<sup>[c]</sup> “I think most of all about our Summer Pilgrimage, which could be a magnificent opportunity for ‘Orthodox enlightenment’ such as is not being given very much nowadays... I have the impression that a heavy ‘church’ atmosphere is hanging over everything and stifling a much needed freshness, and we could be helping to

give this freshness. Perhaps when we're dead they'll even recognize our labors — but at least we have to help those we can.”<sup>17</sup>

Some pilgrims came from as far away as Australia, Japan, Canada, and the East Coast. Each year the number of people tended to increase, reaching, from 60 in the summer of 1978, to nearly 200 in 1981. Since the monastery had very limited accommodations, many of the pilgrims stayed overnight in the forest in sleeping bags, the men within the monastery itself, and the women outside the gate near the small monastery guesthouse. They were not asked to pay any money, but only to “bring sleeping bags and flashlights, and to help out as needed.”

The pilgrimages were a happy and peaceful time for all who came and adapted themselves to the rugged atmosphere. People could shake the dust of the world off themselves and get to know others of like mind. “The daily cycle of Church services, celebrated mostly in English, helped to set a pious and sober tone,” Fr. Seraphim wrote.<sup>18</sup> Each pilgrimage “was oriented towards helping the pilgrims lead a serious and conscientious Orthodox spiritual life, centered around devout preparation for and reception of Holy Communion, and it was very noticeable that the pilgrims approached the services and talks very seriously.”<sup>19</sup>

Fr. Seraphim was especially pleased to see people come away from the pilgrimages with a greater understanding of the heart of their Faith, beyond the externals, and of the Patristic worldview that can and should influence every aspect of life. Thus, after the 1979 Pilgrimage, he recorded: “Many facts were given and absorbed (I myself learned a great deal!), but mainly, the attitude we want to get across does seem to be coming through: an Orthodoxy more of the heart than of the head... There were some heated discussions between lectures on missionary questions, and I tried to instill some sobriety by a talk on ‘head vs. heart,’ the mistakes of over-zealousness, and the like. I think everyone left with at least the beginning of an awareness that the externals are not the reality.”<sup>20</sup> Three years later, after the pilgrimage in 1982, he wrote: “The Orthodox

worldview we are propagating is beginning to sink in.”<sup>21</sup>

One of the most precious things about these gatherings was the opportunity that they provided for the pilgrims, most of them American converts, to be in contact with rare “living links” to Holy Russia. Both Bishop Nektary and Fr. Spyridon came every year, until their failing health no longer permitted. By just being in the presence of these men and hearing them speak, the pilgrims could acquire something of the living transmission of ancient Orthodox wisdom and piety.

At the 1979 Pilgrimage Bishop Nektary, with Fr. Seraphim translating his words into English, told the people of a New Confessor of Optina he had known: the righteous Hieromonk Nikon.<sup>[d]</sup> At one point he shared with them a letter which Fr. Nikon had sent to his (Bishop Nektary’s) mother from a concentration camp. Having been mocked, spat upon, and shaved by the Soviet “liquidation committee” that had come to Optina, Fr. Nikon now lay in the camp dying of tuberculosis; and yet in his letter he wrote: “There is no limit to my happiness...*Rejoice ye and leap for joy, for your reward is great in heaven* [Luke 6:23]. I believe my Lord that these words apply to me also, and therefore I await with impatience that happy moment when I will be dissolved from this corruptible body and will be united with my Lord.”

“When my mother read us this letter,” Bishop Nektary recalled to the pilgrims, “we children sat and wept as we listened.”<sup>22</sup>

In 1978 Fr. Spyridon gave a talk entitled “The Life’s Path of Archbishop John.” Fr. Spyridon would be truly in his element during these pilgrimages. At the culmination of the feast of St. Herman, when there would be a triumphal Liturgy and procession through the woods, with acolytes carrying banners and everyone singing, he would be beaming like a little child.



Fr. Seraphim translating into English a talk by Bishop Nektary at the 1980 St. Herman Summer Pilgrimage.



Newly baptized Orthodox Christians and other pilgrims at the 1980 Summer Pilgrimage. Clergy in front row, left to right: Deacon Vladimir Anderson, Fr. Spyridon, Fr. Seraphim. *Photograph courtesy of Fr. Lawrence Williams.*





Fr. Seraphim translating Archbishop Anthony's talk at the 1980 St. Herman Summer Pilgrimage. In the front row, left to right: Fr. Spyridon, Fr. Herman, Fr. Roman Lukianov. *Photograph by Fr. Lawrence Williams.*

Archbishop Anthony also came to several of the pilgrimages and offered his support to the monastery's missionary endeavors. At the 1980 Pilgrimage, he ordained Vladimir Anderson a deacon for the mission in Willits, which had been dedicated to St. John the Almsgiver. As Fr. Seraphim recorded, at the same pilgrimage the Archbishop gave a talk in which he "identified the pilgrimage as being in the spirit of the missionary labors of the late Archbishop Vitaly<sup>[e]</sup> at Pochaev Lavra in Western Russia before the First World War. There this fervent missionary would give inspired talks outdoors to the great crowds who came to the monastery to venerate the relics of St. Job and the wonderworking Pochaev Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos, arousing them to fervent piety and firm

defense of the Orthodox Faith. These talks would alternate with Church services, the singing of Akathists, and the showing of slides of Orthodox places against the wall of the church late at night. The fervor inspired by these Pochaev pilgrimages changed lives and gave new life to the Orthodox Christians of Western Russia. The St. Herman Pilgrimage, on a much humbler scale, does indeed try to follow the example of Archbishop Vitaly.”<sup>23</sup>



Fr. Herman, Fr. Seraphim, and Fr. Spyridon at the graduation exercises of the “New Valaam Theological Academy” on August 16, 1980. Fr. Spyridon is handing out a diploma which was printed at the monastery.

In 1981, hierarchs from other parts of the country came to participate in the pilgrimage. “Since the 1981 Pilgrimage overlapped the Russian Youth Conference in San Francisco,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “Bishop Alypy of Cleveland replaced the local bishops at the opening of the pilgrimage, taking also an active part in the discussions following the lectures. Later in the week Archbishop Laurus of Jordanville also visited the pilgrimage.”<sup>24</sup>

After the pilgrimages, the week-long “New Valaam Theological Academy” would begin, concluding with Fr. Herman’s memorable “graduation exercises.”

As many as sixty people stayed throughout the week. Besides the usual courses on Orthodox theology, Church history, and Church music, Fr. Seraphim offered courses on the Orthodox interpretation of prophetic books of Scripture: in 1979 a course on the book of Daniel, in 1980 a course on the book of Apocalypse (Revelation), and in 1981 and 1982 his course on Genesis.<sup>[f]</sup>

Describing the pilgrimages in *The Orthodox Word*, Fr. Seraphim concluded: “The pilgrims departed with a new awareness of the vast difference between true Orthodox Christianity and the spirit of the contemporary world, and with a new resolve to offer the struggle necessary to preserve oneself as Orthodox in these difficult times... They brought back fond memories of these days in the California mountains far from the distractions of today’s cities, and many seeds were sown for further labors in Christ’s vineyard.”<sup>25</sup>

**T**HE summer pilgrimages also came to be connected with baptisms, since now the fathers not only could evangelize American God-seekers but could also bring them into the Church sacramentally. Even without the fathers taking special pains to lead them to the baptismal waters, regular American people seemed to come out of nowhere, having been led to Orthodoxy through unexpected, providential means.

The first person they baptized was a bank teller from Redding. This man learned about the monastery at his job, when one of the Brotherhood’s checks happened to pass through his hands. This evoked enough interest in him to visit the monastery and see what it was like; and within a year he was a newly illumined Orthodox Christian.

Another case occurred in the Philosophy/Religion section of B. Dalton’s Bookstore in Redding. Fr. Herman happened to be standing there one day, checking if any of his books had been sold, and being disappointed to see that they had not. Suddenly he felt a tap on his shoulder and heard a voice exclaim, “WHO ARE YOU?!” Turning around, he saw a young man looking at him earnestly from under a large crop of hair. Fr. Herman smiled and exclaimed

back, “I’m an Orthodox monk — and a priest at that!”

“WOW!!” the young man cried. He was further surprised to learn that Fr. Herman lived at a monastery near Platina, since he himself, as a young boy, used to go vacationing with his family at a campground in the gorge right below the monastery. It turned out that this young man was currently a minister in a Protestant organization called “The Open Door,” and as part of his ministry he played in a “Christian rock band.” Earlier he had been a member of a new group called “The Evangelical Orthodox Church,” which, at that point in its history, had not had much contact with traditional Orthodoxy. Thus, upon seeing Fr. Herman in the Philosophy/Religion section, he had not been sure what he was: a Christian, a rabbi, a Buddhist? Discovering that he was an Orthodox Christian, he wanted to learn all about what this meant. This very sociable young man went on to tell others, and soon thereafter he was baptized by Fr. Seraphim together with seven of his friends. The baptisms took place during the 1980 Pilgrimage, in a clear mountain stream. Dressed in robes of white, the newly illumined people — men, women, and children — held candles and sang hymns with the assembled pilgrims amidst the tranquil nature.



Fr. Seraphim baptizing American converts in Hayfork Creek on August 14, 1980, during the St.



Herman Summer Pilgrimage.



The newly illumined Orthodox Christians.  
*Photographs courtesy of Fr. Lawrence Williams.*



Above and below: Fr. Seraphim baptizing ten-year-old Martinian Prince in Beegum Gorge at the beginning of the 1982 Summer Pilgrimage, less than a month before Fr. Seraphim's repose.



During Fr. Seraphim's five years of priesthood, he and Fr. Herman baptized over a hundred people in such mountain streams.

**M**EANWHILE, out of the growing Surety of Sinners mission in Redding, other activities were being born. In January of 1979, the Brotherhood sponsored a Women's Conference at Valentina's home. On Saturday night a Vigil was held in the mission chapel, and then on Sunday Fr. Seraphim served Liturgy. "About thirty people are present," Fr. Seraphim recorded in his Chronicle, "and almost all receive Communion. Fr. Seraphim gives a talk on How to Read the Signs of the Times; all listened with great interest. The conference is a great success; very prayerful atmosphere."<sup>26</sup>

In the years that followed, the fathers went on to hold "St. Herman Winter Pilgrimages" in Redding. They rented a large meeting hall, and many more people came from beyond the local area. At the 1982 Winter Pilgrimage, which occurred right before the beginning of Great Lent, Fr. Seraphim gave a series of

lectures on the meaning of Lent and how to draw maximum spiritual benefit from it. This was to be Fr. Seraphim's last pilgrimage in Redding. One day during it, when Fr. Herman had been away the previous night to take care of the monastery, Fr. Herman asked a participant how things were going. "Very good," replied the pilgrim. "The people are eager to learn about Orthodoxy and are really absorbing the lectures."

"And how is Fr. Seraphim?"

"He's as happy as a clam."

For Fr. Seraphim, it was such a consolation to be able to transmit Orthodoxy to spiritually thirsty people that it mattered not how many were there or how "intelligent" they were. His concern was not to create "experts" in Orthodoxy. He was less concerned about what people's minds did with what he taught as about what their hearts did with it. Thus, although his own mind could grasp things faster than just about anyone else's, he was exceedingly patient with "slow learners" who yet struggled to understand.



Participants of the Women's Conference in Redding, California, 1979, in front of the Surety of Sinners Chapel.





Fr. Seraphim lecturing at the Women's Conference.



Fr. Seraphim lecturing at the 1981 Winter Pilgrimage in Redding.

One of his great joys as a missionary was the Bible studies he would conduct every month after the Sunday Liturgies in Redding. The idea of having these studies had arisen at the Women's Conference, and they were instituted at Valentina's home a month later. As Fr. Seraphim opened up to the people the

Patristic approach to and understanding of the Holy Scriptures, it made his heart glad to see them taking great interest and asking many questions.<sup>[27](#)</sup>

**B**Y 1979 the fathers' lives had become so filled with pilgrims, missionary travel, and the need to give spiritual talks that one wonders how they found time for anything else. One becomes tired just reading Fr. Seraphim's Chronicle entries from this period.

All of Fr. Seraphim's treks in the world, all his efforts to meet pastoral needs during his final years, were of benefit not only to his flock, but also to himself. As he was giving of himself to others in this way, his soul was maturing, becoming ripe to be plucked for the Kingdom of Heaven.

"How fortunate we are," Fr. Seraphim would say to his monastic co-laborer, "and how little time we have to share this fortune with others!"



Fr. Seraphim speaking outside the monastery refectory with Br. Eugene, the cell attendant of Archbishop Tikhon and Bishop Nektary.

## *Pastoral Guidance*

*Suffering is an indication of another Kingdom which we look to. If being Christian meant being “happy” in this life, we wouldn’t need the Kingdom of Heaven.*

—Fr. Seraphim<sup>1</sup>

*Orthodoxy can’t be comfortable unless it is fake.*

—Fr. Seraphim<sup>2</sup>

**W**HY do there seem to be so few miracles in our days? It is because, believed Fr. Seraphim, there is so little *pain of heart*.

In a little handwritten note, hidden away and discovered many years after his death, Fr. Seraphim crystallized into a few words the essence of a great truth for our times:

*“Pain of heart is the condition for spiritual growth and the manifestation of God’s power. Healings, etc., occur to those in desperation, hearts pained but still trusting and hoping in God’s help. This is when God acts. The absence of miracles today (almost) indicates lack of this pain of heart in man and even most Orthodox Christians — bound up with the ‘growing cold’ of hearts in the last times.”*

A proof of this statement can be seen in Fr. Seraphim’s own experience, out of which it of course came. Had it not been Eugene’s plea before that postcard rack in San Francisco, coming from deep pain of heart, and Gleb’s similar plea before the grave of St. Herman, that had led to the miracle of their meeting and

all that they were subsequently able to achieve? All the miracles that Fr. Seraphim had witnessed in his own life, including those of the greatest miracle-worker Archbishop John, had resulted from the prayers of hearts which did not shrink from the pain of Golgotha.

When Fr. Seraphim was called upon to be a guide of souls, he would frequently remind his spiritual children not to despair in the midst of suffering, but, in the words of St. Mark the Ascetic, to “endure pain of heart in the spirit of devotion.”<sup>[a]</sup> Most of these counsels remain only in the minds and hearts of his spiritual children, but some have been preserved in writing: in the pastoral letters which Fr. Herman gave him the obedience of saving in carbon copies.

In 1973, after Vladimir and Sylvia Anderson’s daughter Maggie died and was buried on Noble Ridge, Fr. Seraphim wrote these words to Sylvia:

The aching thoughts of Maggie are natural — but that’s the side that belongs to earth. Her soul is with God, and the trial which you underwent with her was God’s visitation to you, and the proof that in everything that has been happening there is something deeper than human logic and feelings can fathom.

Some people seem to have an “easy” and uncomplicated path in life — or so it seems from outside; while for others like you everything seems complicated and difficult. Don’t let that bother you. Actually, from the spiritual point of view, those who really have an “easy” time are probably in danger!—precisely because without the element *of suffering through* whatever God sends, there is no spiritual profit or advancement. God knows each of us better than we know ourselves, and He sends what is needful for us, whatever we may think!

Maggie’s grave is a source of great joy for us. On the Tuesday after Pascha week, when the dead are commemorated again for the first time, we went there and sang, mingling the funeral hymns with Paschal hymns, then breaking and eating eggs, symbols of the Resurrection, over the grave.



Truly, the living and the dead are one in Christ, and it's only our blindness that makes us sometimes forget it!<sup>3</sup>

A few years later, in a letter to a spiritual son who was suffering over his experience of politics in the Church, Fr. Seraphim wrote:

About your trials: most of them are natural parts of life, and God allows several of them to pile up because you are capable of bearing them. The numbness, which comes chiefly from exposure to politics in a sacred place where they do not belong, will pass. You must learn to suffer and bear — but do not view this as something “endless and dreary,” here you are wrong: God sends many consolations, and you will know them again. You must learn to find joy in the midst of increasing doses of sorrow; thus you can save your soul and help others.<sup>4</sup>

To a man in England who was facing similar difficulties, Fr. Seraphim had these words of counsel:

About you personally, of course, I can't give any definitive answer. However, I do know that in spiritual life it is often precisely in seemingly “impossible” conditions that one really begins to grow; then one *has* to become more sensitive, think less of getting one's own will and ask what is *God's* will, learn to see a little deeper into the reality around one — and all this through suffering, both one's own and that of others.<sup>5</sup>

Fr. Seraphim had similar things to say to a young man who was experiencing loneliness in the world while at the same time yearning to serve God as a priest:

Fr. Dimitry Dudko has an answer for the new convert leading a lonely life in the world (I think we read this at trapeza after you left): Enter as much as possible into the Church's spirit and way of thought and life... Your

loneliness, while difficult to bear, is good, because only out of suffering comes spiritual growth; it will pass as you get more and more into the Church spirit through continually nourishing yourself with it. Daily reading, even if little, is very important in this struggle.

About the priesthood: treasure the idea for now in your heart. The more experience you have in life, and in suffering (I know you don't like that word — but even if you don't go out and seek suffering, at least be prepared to accept what little God allows you, and accept it gladly)—the better prepared you will be for priesthood.<sup>6</sup>

To a young priest Fr. Seraphim wrote:

Do not be depressed that there are people rising up against you in your parish. If everyone loved you, then I would say there is some trouble there, because you are probably catering too much to people when giving pastoral advice. Christ was also hated, and was crucified. Why should we expect everyone to suddenly love us, if we are following in the steps of Christ? Just be careful that your pastoral conscience is pure, and fear not hatred from others, but hatred within yourself.<sup>7</sup>

Fr. Seraphim did not reserve his counsels on suffering for those who happened to be experiencing it. In 1979 he received a letter from a young man who was preparing for baptism and was already on fire with Orthodox zeal. This young catechumen had read a book of homilies by St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Sin of Adam and Our Redemption*, which the Brotherhood had just printed and which Fr. Seraphim had sent to him. “Toward the end of the book,” the man wrote, “I found I was underlining nearly every sentence, and often tears would come to my eyes; but such tears are the very ones which we entreat the Mother of God to send us in our morning prayers. Such tears have a cleansing effect upon the soul.” This man was dreaming of gradually forming a small, semi-monastic community in the city, and expressed hopes that his

present roommate, a former “street person” of Jewish background, would become an Orthodox Christian. His friend D., however, warned him against being carried away by such dreams.

Here is what Fr. Seraphim wrote to the young catechumen:

D. is right — don’t be too taken up by “fantasies.” But don’t entirely squash them, either — without dreams, we can’t live! May God grant your Reuben the grace to be baptized and find his place to be a fruitful Orthodox Christian....

May God grant you to continue with such freshness towards Orthodoxy as you felt with reading St. Symeon’s Homilies! Be aware, however, that this will be possible only with sufferings; everything you need to deepen your faith will come with suffering — if you accept it with humility and submission to God’s will. It is not too difficult to become “exalted” by the richness and depth of our Orthodox Faith; but to temper this exaltation with humility and sobriety (which come through the right acceptance of sufferings) is not an easy thing. In so many of our Orthodox people today (especially converts) one can see a frightful thing: much talk about the exalted truths and experiences of true Orthodoxy, but mixed with pride and a sense of one’s own importance for being “in” on something which most people don’t see (from this comes also the criticism against which you’ve already been warned). May God keep your heart soft and filled with love for Christ and your fellow man. If you will be able to have a spiritual father with whom you can confide the feelings of your heart, and can trust his judgment, all this will be easier for you — but if it’s pleasing to God for you to have such a spiritual father, it will come “naturally,” as all things do in spiritual life — with time, patience, suffering, and coming better to know yourself.<sup>8</sup>

In another place Fr. Seraphim wrote: “Indeed, how we all must learn and

relearn that our pretensions and ideas must be tested by reality and forged in suffering.”<sup>9</sup>

Fr. Seraphim was very concerned about those who used the riches of Orthodoxy, not to struggle for righteousness, but precisely as a means to *escape* struggle. He was acquainted with an unwed mother who, out of “religious zeal,” wanted to give up responsibility for her children, putting them in other people’s homes. About her Fr. Seraphim wrote:

If she is relieved of the “problem” of her children, her perdition is almost guaranteed... She is making a bad mistake in thinking that once she is “rid” of her children she can then begin to think about a convent and real “spiritual life” — because if we do not recognize that our spiritual struggle begins *right now* with whatever God has given us (and all the more if we ourselves have gotten into a difficult situation!), we will not begin the “spiritual life” later, either. And so, if she only knew, her salvation could lie in her suffering through the raising of her own children; but if she doesn’t suffer this through, then later when she thinks to be starting real “spiritual life,” she’ll find she has nothing at all, and “spiritual life” which begins after we are rid of present problems is only an abstraction. I think all this is true — but the spiritual benefit of “suffering through” comes only if one voluntarily accepts it.<sup>10</sup>

To the mother herself Fr. Seraphim wrote:

We realize that raising your [children] is very difficult for you. But that is the cross God has given you, and I must tell you frankly that you can scarcely receive your salvation in any other way than by trying your best to raise them up well. Spiritual life begins when things seem absolutely “hopeless” — that is when one learns to turn to God and not to our own feeble efforts and ideas.<sup>11</sup>

**F**OLLOWING the teaching of the Holy Fathers, Fr. Seraphim counseled people not to be quick to calculate and measure their own spiritual state. In 1975 he wrote to an Orthodox convert:

Don't worry too much about how spiritually poor you are — God sees that, but for you it is expected to trust in God and pray to Him as best you can, never to fall into despair, and to struggle according to your strength. If you ever begin to think you are spiritually “well off” — then you can know for sure that you aren't! True spiritual life, even on the most elementary level, is always accompanied by suffering and difficulties. Therefore you should rejoice in all your difficulties and sorrows.<sup>[12](#)</sup>

To another young man, who wanted to leave the Jordanville seminary because he felt he was making no spiritual progress there, Fr. Seraphim wrote:

We understand very well your situation as you describe it in your letter. Of course, what you say is “correct” as far as it goes. But you are allowing yourself to make one basic mistake: you are making *yourself* the judge of your own spiritual state. In your present state of knowledge and experience, you are not *able* to see whether you need an aspirin or an operation — so try to humble yourself a little to the extent of seeing that you don't know what is best for you! But then what is the answer? To find a stricter place? *Not now*—if you do you will probably regret it; it is very doubtful that this will give you the spiritual growth that you need and are looking for. Neither “strictness” nor “freedom” is a guarantee of spiritual growth. Some people under “freedom” become spiritually loose and never grow; but we have also seen those trained under relative “strictness” who have also made no growth, but on the contrary have *thought* that they have grown while actually falling into the diseases of vainglory and pride, believing that their instructor was taking care of these problems for them. Under *both* forms of

life one must walk in fear of God and with discernment.

*Your* answer — if I may be so bold as to tell you — is to be patient, enduring with good hope all the temptations that come your way, and withholding your judgment as to whether you need an aspirin or an operation—*until you have acquired more knowledge and experience*—which is why you went to Jordanville in the first place. Your opinion will be much more sound after several more years of seminary and experience in an Orthodox community. You are too young in Orthodoxy to be evaluating your spiritual growth — that is actually a sign of your pride. Be patient, endure, observe, learn — and when the time comes there will come ways of testing your real spiritual growth.

In a word, the temptation to leave Jordanville, after committing yourself to the seminary and the life of a novice, seems to come from the devil on the “right side” — to knock you off the path which will give you the best progress, for a seemingly good and plausible reason. Do you remember how today’s Saint, Cyril of White Lake, thought that he would be more spiritually profited by sitting in his quiet cell than by laboring in the noisy kitchen? And that it did not turn out at all as his inexperienced judgment thought it would?<sup>[13](#)</sup> Take that as your example and warning when these thoughts come to you from the “right side.” The “noisy kitchen” can give you much valuable spiritual experience, even if it might not seem to at the time.

The feeling of emptiness, worldly vanity, helplessness against temptations — will pass; but you should accept all this now as your cross, struggling according to your strength, and not being so proud as to think that you should be above them.<sup>[14](#)</sup>

**O**VER the years Fr. Seraphim received letters from Orthodox college students who were disillusioned by the lack of love of Truth in the modern academic world. Like the seminarian of the above letter, sometimes they wanted

to abandon what they had begun. Fr. Seraphim, of course, could well sympathize with them, having once been painfully disillusioned with the modern academic world himself. But as in his other counsels, he encouraged the students to learn and grow from what was placed right in front of them. In general, he would advise that they finish their education, as he himself had done. To one student, who complained that having to study the works of Immanuel Kant and B. F. Skinner was taking its “spiritual toll” on him, Fr. Seraphim wrote:

I hope you will be able to force yourself to finish your courses — you will be surprised how later some of these things which now seem so useless will turn out to have a use after all (even Kant and Skinner!).<sup>[15](#)</sup>

To another college student he sent this guidance:

College life will doubtless give you many temptations. But remember that learning in itself is useful and can be used later in a Christian way. Try to avoid the idle activities and temptations you will meet that serve no useful purpose, so that even in a godless atmosphere you can “redeem the time,” as the Apostle Paul says, and make maximum use of the opportunities you are given for learning.<sup>[16](#)</sup>

Echoing Christ’s words to *take no thought for the morrow* (Matt. 6:34), Fr. Seraphim gave this advice to someone who was wondering what to do *after* he got his college degree:

Perhaps you do not know “what next”?... Get the degree first, and then trust to God to open up the way. The political-economic situation in the U.S., as evidently everywhere in the West, is rapidly deteriorating. Worse, the church situation becomes very bad (your situation is not unique!). In San Francisco suddenly some parishes are becoming empty, as the old priests die and there are *no* young ones to replace them; and it’s doubtful if more

than a few see the cause: that Orthodoxy has too long been “taken for granted,” and it does *not* preserve itself “automatically”! But all of this only prepares us for catacomb times when our opportunities are perhaps greater than ever.

We can’t see the future — but know this, that if you love God and His Orthodox Church and your fellow man — God can and will use you.

Only stay in contact with fellow Orthodox strugglers (they *do* exist).<sup>[17](#)</sup>

**I**N some of Fr. Seraphim’s pastoral letters we also find guidance on the struggle against fleshly sins. To one person he wrote:

About carnal warfare when bodily labors are impossible or difficult, St. Abba Barsanuphius says: “Flee quickly to the Prayer of Jesus, and you will find repose”; “pray ceaselessly, saying, Lord Jesus Christ, deliver me from shameful passions.”<sup>[18](#)</sup> [\[b\]](#)

To another person, who was lamenting over his own weakness and was ashamed to mention sexual falls to a parish priest in confession, Fr. Seraphim exhorted:

Do not be afraid to confess the fleshly sins. Do you think you are so holy? God allows you to fall in order to humble you. Get up and walk in fear and trembling. Struggle against them, but do not despair, no matter what happens. Strength in Orthodox firmness comes very gradually; what you do every day helps build it up; and if you fall, humility and self-awareness build it up.<sup>[19](#)</sup>

And to yet another person:

Your battle with “demonic fornication” is not as unusual as you may think. This passion has become very strong in our evil times — the air is saturated



with it; and the demons take advantage of this to attack you in a very vulnerable spot. Every battle with passions also involves demons, who give almost unnoticeable “suggestions” to trigger the passions and otherwise cooperate in arousing them. But human imagination also enters in here, and it is unwise to distinguish exactly where our passions and imagination leave off and demonic activity begins — you should just continue fighting.

That the demons attack you in dreams is a sign of progress — it means they are retreating, seeing that you are resisting conscious sin. God allows this so that you will continue fighting. Often this demon goes away altogether for a while, and one can have a false sense of security that one is “above” this passion; but all the Holy Fathers warn that one cannot consider this passion conquered before the grave. Continue your struggle and take refuge in humility, seeing what base sins you are capable of and how you are lost without the constant help of God Who calls you to a life above these sins.<sup>[20](#)</sup>

It can be seen from these letters that Fr. Seraphim was gentle and encouraging with those of his spiritual children who were truly struggling with sexual sin. With those who were giving in to such sin and then justifying and rationalizing it, however, Fr. Seraphim took a different approach altogether. In the following letter, to a young man who was leading unwary souls into unnatural sexual sin while thinking to “evangelize” them, Fr. Seraphim did not mince words:

My child, you are deceiving yourself and going the way of perdition. I will not be falsely “kind” and hide this fact from you. You talk about helping others, but you are leading them to perdition... Do you know that by “preaching the Faith” to ——— and then sinning with him, you have inoculated him *against* Christ? And now you think you are going to save ———?

Wake up, my child, if you still can. You have detected a “distance” between us that you do not understand. That is the distance you yourself have placed by choosing your own way and rejecting everyone who has tried to guide you. It is the same “distance” which later on, or even now, you will feel with Vladika Nektary and with all true Orthodox Christians, and then with Holy Orthodoxy itself. You justify yourself to yourself with the argument that you are somehow “special.” Your human problems are too much for you and must be allowed to develop themselves out before you can really choose Christ. No, my child, you are not “special” — a thousand “crazy converts” have already gone that way, and you are joining them.

Forgive my harsh words. I speak them because I really love you and do not wish you to be lost. I do not cease to pray for my erring child... I will gladly suffer with you and for you, but it will do you no good unless you give up your own understanding of how to live.

This last weekend we were visited by a zealous priest from the East Coast. What a deep fellow-feeling between us, based on commitment and zeal and deep suffering — to all of which you will remain a stranger as long as you trust yourself.

May God save you from perdition.

I am praying for the unenlightened ———. Do not deceive him further.<sup>[21](#)</sup>

Fr. Seraphim’s Patristic understanding of the place of sex in the creation, which we have discussed earlier, enabled him to help others put sex in the proper perspective. To one of his spiritual children, who was married and had children, he wrote:

The widespread confusion on this whole issue seems to come from a failure to understand the real Orthodox teaching on sexuality — it is not “holy,”

but neither is it evil. The Lives of Saints alone, without any Patristic treatises, should teach us the Orthodox position: that sexual union, while blessed by the Church and fulfilling a commandment of the Creator, is still a part of man's animal nature and is, in fallen humanity, inevitably *bound up* with sin. This should not shock us if we stop to think that such a necessary thing as eating is *also* almost invariably bound up with sin — who of us is perfectly continent in food and drink, the thorough master of his belly? Sin is not a category of specific acts such that, if we refrain from them, we become “sinless” — but rather a kind of web which ensnares us and from which we can never really get free in this life. The more deeply one lives Orthodoxy, the more sinful he feels himself to be — because he sees more clearly this web with which his life is intertwined; the person, thus, who commits fewer sins feels himself to be more sinful than one who commits more!

The Fathers state specifically, by the way, that Adam and Eve did not have sexual union (nor, of course, eat meat) in Paradise. I believe Thomas Aquinas says that they did — which would accord with the Roman Catholic doctrine of human nature.

All of this should one day be written out and printed, with abundant illustrations from the Holy Fathers and Lives of Saints — together with the whole question of sexuality — abortion, natural and unnatural sins, pornography, homosexuality, etc. With Scriptural and Patristic sources, this could be done carefully and without offensiveness, but clearly....

Enough on this subject; you are correct, by the way, that it is better for such things to be printed by laymen than monks!<sup>[22](#)</sup>

**A**GAIN drawing from the Holy Fathers, Fr. Seraphim counseled his spiritual children not to trust in or get carried away by their imagination, especially in prayer. Fr. Alexey Young recalls how, when he was still a Roman Catholic preparing to become Orthodox, he was given an important lesson by Fr.

Seraphim: “I asked Fr. Seraphim about meditation, which my wife and I, still under the influence of our Roman Catholic background, had made part of our regular routine of morning prayer. We did not yet realize that the Orthodox understanding of meditation is quite different from the Western Christian view. In conversation, Fr. Seraphim explained that the use of imagination in Western spiritual systems of meditation — viz., while saying the Rosary, reciting the Stations of the Cross, or doing the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, etc. —was not compatible with Orthodox spirituality and was forbidden because imagination came into use only after the fall of Adam and Eve; it is one of the lowest functions of the soul and the favorite playground of the devil, who can and does use human imagination in order to deceive and mislead even well-meaning people.”<sup>[23](#)</sup>

In a similar way, Fr. Seraphim warned against placing absolute trust in emotions. Fr. Alexey Young remembers when Fathers Seraphim and Herman visited the chapel in Etna for the first time: “The fathers, seeing how moved we were [by the service], cautioned us not to let our emotions get too caught up by the beauty of the service, explaining to us that emotions, like imagination, are a function of fallen human nature and must therefore be treated with great caution.”<sup>[24](#)</sup>

**I**N 1979, Fr. Seraphim received a letter from a Russian priest who was bewildered and shattered because his spiritual father, the Abbot of a Greek Old Calendarist monastery, had just cut him off in a way that seemed unwarranted and cruel. The Abbot had hired a lawyer to work on a libel case against another Greek Old Calendarist monastery, which he felt was spreading slander about him. When the priest showed his unwillingness to participate in this battle, the Abbot and his monastery completely disowned him, returning every gift he had ever given to them. Fr. Seraphim’s counsel to the priest is valuable for its insights into the unhealthy psychology that underlies much of what presents itself as “traditionalism,” and also for its thoughts on how the spiritual father/son

relationship should be approached in the modern context. Writing to the priest about his former spiritual father, Fr. ———, Fr. Seraphim began:

I received and read your letter with some sadness. (Fr. Herman is presently on a month-long pilgrimage to Mount Athos and won't be back for a week or so.)...

We do not know Fr. ——— well. We began correspondence with him ten or eleven years ago through a friend of ours who met him in southern California... I read his letters with great sympathy, seeing him as someone broken and humbled by his own over-critical approach in earlier years, as well as by the factions and jealousies of the Greek Old Calendarist movement. Fr. Herman, however (who is sharper psychologically) noted that his letters were *too* humble and too complicated, and that he probably wasn't too different from the other Greek factions we already knew about.

Well, all this is the basis of whatever knowledge we have of Fr. ———, and it isn't enough to explain what happened between you. (I imagine that Fr. Herman will not find it too surprising, however.) Apparently, he has some deep personal insecurity about something, and the church situation sets it off. His getting so angry at obviously untrue accusations must be a psychological mechanism for defending himself against the deeper attack he feels against his "weak point," whatever it is. I myself have a feeling that it is all somehow bound up with the great problem of our present-day Orthodoxy (where it tries to be serious and faithful to tradition): too much calculation and not enough heart. We've seen this in Fr. ———, in Dr. ———(especially when he formed his own schism over the iconographic depiction of God the Father), in the priests who follow the "Boston line," in numerous converts; well, why look further — I see it in myself, it's part of the air we breathe in our "enlightened," mind-oriented times. Russian priests seem to be freest of it, and I think there's hope for us converts too, if we suffer enough.

I don't think you need to doubt the genuineness of the good you received from Fr. ———; it's just that now you see his weak side also. God knows if your relationship with him will ever be anything like what it was. Perhaps, indeed, you were “used,” when his calculation overcame his good heart; but perhaps this calculation itself is only the slave of his deeper emotions.

Well, we are all flawed. Perhaps that is the great spiritual fact of our times — that all the teachers are flawed, there are no great elders left, but only “part-time” spiritual teachers who spend part of their time undoing their good works. We should be thankful for the good teaching we can get, but sober and cautious.

The lesson to you is probably: sobriety. Yes, you should trust your heart (I'm sure Fr. Herman will agree with me)—what thing better do we have? Certainly not our calculating mind. I don't think you will be harmed by the trust you gave Fr. ———; the good he did will stay with you, if you stay humble and sober. (If you did give him excessive trust, in the guru-sense, then you are suffering the punishment for it now; but that should pass.) But your own conscience and heart have to speak; totally blind obedience simply isn't possible, especially in our times. In your future relationship with him (if he will allow it), you will just have to keep trusting your heart, I think. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov's constant advice to the Christians of the last times is: there are no elders left, check all teaching against the Gospel (of course, not in the sense of “calculating” to see where the teacher is wrong — but naturally, with the heart and conscience)...

We ourselves try to keep peace with everyone, but don't conceal our opinions when we see someone trying to force narrow personal opinions on the Church... After all, parties come and go, but it is God Who governs His Church. In the meantime, we rejoice whenever we see anyone trying to be fervent in Orthodoxy and minding his own business; that's why Fr. ———'s “political fit” is so sad...

I'm sorry I don't have any real advice for you in your grief, unless it's just one word: yes, trust your heart and conscience, and don't do anything to violate them. If Fr. ——— will let you back in his favor without demanding politics of you, well and good; you will already be wiser and more sober. Probably you will have to wait a while before trying to contact him again, if you then feel you should. If he doesn't change his mind, then apparently you will have to leave him with his own problems, which evidently are great. May God have mercy on us all! Pray for him. A monastic community, because of its close-knit character, can sometimes be a tense place, and the devil attacks it more powerfully than other places.

Meanwhile, don't give up spiritual life just because you have no immediate guide! The Fathers still speak to us through their writings (have you read *Unseen Warfare* recently?), and life itself is a teacher if we try to live humbly and soberly, and once in a while you may get a good word of advice from somewhere. Treasure everything good (it's good to keep a diary of it), and don't grieve at what you don't have!<sup>[25](#)</sup>

**W**E have seen how Fr. Seraphim, having grown in Orthodox Christianity until his Faith was the substance of his entire being, counseled people not to try to prove their Orthodoxy by “bashing” others. To an Orthodox catechumen he wrote:

As you prepare for Baptism, I would give you several words of advice:

1. Don't allow yourself to get stuck on the *outward* aspect of Orthodoxy — whether the splendid Church services (the “high church” to which you were drawn as a child), the outward discipline (fasts, prostrations, etc.), being “correct” according to the canons, etc. All these things are good and helpful, but if one overemphasizes them one will enter into troubles and trials. You are coming to Orthodoxy *to receive Christ*, and this you should never forget.

2. Don't have a hypercritical attitude. By this I don't mean to give up your intellect and discernment, but rather to place them in obedience to a *believing heart* ("heart" meaning not mere "feeling," but something much deeper — the organ that knows God). Some converts, alas, think they are very "smart," and they use Orthodoxy as a means for feeling superior to the non-Orthodox and sometimes even to Orthodox of other jurisdictions. Orthodox theology, of course, is much deeper and makes much better sense than the erroneous theologies of the modern West — but our basic attitude towards it must be one of humility and not pride. Converts who pride themselves on "knowing better" than Catholics and Protestants often end by "knowing better" than their own parish priest, bishop, and finally the Fathers and the whole Church!

3. Remember that your survival as an Orthodox Christian will depend very much on your contact with the *living tradition of Orthodoxy*. This is something you won't get in books and it can't be defined for you. If your attitude is humble and without hypercriticism, if you place Christ first in your heart, and try to lead a normal life according to Orthodox discipline and practice — you will obtain this contact. Alas, most Orthodox jurisdictions today... are losing this contact out of simple worldliness. But there is also a temptation on the "right side" which proceeds from the same hypercriticism I just mentioned. The traditionalist (Old Calendar) Church in Greece today is in chaos because of this, one jurisdiction fighting and anathematizing another over "canonical correctness" and losing sight of the whole tradition over hyper-fine points...

You yourself have had enough experience in life to avoid these temptations, which are actually those of the young and inexperienced; but it is good to keep them in mind.<sup>[26](#)</sup>

A few years before he died, Fr. Seraphim received a letter from an African-American woman who, as a catechumen learning about Orthodoxy, was



struggling to understand the uncharitable attitude that some Orthodox Christians showed to those outside the Church, an attitude which reminded her of how her own people had been treated. “I am deeply troubled,” this woman wrote, “as to how Orthodoxy views what the world would call Western Christians, i.e., Protestants and Roman Catholics. I have read many articles by many Orthodox writers, and a few use words like ‘Papists,’ etc., which I find deeply disturbing and quite offensive. I find them offensive because as a person of a race which has been subjected to much name-calling I despise and do not wish to adopt the habit of name-calling myself. Even ‘heretic’ disturbs me....

“Where do I stand with my friends and relatives? They do not know about Orthodoxy or they do not understand it. Yet they believe in and worship Christ.... Am I to treat my friends and relatives as if they have no God, no Christ?... Or can I call them Christians, but just ones who do not know the true Church?

“When I ask this question, I cannot help but think of St. Innocent of Alaska as he visited the Franciscan monasteries in California. He remained thoroughly Orthodox yet he treated the priests he met there with kindness and charity and not name-calling. This, I hope, is what Orthodoxy says about how one should treat other Christians.”

This woman’s quandary was actually fairly common to people coming into the Orthodox Faith. Now nearing the end of his short life and having thrown off his youthful bitterness, Fr. Seraphim answered as follows:

I was happy to receive your letter — happy not because you are confused about the question that troubles you, but because your attitude reveals that in the truth of Orthodoxy to which you are drawn you wish to find room also for a loving, compassionate attitude to those outside the Orthodox Faith.

I firmly believe that this is indeed what Orthodoxy teaches...

I will set forth briefly what I believe to be the Orthodox attitude

towards non-Orthodox Christians.

1. Orthodoxy is the Church founded by Christ for the salvation of mankind, and therefore we should guard with our life the purity of its teaching and our own faithfulness to it. In the Orthodox Church alone is grace given through the sacraments (most other churches don't even claim to have sacraments in any serious sense). The Orthodox Church alone is the Body of Christ, and if salvation is difficult enough *within* the Orthodox Church, how much more difficult must it be *outside* the Church!

2. However, it is not for us to define the state of those who are outside the Orthodox Church. If God wishes to grant salvation to some who are Christians in the best way they know, but without ever knowing the Orthodox Church — that is up to Him, not us. But when He does this, it is outside the *normal* way that He established for salvation — which is in the Church, as a part of the Body of Christ. I myself can accept the experience of Protestants being 'born-again' in Christ; I have met people who have changed their lives entirely through meeting Christ, and I cannot deny their experience just because they are not Orthodox . I call these people "subjective" or "beginning" Christians. But until they are united to the Orthodox Church they cannot have the *fullness* of Christianity, they cannot be *objectively* Christian as belonging to the Body of Christ and receiving the grace of the sacraments. I think this is why there are so many sects among them — they *begin* the Christian life with a genuine conversion to Christ, but they cannot *continue* the Christian life in the right way until they are united to the Orthodox Church, and they therefore substitute their own opinions and subjective experiences for the Church's teaching and sacraments.

About those Christians who are outside the Orthodox Church, therefore, I would say: they do not yet have the full truth — perhaps it just hasn't been revealed to them yet, or perhaps it is our fault for not living and teaching the Orthodox Faith in a way they can understand. With such

people we cannot be one in the Faith, but there is no reason why we should regard them as totally estranged or as equal to pagans (although we should not be hostile to pagans either — they also haven't yet seen the truth!). It is true that many of the non-Orthodox hymns contain a teaching or at least an emphasis that is wrong — especially the idea that when one is “saved” one does not need to do anything more because Christ has done it all. This idea prevents people from seeing the truth of Orthodoxy which emphasizes the idea of struggling for one's salvation even after Christ has given it to us, as St. Paul says: *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling* [Phil. 2:12]. But almost all of the religious Christmas carols are all right, and they are sung by Orthodox Christians in America (some of them in even the strictest monasteries!).

The word “heretic” (as we say in our article on Fr. Dimitry Dudko)<sup>[\[c\]](#)</sup> is indeed used too frequently nowadays. It has a definite meaning and function, to distinguish new teachings from the Orthodox teaching; but few of the non-Orthodox Christians today are consciously “heretics,” and it really does no good to call them that.

In the end, I think, Fr. Dimitry Dudko's attitude is the correct one: We should view the non-Orthodox as people to whom Orthodoxy has not yet been revealed, as people who are potentially Orthodox (if only we ourselves would give them a better example!). There is no reason why we cannot call them Christians and be on good terms with them, recognize that we have at least our faith in Christ in common, and live in peace especially with our own families. St. Innocent's attitude to the Roman Catholics in California is a good example for us. A harsh, polemical attitude is called for only when the non-Orthodox are trying to take away our flocks or change our teaching...

As for prejudices — these belong to people, not the Church. Orthodoxy does not require you to accept any prejudices or opinions about other races, nations, etc.<sup>[27](#)</sup>

**T**O those people who wrote to the St. Herman Monastery hoping to find God-bearing Elders who could guide them by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, Fr. Seraphim had to inform them that “this kind of guidance is not given to our times — and frankly, we in our weakness and corruption and sins do not deserve it.

“To our times is given a more humble kind of spiritual life, which Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov in his excellent book *The Arena* calls ‘life by counsel’— that is, life according to the commandments of God as learned in the Holy Scripture and Holy Fathers and helped by those who are elder and more experienced. A ‘starets’ can give commands; but a ‘counselor’ gives advice, which you must test in experience.”<sup>[28](#)</sup>

Although, as some of the previous letters indicate, Fr. Seraphim could take a stern tone when he felt someone was in serious spiritual danger, he scrupulously avoided overstepping the bounds of his spiritual authority. One of his spiritual daughters, Agafia Prince, recalls that “he didn’t want to have control over people” and that under his guidance she “felt a wonderful freedom.”<sup>[29](#)</sup> Fr. Vladimir Anderson likewise recalls: “Fr. Seraphim was extremely humble, brilliant though he was... He didn’t come out with guru-type advice. Those who asked him for advice were led more to find the solution to their problems themselves through his gentle guidance rather than to follow declarations or commands.”<sup>[30](#)</sup>

Fr. Alexey Young corroborates these observations: “One of the most striking aspects of Fr. Seraphim’s guidance was, first of all, his utter disinterest in controlling me or anyone else. Unlike some others, he did not play guru or give orders (he had spiritual children, not disciples). I asked for his opinion and he gave it — frankly — but always he left the final decision up to me. This meant that I was bound to make mistakes, but he knew that I would learn from the consequences of those mistakes. Also, whenever he felt the need to criticize something, he always balanced it with something positive, so that one did not

feel somehow destroyed or discouraged about one's work. This is an indication of spiritual health as opposed to the cult-like behavior of those who always think they know better.”<sup>31</sup>



Fr. Seraphim with Fr. Alexey Young at the St. Herman Monastery, early 1982.

Elsewhere Fr. Alexey writes that “Fr. Seraphim... warned against what he called ‘guru-ism,’ which is the temptation to treat certain people in authority as gurus or *startsi* (elders). This danger frightened him very much, for he saw a basic flaw in the American character: a flaw which leads some individuals — whether parish priests or monastics — to claim a spiritual authority that is not truly and authentically theirs because they themselves have not been purified and transformed by repentance, and which leads others to seek out false elders, giving their free will and control over even the most basic details of their lives to

them. Fr. Seraphim repeatedly pointed out that real elders are extremely rare, that we do not deserve such spiritual guides and would not know how to treat them even if we did have them in our midst.”<sup>[32](#)</sup>

**A**s a counselor or spiritual father, Fr. Seraphim relied on his experience in the monastery and on his reading of the Holy Fathers. Most importantly, he drew upon the grace he had acquired through his own “pain of heart endured in the spirit of devotion.” This may not have made him a “God-bearing Elder,” but it did make him able to inspire others to take up their interior crosses, beginning the lifelong *good fight* (I Tim. 6:12) of Christian struggle whose results will be seen by all at the General Resurrection.

## *A Man of the Heart*

*Teach me to feel another's woe  
To hide the fault I see;  
That mercy I to others show,  
That mercy show to me.*

—Alexander Pope<sup>1</sup>

**A**FTER Fr. Seraphim's death, one admirer has aptly described his spiritual development as follows:

"Fr. Seraphim started out as a great thinker, beyond most of the people of his time; but he became *a man of the heart*, whose compassion for the people was profound. This never would have happened without his conversion to faith in Jesus Christ in the Orthodox Church."

As a young, introverted, unhappy philosopher, Fr. Seraphim had begun by trying to *know*, to understand in the highest sense. Seeking this honestly, single-mindedly, even desperately, he attracted God's grace; and thus, while growing in knowledge, he also grew in love toward God and man. We find in *The Way of a Pilgrim* a good explanation of this process:

"By meditation, by the study of God's word, and by noting your experience, you must arouse in your soul a thirst and a longing — or, as some call it, 'wonder'—which brings you an insatiable desire to know things more closely and more fully, to go deeper into their nature.

"One spiritual writer speaks of it in this way: 'Love,' he says, 'usually grows with knowledge, and the greater the depth and extent of the knowledge

the more love there will be, the more easily the heart will soften and lay itself open to the love of God, as it diligently gazes upon the very fullness and beauty of the Divine nature and His unbounded love for men.”<sup>2</sup>

**A** glimpse of how Fr. Seraphim’s heart was thus “softened and laid open to the love of God” has been provided by his spiritual daughter Solomonia. Right after his repose she wrote:

“One of the most dear memories I have of Fr. Seraphim is during the Forgiveness Sunday Vespers Service at the beginning of Great Lent. I think it is most dear because it was a glimpse of him as he stood with his own soul before God. Who can say how each heart breaks in its affliction, in its yearning for God? We don’t see each other at those times; only God knows. But during the Vespers Service of Forgiveness Sunday our hearts say in unison the verse of the Prokimenon:<sup>[a]</sup> ‘Turn not Thy Countenance away from Thy servant, for I am afflicted; quickly hearken unto me. Attend unto my soul and deliver it’ (Psalm 68:17–18). I wish somehow it were possible that I just not write the verse, but that in reading it the reader could hear how it is sung as such a deeply heart-rending plea to God. I can see now as if it were only yesterday: Fr. Seraphim standing in the back of the altar, and — since the special tone was unfamiliar to everyone — it was only his voice that was heard, filled with such a meekness and humble contrition. His voice wasn’t filled with what one would call emotion, but something far deeper — a certain tender feeling — which struck me with wonder. He then very unobtrusively raised his hand to his cheek, and I thought to myself, ‘He’s praying to God for his own soul, and was that a tear that he wiped from his face?’

“I, along with many people, relied on Fr. Seraphim in so many different ways, from small daily circumstances to more important spiritual difficulties, and his kind help was always so much without thought of himself, that I had never stopped to think of the depth of his own soul’s longing for God. As the years went by, each time he served at Vespers on Forgiveness Sunday, I would



wait to hear the precious sound of his voice praying this prayer, and each time I would see him lift his hand almost unnoticeably to wipe the tear from his face.”<sup>3</sup>

**A**NOTHER glimpse of this “man of the heart” comes from Fr. Alexey Young:

“I would like to reveal... a little of what Fr. Seraphim, the priest, the pastor, was.

“The essence of this priest-monk could be found in his sermons, which were always brief, to the point, intended to touch our hearts and ‘humble us down’ (as he liked to say), and show us what Christ expects of us. I remember the first time he came to our Etna Mission to serve Divine Liturgy. For some reason now forgotten, the Liturgy was in the middle of the night. As he turned from the Holy Table to read the Gospel, a candle in one hand illuminating both the Sacred Scriptures and his pale face, I thought to myself: This is what it was like in the catacombs, and this is what it is like in the persecuted underground Church of Russia today! In these sermons we saw a heart as warm and loving as could be found anywhere in this cold world, and a mind uncluttered and penetrating, produced not by this dismal world, but by grace. ‘Only struggle a little more,’ he would urge us. ‘Carry your crosses without complaining; don’t think you’re anything special; don’t justify your sins and weaknesses, but see yourself as you really are; and, especially, love one another.’ The words of Christ. Indeed, Fr. Seraphim showed forth Christ to us in both word and example.”<sup>4</sup>

Fr. Seraphim’s godson Br. Laurence writes that Fr. Seraphim “gave some of the most inspiring sermons ever uttered in the English language. His constant counsel was: ‘Censure yourself. Never excuse yourself. If you must, or think you must, give way to a weakness, then be certain that you recognize it as a weakness, and a sin. But see your own faults and condemn not your brother!’”<sup>5</sup>

The effectiveness of Fr. Seraphim’s short, simple sermons derived not from eloquence, but solely from the fact that they came out of the treasure of his heart

— a treasure he had been granted after a long, continued struggle to draw closer to Jesus Christ. *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh* (Matt. 12:34). In the words of St. Macarius the Great, which Fr. Seraphim entered into his spiritual journal:

“When those who are rich in the Holy Spirit, really having the heavenly wealth and the fellowship of the Spirit in themselves, speak to any the word of truth... it is out of their own wealth and out of their own treasure, which they possess within themselves when they speak, and out of this that they gladden the souls of the hearers of the spiritual discourse... But one who is poor, and does not possess the wealth of Christ in his soul... even if he wishes to speak a word of truth and to gladden some of his hearers, yet not possessing within himself the word of God in power and reality but only repeating from memory and borrowing words from various parts of the book of Scripture, or what he has heard from spiritual men, and relating and teaching this — see, he seems to gladden others... but after he has gone through it, each word goes back to the source from which it was taken, and he himself remains once more naked and poor... For this reason we should seek first from God with pain of heart and in faith, that He would grant us to find this wealth, the true treasure of Christ in our hearts, in the power and effectual working of the Spirit. In this way, first finding in ourselves the Lord to be our profit and salvation and eternal life, we may then profit others also, according to our strength and opportunity, drawing upon Christ, the treasure within.”<sup>6</sup>

**A**s a pastor, Fr. Seraphim was extremely patient in listening to people, and at the same time unusually hesitant in expounding his own teachings. He only said that which was necessary. Often when someone came to him for spiritual counsel, he would be silent for long stretches of time, waiting for the person to ask a question.

In the Life of Elder Joseph of Optina, it is told how a certain monk used to murmur at the Elder because he was so sparing with words and never said

anything without being questioned. “Why is this?” thought the monk. “The Elder is so well-read in Patristic teaching, and is himself so filled with spiritual wisdom, that he could say more — but you have to force him with questions.” Later, however, the Elder explained this matter to him with the words of St. Peter Damascene, who wrote: “One should not say anything profitable without the inquiry of the brethren, in order that good might come through free will, as the Apostle teaches: *Neither as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock* (I Peter 5:3). Without being asked, even the ancient Fathers did not speak of that which served for salvation, considering this to be idle talking.”

Elder Joseph said to another monk, probably because he was troubled by the same thought: “Certain people are displeased with me because I speak little. One need not say much to console an afflicted soul; one must only allow that soul to speak freely without interrupting him — and when he has expressed all his woes, he will have relieved his sorrow by this very thing. All that remains to be done is to offer a few words warmed with love and to clarify any confusion. Afterwards the man will be clearly strengthened in faith, renewed in soul, and once again ready to suffer all things.”<sup>7</sup>

This was Fr. Seraphim’s pastoral approach, and with him it was totally natural. One of the members of the Etna mission, Barbara Murray, recalls:

“Anytime I came to the monastery and had a problem, Fr. Seraphim would take me to the printshop. He would ask me how things were, what the situation was, and I would tell him — and then there would be complete silence. Anyone who went to Fr. Seraphim for counsel knows that this could last a very long time... Then finally he said a few words, consoling me about my situation, and then we went to church...

“I would come to Platina with all kinds of things on my mind that were troubling me. Then when I would go to services it would seem that they weren’t important, that there wasn’t anything wrong anymore.”<sup>8</sup>

Fr. Seraphim was not a clairvoyant *starets* like Elder Joseph of Optina, and

yet the following words, written about Elder Joseph, could apply just as well to Fr. Seraphim: “His brief answers and concise instructions were more powerful and effective than the most detailed and prolonged conversations. He could say in two or three words enough to make everything immediately clear and comprehensible. The most persuasive arguments of self-love and haughty self-justification crumbled to pieces at one word from him.”<sup>9</sup>



Fathers Seraphim and Herman at the St. Herman Monastery, winter, 1978.

In connection with this last statement, we will quote a profitable tale told by a pilgrim who first came to the monastery a year before Fr. Seraphim reposed:

“I’ll never forget one time when I went to confession to Fr. Seraphim. I was a new convert to Orthodoxy then and very full of myself. I thought I was making tremendous progress in my spiritual life. When Fr. Seraphim asked me what I had to confess, I mentioned a few sins that I thought were ‘minor,’ and then I tried to justify myself even in these, bringing out some of my ‘virtues’ to counterbalance the sins. My unspoken attitude was: Sure, I’m a sinner, but so is everyone else, and I’m not such a bad guy — in fact better than most people.

“After I had finished my ‘confession,’ Fr. Seraphim asked, ‘Is that all?’

‘Yes,’ I replied. ‘Oh, my brother,’ he sighed. At this I thought, Hey, I must be pretty good — he calls me his brother! But then he continued: ‘*You have a long way to go.*’

“These few words struck me to the core, more than any homily or stern rebuke could have done. In the years that were to follow, through all my falls, I had to bear painful witness to how true those words were. And now, whenever I start to think much of myself, when I want to sit back and ‘enjoy spiritual life,’ I’m always reminded involuntarily of what he told me: ‘Oh, my brother — you have a long way to go.’ It was both an unforgettable lesson in humility and an encouragement to keep struggling.”

Several of Fr. Seraphim’s spiritual children attest that they benefitted spiritually from just being in his presence, being blessed by his silences as well as by his words. “Fr. Seraphim had a deep center of calm within him,” Fr. Vladimir Anderson says, “as if he was always close with God... He was the most supremely real person I’ve ever known.”<sup>10</sup> Fr. Alexey Young likewise remembers: “Fr. Seraphim was very, very quiet, not given to sudden movements or loud talk; there was a kind of ‘pool of stillness’ around him, and when you entered into that ‘pool,’ the stillness came into your own heart and you partook of this grace. Things that had seemed terribly important no longer seemed so.”<sup>11</sup>

**F**ATHER Alexey recalls three simple principles of life that he learned from Fr. Seraphim. “I learned them,” he says, “not so much from Fr. Seraphim’s books as from what he told me in different conversations over the years.

“The first of these principles is: ‘We are pilgrims on this earth and there is nothing permanent for us here.’ We must constantly remind ourselves of that. We are just sojourners. This life is but the beginning of a continuum that will never end. We tend to treat it as though it’s permanent and awfully important in terms of careers and education and getting ahead and all those things. But all of that will die with us when the body dies; none of it will go with us into the next world.

“Fr. Seraphim wanted to teach us principles that would stand us in good stead throughout life and sustain us in new and different situations, circumstances, and problems. Therefore, if you went to him with a question about a particular matter, he might or might not address that specific problem, but he would give a principle by which one could evaluate the problem oneself and come to a reasonably sober and reliable conclusion. This is what was behind his reminding us that we’re pilgrims on this earth. This is *a principle, a premise*. Let us consider all the problems that we’ve encountered in the last week or month, all the things in our private lives that seem very important and get us riled up, upset, worried, or threatened; and then let us think about how, if we had reminded ourselves that we’re just pilgrims here and that most of our ‘issues’ are very unimportant, what a difference that would have made in the quality of our day, our week, our life.



Fr. Seraphim walking through the monastery.

“A second principle Fr. Seraphim taught me was that our Orthodox Faith is not an academic ‘thing.’ This might seem odd to say because we have scores of volumes of the Holy Fathers and the Divine services of the Church, and also of

the Lives of the Saints — there's so much. Of course, there is an academic level to all of this — but that's not the point. Fr. Seraphim wrote to me once: 'Don't let anyone ever take your books away from you. But don't mistake the reading of books for the real thing, which is the *living* of Orthodoxy.'... 'Orthodoxy,' he told me, 'is not so much a matter of the head. It's something living, and it's of the heart.'

"Once, when we were walking somewhere on the monastery grounds, I asked him, 'Fr. Seraphim, what's your favorite icon of the Mother of God?' (That's the kind of question converts like to ask, you know.) He stopped and said, 'I don't have one.' 'That's impossible!' I said. 'Everyone has a favorite icon of the Mother of God. Which one is yours?' He paused again and looked at me, actually with astonishment, and he said, 'Don't you understand? It's the whole thing.' That was a very profound answer: you can't just pick out one thing and say this is the best thing, or this is my favorite. It truly *is* everything!

"On occasions like this, Fr. Seraphim was able to remind me over and over again that Orthodoxy is to be lived, not just read, studied, or written about...

"A third principle was probably the most important of all. Fr. Seraphim told me, 'If you do not find Christ in this life, you will not find Him in the next.' For a Westerner, this is an astonishing statement. What does this mean, practically? He wasn't talking about mystical experiences or having visions or something of that nature. Anyone who knows Fr. Seraphim realizes he would have stayed far away from that kind of talk.

"What he meant by 'finding Christ in this life' is this: that one must first keep one's focus on Christ all the time, day in and day out. This is not just to have a routine of prayer, not just to tip one's hat to the icons as one goes out the door. Rather, it's to bring to mind Christ all day long in every circumstance, in every opportunity — to raise one's heart and mind to Him.

"Fr. Seraphim used to say to me, quoting from the New Testament: *God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him...Perfect love casts out fear* (I John 4:16, 18). You see, I was a fearful person, so he would say



things like that. And then he would explain, ‘Well, we can’t have perfect love for God or anyone because we’re imperfect. God’s love is perfect. But if we dwell in love and God is love, then God is dwelling in us. And that is one of the ways by which we become closer and closer to Christ in this world.’ And this is how we become less fearful of life and other people, of challenges and difficulties.

“Other verses he liked to quote were *Little children, it is the last time* (I John 2:18), and *Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom* (Luke 12:32). In subsequent years I remembered Fr. Seraphim repeating such verses to me; and they came back to me in times of fear and distress. These verses were a particular comfort and consolation to me at the time of my Matushka’s sudden repose, which occurred several years after Fr. Seraphim left this world. But, of course, the greatest comfort of all at the time of her death was that I knew she was now with him.

“In conclusion, I would like to say, with utmost conviction, that Fr. Seraphim did find Christ in this life. You can’t give what you don’t have, and he had so much to give. By this we can know that Christ truly dwelled within him.”<sup>[12](#)</sup>

ONE of Fr. Alexey’s parishioners, the aforementioned Barbara Murray, also remembers a lesson she learned from Fr. Seraphim’s words and example:

“On March 21, 1975, I drove to Platina in the middle of a snowstorm to visit the fathers. The snow was falling so heavily that I couldn’t see the road, but as the cares I took with me were so heavy, I thought of nothing but reaching the monastery. I left my car at the foot of the mountain and proceeded to walk the rest of the way. It was a tiring climb even in the best weather, and as my clothing became wet under the snowfall I was chilled and fatigued. On my arrival Fr. Seraphim and Fr. Herman greeted me, surprised that I was able to get through the storm, and I quickly settled into the routine of prayer, work, and meals. Soon my heart became calm. As the snow continued to fall, sounds were muted and



the outside world became far away. The concerns I had brought with me also seemed distant, and the longer I stayed and the more the snow fell, my cares became lighter and more bearable.

“By late afternoon three feet of fresh snow had fallen on top of the old snow before the storm stopped. When it was time for me to leave, Fr. Seraphim said he would accompany me down the mountain and dig my car out of the snow if the snowplow had been out clearing the roads. We set out, Fr. Seraphim wearing snowshoes hidden underneath the black fullness of his clothing. He told me to follow in his footsteps, and I was reminded of the page who followed in the footsteps of St. Wenceslaus. As we walked Fr. Seraphim sang various troparia and other hymns, and I joined in. When he found that I didn’t know a particular hymn, he began one that was familiar to me. Sometimes we were just quiet, listening to the sounds we made as we walked. Occasionally he would stop and relate something from the life of a saint or quote from one of the early Church Fathers. He spoke about the importance of not being alone in one’s spiritual struggles. When we are alone we tend to listen to our own counsel, and our perception can get twisted. ‘If you are alone,’ he said, ‘who will pick you up when you fall?’ He was referring, of course, to one’s falling into sin, but later when he fell in the snow and I helped him up, he was quick to point out the lesson.

“When we finally reached my car, it was just as I feared — buried under a wall of snow piled up by the plow. Patiently he dug out the car and pushed it onto the main road. I asked his blessing and drove off, but my heart felt a twinge of guilt as it was by then very dark and cold, and he faced a long walk back up the mountain. (I didn’t know until many years later, when I was allowed to read his Chronicle after his repose, that Fr. Seraphim had already been down the mountain once that day, and he was really very tired.)<sup>[b]</sup>

“This was a very special day, and like so many others it wasn’t so much what Fr. Seraphim said that made such an impression on me; it was just what he was, his presence that represented what it means to live an Orthodox life.”<sup>13</sup>

**W**HEN one has endured great suffering, the stamp of this suffering never leaves one, even though one's outward circumstances and disposition may change entirely. This stamp, if impressed on a heart made soft and supple by love, can give one a "second sight," a special awareness of the pain of others.

So it was with Fr. Seraphim. As a pastor, he knew when to rebuke and when to console, how to instill Christ-like humility in people and at the same time nourish them with hope. His gentle manner, so different from the "tough" tone he often took when defending the truth in print, drew people to him. One could look into his eyes and know he understood one's place of pain — for he had been there, too. One knew that he would have compassion on one's sinfulness, for in his humility he himself felt sinful before the majesty of God. Once, in encouraging one of his spiritual daughters who was feeling depressed and condemned by her own sinfulness, he told her: "If you feel condemned, you will go free."

Although Fr. Seraphim has been called a man of the heart, he never could have been called sentimental or emotional. As Alison would say, "He was too dignified for that." After his death, however, it was only natural that some of his spiritual children would remember him in a sentimental way. The following reminiscences were set down by another of his spiritual daughters, a person whose character was the opposite of his in many respects, yet one for whom he truly cared and showed love, seeing in her a soul that was suffering. Born of a heart grieving over the loss of him, these memories were written to Fr. Herman a year and a half after Fr. Seraphim's repose:

"I have been thinking what I would write to you as far as remembrances of Fr. Seraphim. I have a little notebook which I began keeping while he was in the hospital... I wrote down things I remembered about him from the time I met him and some things that happened in the hospital and after his death... it has been helpful.

"There are so many things that I remember about him. Many of them are

personal and sentimental... his hands uplifted when he was in the altar... the way his voice sounded when he sang... his smile... the way his hands felt so strong when he baptized me... the kiss he gave me that day (my baptism) on the forehead...

“I remember the last time I saw him before his final illness, a beautiful Sunday at Platina, when he talked about the monastery dog, the peacocks, the deer, and the eclipse he had seen. He was very happy that day and laughed a lot. I asked him how he had been and he said, ‘Me? I am in Paradise!’, and he looked around at the monastery as he said it. Forgive me, Father, if these memories are not really spiritual. I wanted to share them with you anyway.

“He always showed me love... even when he called me a stupe and a dunce. Somehow, it never hurt when he said that, even though I know he meant it. It was hopeful, somehow, when he said those things.

“That day at Platina which I mentioned above was a blessing I never deserved. I’m sure you knew that I had been very angry at him and hurt because he told me some things about myself that I didn’t want to hear. I had brooded about it for months, but that day something just made me get up in the morning and drive to Platina. He was as warm and loving as always in spite of the childish and terrible way I had acted. When I got there, I was in my usual ridiculous state. I told him that I felt trapped in a rut and that there was no hope. He was patient as always and told me, ‘We have a way of being jolted out of our ruts.’ Looking back, that was so prophetic. I heard it over and over again while he lay dying. I’m not sure what has happened to me spiritually since his death. In many ways I’ve been worse (in my sins) than ever before and much more hardhearted... but I was truly jolted out of my rut. My life has not been the same since. There has been much confusion and anger because of his death, and yet, he has seemed much closer. And I think I have begun to understand some things. I used to try to do *things* to make him love me and approve of me. After his death I realized that he had loved me all along but I had been blind to it... It is good to talk about him and remember him... I have avoided it for a long time.

“He insisted that I be harder on myself than I was, and yet at the same time he urged me to not be so hard on myself... do you know what I mean? Like in confession once I was going on and on about this sin and that sin and saying how I felt hopeless and how I wanted to die, etc. He said to me, ‘Yes, you are a no-good sinner, but that doesn’t mean that you have to somehow drop out of existence!’ That gave me hope to go on. I guess that is what he gave me most of all... hope.

“He said to me so often to be patient. To do things a little bit at a time according to strength and to always, *always* get up when I fall.

“The first time I made it to Platina he had been ill and was resting in his cell, but he came down when you sent one of the brothers to get him. He always had time for me, for everyone, no matter what his state. He always listened patiently and answered questions.

“One of the things I remember most about him now is something that used to make me jealous! He loved little C—— so much. [C—— was a simplehearted blind girl who went to the Redding parish.] He was so patient with her and she really used to make him laugh with some of the things she would say. He really enjoyed her. Once, at Val’s [Valentina’s] for lunch after services, C—— came out with some remark, and he laughed out loud. You could tell that he loved her. It was nice to hear him laugh like that.

“Sollie [Solomonina] reminded me recently of another instance which shows how patient he was. It was at Val’s way before the church was as it is now. It was during the summer, and the church was absolutely *boiling* hot. Everyone else had gone into the house after services to cool off, but I had wanted to talk to him; and he sat there, in the heat, and listened to my questions. Sollie walked in on us to tell him that lunch was ready, and she commented on the fact that it was so hot and he was sweating! He always sacrificed his physical comfort, didn’t he?

“I remember another Sunday. It is a painful one to remember because I was so horrible. It was Easter Sunday (Western) to make matters worse! I had been at

a friend's house to a party and had been drinking a lot and began to get very depressed. I just wanted to run away so I left the party, but instead of going home, I went to Val's because I knew he would be there. I didn't say anything much... I just cried. He came out of the church (it was in the late afternoon and he was preparing to leave) and came to me in the driveway. I was making a complete fool of myself and just going through my usual drunken hysterics, and he put his hands on my shoulders and just stood there talking to me softly and patiently and, once again, he gave me the strength to get up and go on. I later wrote in my journal that if I could have stopped time, I would have stopped it right there in that driveway. I felt so safe with him there. There is no way I can really describe in words what happened that day. I am only reminded of the Scriptures where Christ heals the possessed boy who would throw himself onto the ground and into the fire.

“Finally, I remember the last time I saw him alive. It was in the hospital, and I had gone in to see him and had a few moments with him alone. As you know, he cried all the time there. I still wonder, even though he was frightened and in pain, whether he was crying for himself or for us. But this last time I saw him he opened his eyes and looked right at me. I had wondered, before, if he knew whom he was seeing. This time I was sure he was aware. In spite of his pain and all the tubes and machines, he smiled. I'll never forget that moment.

“In writing these things, I can't help but be disgusted with myself. How can I continue to be the same awful sinner I always have been when I've been given so many wonderful memories of someone like Fr. Seraphim.”

## *Orthodoxy of the Heart*

*And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.*

—I John 4:21

**A**s Fr. Seraphim developed into a man of the heart, the thrust of his mission developed accordingly. When he had begun his missionary work, he had placed emphasis on upholding true Orthodoxy, on taking a stand against modernism, renovationism, ecumenism. This may have been fine at a beginning stage. As he himself said, “The more one finds out about Christian doctrine and practice, the more one discovers how many ‘mistakes’ one has been making up to now, and one’s natural desire is to be ‘correct.’”<sup>1</sup> But all this is only on the external level, as Fr. Seraphim came to see more clearly as the years went by. He never changed his basic, original philosophy; he was no closer to becoming an ecumenist, modernist, or a New Calendarist at the end of his life than he had been when he had first started printing *The Orthodox Word*. It was just that now, especially after witnessing the bitter fruits of “correctness disease” in the Church, he saw that there was something much more *essential* that he should be preaching in these last times, when “the love of many grows cold.”<sup>[a]</sup>

Above all, Fr. Seraphim became a preacher of *Orthodoxy of the heart*. Besides the resurrection of Holy Russia (of which more will be said later), this was his main theme during the last part of his life.

“True Christianity,” he stated in a lecture, “does not mean just having the right opinions about Christianity — this is not enough to save one’s soul. St.

Tikhon (of Zadonsk) says: 'If someone should say that true faith is the correct holding and confession of correct dogmas, he would be telling the truth, for a believer absolutely needs the Orthodox holding and confession of dogmas. But this knowledge and confession by itself does not make a man a faithful and true Christian. The keeping and confession of Orthodox dogmas is always to be found in true faith in Christ, but the true faith of Christ is not always to be found in the confession of Orthodoxy... The knowledge of correct dogmas is in the mind, and it is often fruitless, arrogant, and proud.... The true faith in Christ is in the heart, and it is fruitful, humble, patient, loving, merciful, compassionate, hungering and thirsting for righteousness; it withdraws from worldly lusts and clings to God alone, strives and seeks always for what is heavenly and eternal, struggles against every sin, and constantly seeks and begs help from God for this.' And he then quotes Blessed Augustine, who teaches: 'The faith of a Christian is with love; faith without love is that of the devil.'<sup>2</sup> St. James in his Epistle tells us that *the demons also believe and tremble* (James 2:19).



Fr. Seraphim in front of the royal doors of the St. Herman Monastery church, 1977.

“St. Tikhon, therefore, gives us a start in understanding what Orthodoxy is: it is something first of all of the *heart*, not just the mind, something *living and warm*, not abstract and cold, something that is learned and practiced in *life*, not just in school.”<sup>3</sup>

To give his fellow Orthodox a deeper sense of heartfelt Christianity, Fr. Seraphim brought up the example of Gospel Outreach, the Protestant group out of which Mary, Solomonia, and others had come. While rejecting Protestant errors just as he had ever done, he was able to go beyond the perspective of his early period of negation, to see beneath the externals to the heart of these



people's strivings.

"These Protestants," he said, "have a simple and warm Christian faith without much of the sectarian narrowness that characterizes many Protestant groups. They don't believe, like some Protestants, that they are 'saved' and don't need to do any more; they believe in the idea of spiritual struggle and training the soul. They force themselves to forgive each other and not to hold grudges. They take in bums and hippies off the streets and have a special farm for rehabilitating them and teaching them a sense of responsibility. In other words, they take Christianity seriously as the most important thing in life; it's not the fullness of Christianity that we Orthodox have, but it's good as far as it goes, and these people are warm, loving people who obviously love Christ. In this way they are an example of what we should be, only more so....

"Some of our Orthodox young people are converted to groups like this, but it works the other way around also — some of these Protestants are being converted to Orthodoxy. And *why not?* If we have the true Christianity, there should be something in our midst that someone who sincerely loves the truth will see and want. We've baptized several people from this Protestant group in our monastery; they are drawn to Orthodoxy by the grace and the sacraments whose presence they feel in Orthodoxy, but which are absent in their group. And once they become Orthodox, they find their Protestant experience, which seemed so real to them at the time, to be quite shallow and superficial. Their leaders give very practical teachings based on the Gospel, but after a while the teachings are exhausted and they repeat themselves. Coming to Orthodoxy, these converts find a wealth of teaching that is inexhaustible and leads them into a depth of Christian experience that is totally beyond even the best of non-Orthodox Christians. We who are already Orthodox have this treasure and this depth right in front of us, and we must use it more fully than we usually do."<sup>4</sup>

Fr. Seraphim spoke along similar lines about those who were converting to Orthodoxy in Africa. Since the 1960s he had followed the Orthodox mission in Africa with great interest, writing and publishing articles about African converts

to Orthodoxy, corresponding with them, and sending them clothes, supplies, Bibles, and *The Orthodox Word*.<sup>5</sup> He was deeply moved by the letters he received from Africa, seeing in them a simple piety and a warm love for Jesus Christ and the Church that he felt could be instructive to over-complicated people of the West. In one talk he said: “During the last fifty years there has been a tremendous movement of conversion of people to Orthodoxy in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and now the Congo and other countries. They often write to us at *The Orthodox Word* the simplest kind of letters, very evangelical, about ‘rejoicing in the Lord,’ quoting Scriptural texts. They are very, very pious and faithful to Orthodoxy. It is just such simple-hearted people that Christ wants, and it is such people who are coming into the Orthodox Church now.”<sup>6</sup>

In another talk Fr. Seraphim spoke more about some of the letters he received: “They are very touching letters from African boys who are converted to Orthodoxy. They have the utmost respect for their bishop. They go to seminary. It is obvious that a very Orthodox feeling is being given to these people in Africa. If simple people are preached the Orthodox Gospel, they respond now in the same way that they have always responded in the past. The problem is, rather, with complicated people.”<sup>7</sup>

**I**N preaching inward Orthodoxy of the heart, Fr. Seraphim warned against being calculating and critical. He identified this as the temptation of following “external wisdom.” “Sometimes,” he said, “one’s zeal for ‘Orthodoxy’ (in quotes) can be so excessive that it produces a situation similar to that which caused an old Russian woman<sup>[b]</sup> to remark about an enthusiastic American convert: ‘Well, he’s certainly *Orthodox*, all right — but is he a Christian?’ To be ‘Orthodox but not Christian’ is a state that has a particular name in Christian language: it means to be a pharisee, to be so bogged down in the letter of the Church’s laws that one loses the spirit that gives them life, the spirit of true Christianity.”<sup>8</sup>

Fr. Seraphim pointed out how we can get carried away with “correctness”

even in small ways: “We can like well-done Byzantine icons (which is a good thing), but we go too far if we are disdainful of the more modern-style icons which are still in many of our churches. The same goes for church singing, architecture, the following of correct rules of fasting, of kneeling in church, etc....<sup>9</sup>

“If you get all excited about having the right kind of icons and begin saying, ‘There’s an icon of the wrong style in our church!’ you have to be very careful, because you’re placing all your emphasis on something external. In fact, if there is a church with nothing but good-style icons, I’m suspicious of it, because maybe [the people there] are just following the fashion. There is a case (one of many) in which a church had old, original Russian icons — some good and some in rather poor taste, painted in a relatively new style — and a zealous person took them all out and put in new, paper icon prints in perfect Byzantine style. And what was the result? The people there lost contact with tradition, with the people who gave them Orthodoxy. They removed the original icons which believers had prayed before for centuries.”<sup>10</sup>

Fr. Herman recalls how, when he and Fr. Seraphim were first honoring the memory of Fr. Gerasim in *The Orthodox Word* in the early 1970s, he had expressed his reservations to his co-laborer. “How can we present Fr. Gerasim as a modern giant of traditional Orthodoxy,” Fr. Herman asked, “when he had those nineteenth-century Western-style icons in his church?”

“Those very icons,” Fr. Seraphim replied, “*prove* that he was in the tradition, because he accepted simply and lovingly what was handed down to him from his righteous fathers in the Faith.”

Fr. Seraphim also observed how we can be following “external wisdom” when we get caught up in exalted ideas: “It is the fashion now to learn about the Jesus Prayer, to read the *Philokalia*, to go ‘back to the Fathers.’ These kinds of things also will not save us — they are external. They may be helpful if they are used rightly, but if they become your passion, the first thing you are after, then they become externals which lead not to Christ, but to Antichrist.”<sup>11</sup>

Fr. Seraphim was one with the nineteenth-century prophet St. Ignatius Brianchaninov in teaching that only those who *feel the Kingdom of God in their own hearts* will be able to recognize the true nature of Antichrist when he comes. By contrast, Fr. Seraphim stated that “the ‘super-Orthodox’ of today can very easily become the prey of Antichrist.” In a few places he told how this might happen: “Vladimir Soloviev, in his ‘Short Story of Antichrist,’ ingeniously suggests that Antichrist, in order to attract Orthodox conservatives, will open a museum of all Christian antiquities. Perhaps the very images of Antichrist himself (Apoc. 13:14) will be in good Byzantine style — this should be a sobering thought for us.

“The Antichrist must be understood as a spiritual phenomenon. Why will everyone in the world want to bow down to him? Obviously, it is because there is something in him which responds to something in us — that something being a lack of Christ in us. If we will bow down to him (God forbid that we do so!), it will be because we will feel an attraction to some kind of external thing, which might even look like Christianity, since ‘Antichrist’ means the one who is ‘in place of Christ’ or looks like Christ.”<sup>[12](#)</sup>

In particular, Fr. Seraphim saw in the unwarranted “Orthodox” attack on Blessed Augustine a sign of the externalism that will lead to acceptance of Antichrist. Augustine’s “overly logical” doctrines, of which Fr. Seraphim himself said he was “no great admirer,” were only the external, intellectual aspect of a man whose *heart was* clearly Orthodox. As Fr. Seraphim wrote in a letter, “The one main lovable and Orthodox thing about him is his Orthodox *feeling, piety, love for Christ*, which comes out so strongly in his non-dogmatic works like his *Confessions* (the Russian Fathers also love the *Soliloquies*). To destroy Augustine, as today’s critics are trying to do, is to help to destroy also this piety and love for Christ... I myself fear the cold hearts of the ‘intellectually correct’ much more than any errors you might find in Augustine. I sense in these cold hearts a preparation for the work of Antichrist (whose imitation of Christ must also extend to ‘correct theology’!); I feel in Augustine the love of

Christ.”<sup>13</sup>

**O**VER and over again, Fr. Seraphim counseled his fellow Orthodox Christians to have love and compassion for the suffering. “There are the daily opportunities for expressing Christian love,” he said: “giving alms, visiting the sick, helping those in need.”

Frequently Fr. Seraphim commented on the danger of making Orthodoxy into a “style” while at the same time overlooking one’s most basic duties as a Christian. In one talk he said: “Do we perhaps boast that we keep the fasts and the Church calendar, have ‘good icons’ and ‘congregational singing,’ that we give to the poor and perhaps tithe to the Church? Do we delight in exalted Patristic teachings and theological discussions without having in our hearts the simplicity of Christ and true compassion for the suffering?—then ours is a ‘spirituality with comfort,’ and we will not have the spiritual fruits that will be exhibited by those without all these ‘comforts’ who deeply suffer and struggle for Christ.”<sup>14</sup>

In 1979, when speaking about Archbishop Andrew (formerly Fr. Adrian) of New Diveyevo, who had reposed the year before, Fr. Seraphim said: “He hated the ‘hothouse’ Christianity of those who ‘enjoy’ being Orthodox but don’t live a life of struggling and deepening their Christianity. We converts can easily fall for this ‘hothouse’ Orthodoxy, too. We can live close to a church, have English services, a good priest, go frequently to church and receive the Sacraments, be in the ‘correct’ jurisdiction — and still be cold, unfeeling, arrogant and proud, as St. Tikhon of Zadonsk has said.”

In the same talk, Fr. Seraphim spoke on how one can try to be “spiritual” while neglecting basic Christian love: “Our spiritual life is not something bookish or that follows formulas. Everything we learn has to become part of our life and something natural to us. We can be reading about hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer, for example, and begin to say it ourselves — and still be blind to our own passions and unresponsive to a person in need right in front of us, not

seeing that this is a test of our Christianity that comes at a more basic level than saying the Jesus Prayer.”<sup>15</sup>

“Wherever you are in your spiritual life,” Fr. Seraphim counseled, “you are to begin right there to take part in the life of the Church, to offer struggles to God, to love each other, to become aware of the people around you, to see that you are responsible for them, for being at least kind and cheerful, trying to do good deeds. You are to be aware of the unhappiness of others, to cheer them up and help them out. All of these things promote the life of grace in the Church.”<sup>16</sup>

**S**UCH was Fr. Seraphim’s counsel on showing Christian love through outward actions — counsel which, as we have seen, he first put into practice himself. But he also spoke about giving love to others in a way that was not shown outwardly, that is, through praying for them. Here again his counsel was born out of his own experience, as he prayed daily for people in the silence of his heart and the solitude of his cell. He prayed not only for those close to him, but also for people throughout the world whom he knew about, especially those he knew were suffering.

In 1981, when an Orthodox priest asked Fr. Seraphim about the role of prayer in the life of a monk, Fr. Seraphim emphasized the monk’s duty to pray for others, and ultimately for the whole world. “A monk,” he said, “is free to pray more than the ordinary layman is able to, because the whole monastic life is centered around the Church services, which we have in the morning, in the evening, and at various other times of the day. Therefore, he prays with the cycle of the Church’s services. And a special part of his prayer is the prayer, both in church and in his own cell, for others. In the world, people are not usually so free to devote time to praying for others; but the monastic has the opportunity to devote himself to this kind of prayer. In his prayer in the desert, away from the ways of the world, he can call to mind those who are in various conditions of suffering, sorrows, or struggles. Often those people in the world have no one to have sympathy on them in their struggles. The monastic is one who can do this.

We receive mail from people all over the world telling about their needs and their struggles, and therefore we take this obligation upon ourselves of praying for them, asking God's mercy upon all those who are in conditions of need throughout the world."<sup>17</sup>

In the Orthodox understanding of monastic life, a monk on leaving the world does not at all cease having love and concern for the world, nor does he cease to labor for it. His love and his labor for the world are expressed in his prayer for it. He actually helps to sustain the world through his prayers.

Fr. Seraphim took seriously his monastic duty of praying for the world. With this in mind, he made it a point to keep abreast with the plight of suffering people all over the world, especially those who live under Communist and totalitarian Muslim regimes. In his talk at the 1979 St. Herman Pilgrimage, "Orthodox Christians Facing the 1980s," he tried to make people aware of the tremendous suffering that was occurring in the world around them, from the drowning of thousands of Southeast Asian "boat people" to the extermination of one-quarter of the population of Cambodia under the Communist dictator Pol Pot. During the same lecture he read a moving letter which he had received from an Orthodox Christian in Degeya, Uganda, where the people had just come out from under the regime of the Muslim dictator Idi Amin.<sup>[c]</sup> As the letter made clear, Idi Amin's regime had been ruthlessly persecuting Christians, killing priests and believers, closing or bombing their churches, and changing Sunday services to Friday (the Muslim holy day). Fr. Seraphim did not neglect to draw a comparison between this Muslim dictatorship and Communist totalitarianism. "It's frightful," he remarked. "There are pictures of Idi Amin's torture chambers, just like under Communism. But Idi Amin did this in his own name in order to make Islam the religion of Uganda."<sup>[d]</sup>

Even though monastics have a greater responsibility to pray for the world because of their greater opportunity, Fr. Seraphim made clear that this duty is common to all Christians. In his talks he counseled monastics and laypeople alike to go throughout the world in their minds, praying for those who were



struggling and suffering. He especially asked them to pray for Christians who were being persecuted for their faith.

**T**HERE can be no doubt that Fr. Seraphim's preaching of Orthodoxy of the heart came out of a deepening of his prayer life, and out of a corresponding deepening of what he called "the essential experience of pain of heart."<sup>18</sup> Elder Paisios, a revered spiritual father who reposed in 1994 on Mount Athos, has well described the experience of *prayer with pain for other people* which Fr. Seraphim entered into, and to which he called others. "Prayer which is not from the heart," said Elder Paisios, "but is made only by the mind, doesn't go any further. To pray with the heart, we must hurt. Just as when we hit our hand or some other part of our body our *nous* (spirit) is gathered to the point we are hurting, so also for the *nous* to gather in the heart, the heart must hurt.



Fr. Seraphim at the St. Herman Monastery, 1979. *Photograph by Gary Todoroff.*

"We should make the other's pain our own! We must love the other, must hurt for him, so that we can pray for him. We must come out, little by little, from our own self and begin to love, to hurt for other people as well, for our family



first and then for the large family of Adam, of God.”<sup>19</sup>

Fr. Seraphim’s love for others, expressed in his outward deeds and in his inward prayer, was both the means and the evidence of his going deeper into the Orthodox Christian Faith. As our Lord Jesus Christ has said, *By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples: if ye have love one to another* (John 13:35). Fr. Seraphim had truly been granted the prayer he had brought before the Mother of God in 1961, when he had asked her to let him enter “the heart of hearts” of the saving Faith of Christ. At the heart of true Christianity, he had found that on which *hang all the law and the prophets* (Matt. 22:40): love for God, and love for one’s neighbor. It was the first and second commandment of the incarnate God — of Him Who made of Love a law.

## *Simplicity*

*Be humble, and you will remain whole.*

*Be bent, and you will remain straight....*

*Appear plainly, and hold to simplicity.*

—Lao Tzu<sup>1</sup>

**I**N 1979, during an informal talk after the St. Herman Summer Pilgrimage, Fr. Seraphim spoke to his brothers and sisters in Christ on the theme of simplicity. Even before his conversion he had encountered this virtue in the writings of the pre-Christian Chinese sages, who by observing and contemplating the created order had understood simplicity and humility to be the “Way of heaven.” In the God-man Jesus Christ he had found this “Way” incarnated, and had heard the call: *Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven* (Matt. 18:3).

“A pagan philosopher in China named Lao Tzu,” Fr. Seraphim told the brothers and sisters, “taught that the weakest things conquer the strongest things. There is an example of this here at our monastery. The oak trees, which are very hard and unbending, are always falling down, and their limbs are always breaking off and falling; while the pine trees, which are more supple, fall down much less often before they are actually dead.

“That is, if you bend, it is a sign of strength. We can see the same thing in human life. The person who believes in something to such an extent that he’s going to stand up and ‘cut your head off’ if you don’t agree with him — he shows his weakness, because he’s so unsure of himself that he has to convert

you to make sure that he himself believes.”

Fr. Seraphim said that in order for us to “bend” like the pine trees, our hearts must be transformed. “The way,” he said, “is to soften the heart, to make the heart more supple.”

“In the Protestant world, we have many examples of people with soft hearts, who, for the love of Christ, are kind to other people. That is basic Christianity. We should not, in living an Orthodox life, think that we can be cold and hard and correct and still be Christians. Being correct is the external side of Christianity. It’s important, but not of first importance. Of primary importance is the heart. The heart must be soft, the heart must be warm. If we do not have this warm heart, we have to ask God to give it, and we have to try ourselves to do those things by which we can acquire it. Most of all, we have to see that we have not got it — that we *are* cold. Therefore, we will not trust our reason and the conclusions of our logical minds, with regard to which we must be somewhat ‘loose.’ If we do this, entering into the sacramental life of the Church and receiving the grace of God, then God Himself will begin to illumine us...



Left to right: Fr. Seraphim, the future Novice Gregory, Fr. Mark Gomez, Br. David. St. Herman Monastery, 1981.

“The one thing that can save us is simplicity. It can be ours if in our hearts we pray to God to make us simple; if we just do not think ourselves so wise; if, when it comes to a question like, ‘Can we paint an icon of God the Father?’ we do not come up with a quick answer and say, ‘Oh, of course it’s this way — it says so in such and such Sobor [Council], number so and so.’ Either we, knowing that we are right, have to excommunicate everyone, in which case we will go off the deep end, or else we have to stop and think, ‘Well, I guess I don’t know too much.’ The more we have this second attitude, the more we will be protected from spiritual dangers.

“Accept simply the Faith you receive from your fathers. If there is a very

simple Russian priest you happen to be in connection with, give thanks to God that you have someone like that. You can learn a great deal from him: because you're so complex, intellectual, and moody, these simple priests can give something very good to you...

“As soon as you begin to hear or think to yourself critical statements [about people in the Church], you have to stop and warn yourself that, even if it's true — because often those statements are true to some degree — this critical attitude is a very negative thing. It will not get you anywhere. In the end it may get you right outside the whole Church. Therefore, you have to stop at that point and remember not to judge, not to think you're so wise that you know better. On the contrary, try to learn, perhaps without words, from some of those people whom you might be critical of...

“If we follow the simple path — distrusting our own wisdom, doing the best we can with our mind, yet realizing that our mind, without warmth of heart, is a very weak tool — then an Orthodox philosophy of life will begin to be formed in us.”<sup>2</sup>

**A**s Fr. Seraphim taught simplicity, so also he lived it. Many people remember how this brilliant man, whose intellectual abilities far surpassed their own, provided them with a constant example of how to be simple. In the words of the biographer of St. John Climacus, Fr. Seraphim had renounced the “conceit of human wisdom.”<sup>3</sup> Here is the account of a pilgrim to the St. Herman Monastery named John:

“When I first met Fr. Seraphim, I had almost finished my freshman year in college. Already I considered myself somewhat of a deep thinker, one who did battle with ‘ultimate questions’ on the path of Truth. I noticed that most of the people around me were not interested in this: either they were too old, tired, and jaded to take up such battles, or, if they were young, they were more interested in having fun or making money in business or computers...

“Seeing in Fr. Seraphim a kindred philosopher, I longed to have deep

discussions with him about those ultimate questions. He always listened patiently as I expounded all my ‘profound’ ideas, but he didn’t expound himself: usually he only made simple, succinct comments. I was a bit puzzled by this at the time, but now it makes sense. Now, nearly a decade later, it seems that almost all of those simple comments have remained imbedded in my memory forever.

“I first became interested in Orthodoxy by studying its most exalted teachings. The first Orthodox books I read were *Mystical Theology* by St. Dionysius the Areopagite, and *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* by Vladimir Lossky. I was attracted to ineffable concepts such as the ‘Divine Darkness’ of apophatic theology.

“Fr. Seraphim, however, was always bringing me down to earth. After I was made a catechumen at the monastery, I was expected to learn about the Faith in preparation for baptism. I thought I already knew a lot, dealing as I was with such lofty metaphysics. But when I went to Fr. Seraphim’s cell to talk to him, one of the first questions he asked me was: ‘Do you know about the fasts of the Church?’

“‘I think so,’ I replied. ‘There’s Lent, and another fast before Christmas...’

“‘Yes,’ he said. ‘Do you know about the Apostles Peter and Paul Fast?’

“I was ashamed to say I did not recall hearing that such a thing existed.

“‘This is a very important fast of the Church,’ he said, and went on to describe what it was and why it was done. ‘Someone calculated,’ he said at last, ‘and it turns out that there are more fast days in the Church Calendar than there are non-fast days.’

“This rather surprised me. I believe Fr. Seraphim was trying to tell me that being baptized did not mean feeling important with exalted theology and philosophy, but taking on a life of struggle, of labor and sacrifice for Jesus Christ. In his own unobtrusive way, he was leading me out of the ‘Divine Darkness’ and to the foot of the Cross, the vehicle of our salvation.

“During the year of my catechumenate, I took a university course on the

Philosophy of Religion, for which I wrote two highly rated papers I was rather proud of. The first paper was called ‘Reflections on Kant’s “Purely Rational Religion.”’ I gave this to Fr. Seraphim for him to read. I suppose I was anticipating a little praise. Later, I asked him if he had looked at it, and he said he had.

“‘What did you think of it?’ I asked.

“‘It was a little over my head,’ he answered.

“This left me speechless. Later I discovered, much as I suspected, that Fr. Seraphim had made a thorough study, not only of Kant, but of many philosophers I had never even heard of, and that he had a much more penetrating understanding of Western philosophy than my university professors. Why, then, did he say that my eleven-page sophomore paper was ‘over his head’? Clearly, to teach me simplicity and its sister-virtue, humility.

“My other paper was on Søren Kierkegaard, whose philosophy was so full of paradox and intellectual challenge that one could spend days talking about it.

“‘What do you think of Kierkegaard?’ I asked Fr. Seraphim.

“‘I always felt sorry for him.’ Those were the only words Fr. Seraphim had to say to me on the subject. His statement had to do, not with the mind, but with the heart. In thinking more about Kierkegaard — his struggle to maintain Christian zeal amidst the general lukewarmness of his Church, to uphold Christian faith against a barrage of Hegelian philosophy, and to overcome the contradictions in his own personality — I realized later that nothing more precise could be said of him than those few words of Fr. Seraphim.”<sup>4</sup>

**A**NOTHER pilgrim, Paul, recalls his futile attempts to enter into intellectual debates with Fr. Seraphim. As a pastor of a Protestant church, Paul was convicted in his heart by the spiritual depth of Orthodoxy. In order to prove that Orthodoxy was not the true way after all, he wanted to win an argument with Fr. Seraphim. Fr. Seraphim would ask if he had questions, but Paul would try to start arguments instead. As he later confessed, “I came to Fr. Seraphim not with

questions but with opinions.”

At one point Paul worked out an elaborate polemic against Orthodoxy based on the fact that pogroms against Jews had occurred in pre-Revolutionary Russia. When he approached Fr. Seraphim and began setting forth his points about the pogroms, the latter replied, “I don’t have to defend something that is obviously not Christian.” As Paul recalled later, “That reply shred all my pre-planned arguments to pieces!”

On another occasion, when Paul challenged Fr. Seraphim with the question of whether he, a Protestant, would go to heaven or hell, Fr. Seraphim replied, “Who am I to say whether you’re going to heaven or hell?”

“Fr. Seraphim would just not enter the Protestant dialectic,” Paul later observed. “He would just say, ‘The Holy Fathers said...’”

At other times, when Paul would speak to Fr. Seraphim in a contentious tone, trying to provoke him to debate, Fr. Seraphim would say nothing at all, but would simply stand up and walk away. “This taught me a profound lesson,” Paul now says. “From his silentness and his unwillingness to argue, Fr. Seraphim taught me that faith is something you receive not otherwise than as a little child.”<sup>5</sup>

After Fr. Seraphim’s repose, Paul regretted that his competitive approach robbed him of precious opportunities to receive wisdom from someone he remembered as a true man of God. He was eventually baptized as an Orthodox Christian, and today he is an active and dedicated member of the Church.

**A** YOUNG MONK who joined the hermitage from another monastery remembers well his first meeting with Fr. Seraphim. Unlike the pilgrims in the above accounts, this monk did not regard himself as an intellectual. He felt somewhat intimidated about meeting Fr. Seraphim, whom he already knew to be a profound and “intense” Orthodox writer.

When told by Fr. Herman to go talk to Fr. Seraphim in his cell, the monk did so nervously. Fr. Seraphim invited him in and he sat down, wondering what



in the world a “simpleton” like himself was going to say to this wise and deep man with a long gray beard and penetrating eyes.

Suddenly Fr. Seraphim asked him: “Do you know anything about picking mushrooms?”

“No...” the new brother answered.

A veteran mushroom picker, Fr. Seraphim was able to tell, with open-hearted enthusiasm, about all the edible mushrooms found in the area. The brother felt instantly more at ease. It was just what he needed: to hear about the simple joys of monastic life.

**I**N seeking simplicity, Fr. Seraphim fled from what he called “spiritual pretense and affectation.”<sup>6</sup> He had none of the “pride of monastic life” that makes some *love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces* (Mark 12:38). One woman convert to Orthodoxy recalls:

“I was still a Protestant when I met Fr. Seraphim. Icons, relics, monasteries, the idea of ongoing repentance — all this was still foreign to me.

“While visiting an Orthodox friend, I was told that Fr. Seraphim would be coming. I tried to mentally prepare myself. When he walked in, he looked so *different*, with his long beard, long hair, and long robe. I told myself that this was not really him, but just an external appearance, and that I had to see beyond it. I tried to separate the person from the outward impression, since with so many people the latter has very little to do with the former. But with Fr. Seraphim I just couldn’t do it. I found that what I saw *was* Fr. Seraphim; that is, his Orthodox Faith, his monasticism, the black he wore as a symbol of repentance — this was part of what he really was inside. They were inextricably bound together.”<sup>7</sup>

Fr. Seraphim also fled from praise and glory as from a flame. Once, during a question-and-answer session after one of his Summer Pilgrimage lectures, a man raised his hand and began praising Fr. Seraphim as a “holy man of prayer.” Fr. Seraphim cut the man off sharply. “Get to the point,” he said. “What’s your

question?”

At the same pilgrimage Fr. Seraphim was approached by a young spiritual seeker who worshipped the very ground he walked on. Not yet knowing Orthodox “etiquette,” the young man spontaneously crossed himself and bowed before Fr. Seraphim when asking for a blessing. “You’re supposed to cross yourself before icons,” Fr. Seraphim told him, “not people.”

**T**AKING example from Bishop Nektary and, through him, from the Optina Elders, Fr. Seraphim sometimes used humor as a pastoral tool. We have seen that he did not like too much levity in the monastery, how he disliked to see brothers standing around giggling. At the same time, he knew that *too much* seriousness would not be good for weak Americans, especially young ones. As a spiritual father, he had to take into consideration how the boys and young men at the monastery had been raised. These young people needed a little consolation, a little joke now and then to lighten the atmosphere. Otherwise, they would begin to take themselves too seriously, thereby becoming the criterion by which everything else is judged; or else they would sink into a pit of despondency out of which it would be very difficult to emerge.

Those who knew Fr. Seraphim recall that he had a wonderful sense of humor, though one which, like everything else about his personality, was understated. One story has been told by the same young monk whom Fr. Seraphim had talked to about mushrooms:

Once in the refectory, Fr. Herman was expatiating on the futility of modern technological civilization. “They build skyscrapers high into the air,” he was saying. “They compete to see who can build them higher. And they keep on building, building, building. When will it all end? They can only build so high — and then what?”

“Why then,” Fr. Seraphim said, “King Kong comes.”

Fr. Alexey Young notes that “Fr. Seraphim had a fondness for practical jokes which, unless you had been there, would have seemed very out of

character. Nothing low-minded or cruel, mind you, but once in a rare while he would play a modest little practical joke on someone.”<sup>8</sup>

One of Fr. Seraphim’s spiritual daughters provides an example: “Sollie [Solomonina] once told me a story which reflects Fr. Seraphim’s humor. It was at the monastery after a rain and there were puddles around, and he told Sollie to come and look at the duck that was in one of the puddles. He told her to be very quiet so she wouldn’t scare it, so she was. Then he began to chuckle softly, and she realized that it was a fake duck... a decoy!”

Another woman pilgrim, who had been introduced to the monastery only a year before Fr. Seraphim’s death, remembers being surprised at seeing Fr. Seraphim engaged in a snowball fight with the boys at the monastery. At first she thought that this looked out of place; but then, as she entered more deeply into Orthodox life, she realized that yes, it did fit here.

Fr. Herman has said: “When I first met Fr. Seraphim, he *never* would have lowered his dignity enough to start a snowball fight.” It was only in his later years, when he had become a pastor and had to care for the needs of American boys, that he could be seen doing this. Fr. Seraphim also played catch with the boys.

**A**NOTHER virtue of Fr. Seraphim, bound up with simplicity and humility, was patience. “If I possess any patience at all now,” Fr. Herman says, “I learned it from Fr. Seraphim. I think that’s the main thing he taught me.”

In his counsels to his spiritual children, Fr. Seraphim often said that their spiritual survival depended on having patience amidst trials. “The devil is walking about like a lion in our midst,” he said, “but by our patience and endurance of trials we can get the best of him, with God’s help.”<sup>9</sup> Once, when Fr. Alexey Young wrote that he was beset with various difficulties, Fr. Seraphim replied that the “chief answer to your questions” was contained in the words of the Epistle of St. James: *Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. And let*

*patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing* (James 1:2–4).<sup>[10](#)</sup> In another letter to Fr. Alexey, Fr. Seraphim noted that “It is much better to learn patience and humility than it is to get everything as one wants and then discover... that inside one is empty. May God grant us to trust Him as He guides our daily lives better than we could.”<sup>[11](#)</sup>

For Fr. Seraphim, patience was an indispensable virtue not only because it kept one on the path to salvation in the midst of trials and temptations, but also because it kept one from leaping off that path out of misdirected spiritual zeal. “By taking one small step at a time,” he once said, “and by not thinking that in one big leap we are going to get any place, we can walk straight to the Kingdom of Heaven — and there is no reason for any of us to fall away from that. Amen.”<sup>[12](#)</sup>



Fr. Seraphim at the St. Herman Monastery.

## Converts

*As many as are made partakers of the Spirit of Christ, see that you do not behave contemptuously in anything, small or great, and do not offend the grace of the Spirit, that you may not be excluded from the life of which you have already been made partakers.*

—St. Macarius the Great<sup>1</sup>

*Christians are not born but made.*

—Blessed Jerome<sup>2</sup>

**A** TRUTH-SEEKER,” Fr. Herman used to say, “when he finds the truth in Orthodoxy, must then stop his searching. His path to Orthodoxy, which is on a horizontal plane, has ended, and now he must go ‘vertically,’ *deeper* into Orthodoxy. If he continues to progress on the horizontal level, perpetually seeking how to be externally right, it is often the case that he will keep progressing *right out of the Church.*”

In Fr. Seraphim, Fr. Herman found a convert who *had* turned from the horizontal to the vertical — who, upon finding Orthodoxy, had never ceased to go deeper into it. Now that Fr. Seraphim had jumped so many convert hurdles and acquired that rare “Patristic mind,” Fr. Herman thought he would have some important lessons to give to today’s converts. At one point he asked him to compose a “Manual for Orthodox Converts.”

Accepting this as an obedience, Fr. Seraphim went to his cell to write out some notes. On one page he jotted down the following “convert pitfalls,” or

what he called “obstacles in the Orthodox mission today”:

A. Trusting oneself, *samost*.

Remedy: sober distrust of oneself, taking counsel of others wiser, guidance from Holy Fathers.

B. Academic approach — overly intellectual, uninvolved, uncommitted, abstract, unreal. Bound up with A. also.

C. Not keeping the secret of the Kingdom, gossip, publicity. Overemphasis on outward side of mission, *success*. Danger of creating empty shell, form of mission without substance.

Remedy: concentrate on spiritual life, keep out of limelight, stay uninvolved from passionate disputes.

D. “Spiritual Experiences.”

Symptoms: feverish excitement, always something “tremendous” happening — the blood is boiling. Inflated vocabulary, indicates puffed up instead of humble. Sources in Protestantism, and in one’s own opinions “picked up” in the air.

Remedy: sober distrust of oneself, constant grounding in Holy Fathers and Lives of Saints, counsel.

E. Discouragement, giving up — “Quenched” syndrome.

Cause: overemphasis on outward side, public opinion, etc. Remedy: emphasis on inward, spiritual struggle, lack of concern for outward success, mindfulness of *Whom* we are followers of (Christ crucified but triumphant).

F. A double axe: *broadness* on one hand, *narrowness* on the other.

Writing about converts in another place, Fr. Seraphim once again identified “pain of heart” as a watershed of true spiritual life. “Pain of heart,” he wrote, “is what separates crazy converts and careless Orthodox from true strugglers.”<sup>3</sup> He believed that, without the contrition and inward brokenness that is born of pain of heart, converts remain on the horizontal level, scrutinizing everything in Orthodoxy according to their self-opinion, and trusting the faulty conclusions of

their logical minds. In the words of St. Barsanuphius the Great, which Fr. Seraphim translated into English: “Without pain of heart no one receives the gift of discerning thoughts [the motives of actions and the like].”<sup>4</sup>

In yet another place, Fr. Seraphim described the spirit of undiscerning criticism that often enters converts today:

“My priest (or parish) does everything right — other priests (or parishes) don’t.” “My priest does everything wrong; others are better.” “My monastery does everything according to the Holy Fathers — other monasteries don’t.” “My monastery is not according to the Holy Fathers or canons, but *that* monastery over there is perfect, everything according to the Holy Fathers.”

Such attitudes are spiritually extremely dangerous. The person holding them is invariably in grave spiritual danger himself, and by uttering his mistaken, self-centered words he spreads the poison of rationalist criticism to others in the Church.<sup>5</sup>

Fr. Seraphim had one spiritual son whom he saw falling into this classic pattern of the “crazy convert” who thinks he knows better than everyone. In a little mission chapel which he had built in his backyard, this man was making an issue over congregational singing versus “partitura” singing by a separate choir. On Pentecost Sunday he had a confrontation in the church with a Russian woman who wanted to have partitura singing. “As I rather bluntly told her,” he wrote to Fr. Seraphim, “I didn’t build a chapel in order to perpetuate error in my own backyard.” In his letter to Fr. Seraphim, he criticized the idea that a person could stand through a Liturgy while a choir did the singing, and said that this was “analogous to going to visit someone in his home and spending the time there with his nose in a magazine.” “I am in no mood to compromise on this issue,” he declared.

In principle, Fr. Seraphim agreed with his spiritual son that congregational



singing was to be preferred, but what concerned him most was the man's attitude. "Beware!" he wrote to him:

No matter how "right" you may be on various points, you *must* be diplomatic also. The first and important thing is not "rightness" at all, but Christian love and harmony. Most "crazy converts" have been "right" in the criticisms that led to their downfall; but they were lacking in Christian love and charity and so went off the deep end, needlessly alienating people around them and finally finding themselves all alone in their rightness and self-righteousness. *Don't you follow them!...*

The attitude toward the little ——— mission which you reveal in your letter is a very dangerous one, both for you and others. I will tell it to you straight and pray that you have the courage to accept it and act on it before it is too late. The "zeal" you are showing for English services, congregational singing, etc.,—is not primarily zeal according to God, is not based on Christianity; it is, on the contrary, only stubborn self-will, a symptom of the "correctness disease" that plagues so many converts and leads straight to disaster. If you do not fight against this passion now (for it is a passion), the ——— mission is doomed, and you yourself will very likely lose your own faith and your own family. I have seen this "convert-pattern" in practice too often not to warn you about it.

You are still new to Orthodoxy, and yet you wish to teach those older in the Faith (and from the way you describe it, you are "teaching" them quite crudely, without the slightest tact or Christian charity). Plain common sense should tell you that this is no way to act; Christian love should make you ashamed of your behavior and anxious to learn more of basic Christianity before daring to teach anyone *anything*. I haven't heard from anyone in the ——— area, but I can imagine how your behavior must offend and hurt them. There is nothing mysterious about the fact that you are alienating people; your behavior, as you have described it yourself, is

exactly the kind that drives people away and causes fights in the Church. Don't hide behind "English services" and "no-partitura" singing: these are only half-truths which your pride seizes on in order to avoid basic Christian humility and love.

Look for a moment at how it must seem to others: you couldn't get along in the ——— parish and had to drop out; now, in your "own" parish, you drive people away. It simply cannot be that others are *always* to blame and you are always innocent; you must start correcting your own faults and living in peace with the Christians around you.

How do you do this? You begin by accepting certain basic Orthodox principles:

1. All questions regarding Church services (language, kind of singing, etc.) and behavior in church (including head coverage of women, etc.) are decided by the priest who serves. You are not to be a "policeman" who enforces "church laws" according to your understanding of them; it's already clear that you are going to drive everybody away doing this, and in any case, people come to church hoping to *escape* the cold legalism of the world that surrounds us — have pity on them!

2. Realize that you are still a new convert and have much to learn, and are not to be a "teacher" of others, save in the sense that every Orthodox Christian is a source of edification (or the opposite) to others by his behavior. This edification is given first of all, of course, to one's own family, and this is a place where, according to what you have told me, you are very weak... You've indicated in earlier letters that you and your wife might just drift apart, that [your son] may not end up Orthodox — but how can a Christian husband and father realize such terrible things and not be filled with zeal to *correct himself before* these disasters happen? (For if these things do happen, you will be to blame: because you did not give your family *an example of living Christianity* to inspire and warm them, but only some kind of legalistic, soul-less "correctness" that only feeds the ego.)

3. Begin to humble yourself in your relations with others, to act towards them first of all with compassion and love; go out of your way to see things the way they see them and not give offense to their feelings. Cease to be an egotist and learn to live in peace with the Christians around you. This can't be done overnight, but you can *start*.

4. Start studying seriously the ABC's of Orthodox Christianity. Have you read *Unseen Warfare* recently?—that's a good place to start...

I've said enough, perhaps more than you can digest at once. I do not call on you to “abandon all your ideas,” or to become a totally different man overnight. I only want you to start working harder *on yourself* and to be more compassionate to others, and to relax on trying to be so “correct.” This is not so impossible, and I think you will never find happiness and spiritual peace unless you do this.<sup>6</sup>

Eight months later, as Fr. Seraphim had feared, the man's son left him. In his next letter to the man, Fr. Seraphim wrote:

What can I say? Obviously I have failed you as a spiritual father, not communicating to you even the basic ABC's of Christian spiritual life. In this past year you have gone from bad to worse, alienating even more than before, through your un-Christian behavior... the Orthodox community, visiting priests, and even your own son — who is surely to a large extent what you have made him, apparently more unconsciously than consciously. The blame for all of this rests squarely upon your shoulders. *You are not behaving in a Christian way* to any of these people, and you seem totally unaware of the fact...

If you wish to be an Orthodox Christian you must begin *now*, from this very day and hour and minute, to love God and your fellow men. This means: not to act in an arbitrary or whimsical way with people, not just saying the first thing that enters your head, not picking fights or quarrels

with people over *anything*, big or small, being constantly ready to ask forgiveness of them (and to ask it more than you think is necessary), to have compassion for them and fervently pray for them... If you had such compassion for your own son, on a regular basis, he would not have left you. He loves you, in case you don't know it...

If you still accept my authority as a spiritual father, I am giving you a different prayer rule: instead of the Jesus Prayer, say every night 100 prayers by the prayer-rope, with words something like this (or the equivalent in your own words): Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on my brother (name)... going by name through all the people close to you, starting with your immediate family. With each petition make a bow (prostrations for members of your immediate family). Stop at 100 (repeating names if necessary), and let your last petition be for *everyone*. By this I want you to *wake up* and start loving your brothers and sisters, both of the household of faith and those without...

I make a prostration before you and beg your forgiveness for my many sins and failings towards you. May God forgive and have mercy on us all... I assure you that, whatever your attitude may be towards me, mine towards you has not changed in the least.

With love in Christ,  
Unworthy Hieromonk Seraphim<sup>2</sup>

**D**ESPITE the fact that Fr. Seraphim warned against the dangers of “crazy convertism,” he was never partisan to any silly rivalry between converts and the cradle-Orthodox. He did not agree with the notion, held by some people in the Church, that “the converts are the cause of all the problems in the Church; if we get rid of the converts, the problems will go away.” In a letter to one convert who was trying to deal with a church problem in a restrained and level-headed way, he noted how this convert had acted less like a “crazy convert” than someone who was cradle-Orthodox: “Perhaps we’ve all done a little too much

talking about ‘converts’—the pitfalls into which they fall are really the same ones that any believer can and does fall into!”<sup>8</sup>

With this in mind, Fr. Seraphim was against attempts to limit the influence of converts by requiring English-speaking missions to hold their services in Slavonic. In 1979, the priest of a mission parish in England wrote to him in alarm after reading an article by an Archbishop of the Russian Church Abroad which stated that all-Slavonic services had become “Synod policy.” Assuring the priest that no such policy had been implemented, Fr. Seraphim noted that the Archbishop’s views were “extremely unrealistic” and revealing of “very little experience in the mission field.” “We ourselves,” Fr. Seraphim went on to say, “have had complete freedom in developing our American mission. Our services both in the monastery and in our missions are almost entirely in English, and Vladika Anthony when he visits us makes a point of encouraging us to do everything in English, and he himself does as much as he can in English. This is certainly the ‘normal’ attitude of our bishops, and Vladika ———’s remarks are surely atypical.”<sup>9</sup>

In rejecting the anti-convert view, Fr. Seraphim was also careful not to go to the other extreme, that is, to blame all the church problems on the “ethnicity” of the cradle-Orthodox. He noticed that many Americans who were so strongly against Old World “ethnicity” were not aware of their own ethnicity, which he called “the newest ethnic emphasis: Americanism.”<sup>10</sup> “There are many,” he pointed out, “who now will say, ‘Oh, we don’t believe in ethnicism, we’re American.’ But America is another ethnic jurisdiction. They don’t notice that because they themselves are Americans.”<sup>11</sup> It was wrong, he said, for young cradle-Orthodox to voice their “easy criticism of their elders and their Orthodox ‘ghettos.’”<sup>12</sup> This again was *external wisdom*. By dismissing something or someone merely on the outward basis of “ethnicity,” one may miss finding the very heart of Orthodoxy, the “living tradition” carried on through the generations. “In the Russian Church,” he said, “we have many ordinary parish priests who are extremely quiet, who would never think of making schisms and

factions, who would never think of excommunicating you over various issues of strictness, who are extremely long-suffering and often do not say much; and therefore some people criticize them, saying things like ‘Oh, they don’t guide their people enough, they don’t give them enough.’ These criticisms are superficial: we ourselves must be looking deeper to find something in these pastors and in the Church, something that is not too obvious outwardly — this very ‘link’ with the past.<sup>[a]</sup>



Fr. Seraphim at the monastery with Andrew Bond, an Orthodox convert from England, 1979.

“You will not find many people who will explain it in detail like this. No matter where you are — in a parish, or wherever it might be — you have to look behind what is most obvious, and try to receive those things which cannot necessarily be communicated by words. Look for the characteristics that come from a warm, loving heart: long-suffering, patience, fervor — but not fervor of such a kind that it begins to be critical of others.”<sup>13</sup>

Once while working on his “Manual for Orthodox Converts,” Fr. Seraphim made a statement to Fr. Herman which, in the latter’s opinion, expressed a perfectly balanced view of the converts vs. cradle-Orthodox issue. “Those who are raised Orthodox from childhood,” he said, “have patience, but lack zeal. The converts have zeal, but lack patience. The ideal is to have zeal tempered by patience. We must be governed by the Church Fathers, who are the *mind of the Church*.”<sup>14</sup>

Fr. Seraphim likewise refused to be partisan to another futile controversy in the Church: the relative superiority of the Greek and Russian traditions. To a convert who was troubled by this issue, he wrote:

One can find that in some respects the “Russians” are closer to more ancient and traditional practice... and in some respects the “Greeks” are closer... You notice that I put “Greek” and “Russian” in quotation marks — because we are one in Christ, and we should by no means let differences of nationality or custom cause rivalries among us. We have much to learn from each other, but both of us must learn first of all from Christ our Saviour and the pure tradition of His Church! Both “Greeks” and “Russians” have faults and have introduced some minor “innovations” into church practice; but if we love each other in Christ, these faults are tolerable, and it is far preferable to tolerate them than to go about “reforming” other people and being overly critical. Each parish and monastery is free to preserve the Orthodox tradition as fully as it wishes and can, preserving all humility and love.<sup>15</sup>

**F**ATHER Alexey Young confirms that Fr. Seraphim, far from giving credence to convert vs. cradle-Orthodox rivalries, was actually a “bridge-builder” between “ethnic” Church leaders and a whole generation of American converts. “To understand this,” Fr. Alexey writes, “one must know something about Orthodoxy in America — and particularly in the Russian Church Abroad —

back in the 1960s.

“At the time my family and I were approaching Orthodoxy, there were no services in English anywhere (even in many so-called ‘modern’ jurisdictions) and, by comparison with what is available today, there were also relatively few books about the Faith in English. Most clergy spoke little or no English, which made confession and even basic spiritual direction very difficult. Although we were certainly sincerely and warmly welcomed into the Faith (at the Cathedral of the Mother of God, ‘Joy of All Who Sorrow’ in San Francisco), much of Orthodoxy was actually still closed to us because of these language barriers.



Fr. Seraphim with Reader Vladimir Anderson inside the monastery gates.





Archbishop Anthony, Bishop Nektary, and Fr. Seraphim with the Anderson family on the day Vladimir was ordained to the diaconate at the monastery, Feast of St. Herman, July 27/August 9, 1980.

“Fr. Seraphim, however, was a conscious ‘bridge-builder’ between American converts and the Church. Because of his fluency in Russian, he could represent us — our needs, our motives, our hopes — to the Church authorities and, at the same time, he was able to explain to us the mind-set and worldview of our Russian hierarchs and clergy, as is dramatically clear in his many letters to converts like myself. This meant that we were able to understand the ‘hearts’ of our Church leaders, and they were able to understand *our* ‘hearts,’ too. For those who were part of the early convert movement, Fr. Seraphim’s ‘bridge-building’ was an incomparable labor of love.”<sup>16</sup>

FATHER SERAPHIM was never to complete his “Manual for Converts” project. The more he thought about and struggled with it, the more he became convinced that the very idea of a “manual” was wrong in this case. As he so often reiterated, *there are no formulas in spiritual life*. Christ gave no detailed “recipes,” but rather gave the most awesome commandment of all: to *love*—even to love our enemies.

If Fr. Seraphim were to create a “manual,” he would be giving formula-seeking converts a new subject at which they could become “experts.” Paradoxically, they could then “know better” than anyone else about all the convert pitfalls! And this would lead to pride, the death of spiritual life.

The state of contemporary converts, however, was far from hopeless. Toward the end of his life Fr. Seraphim noticed that the older generation of converts, which had largely been attracted to Orthodoxy as an opportunity for legalism and intellectual pretension, was being replaced by a much more promising generation. “Out here,” he wrote to a friend in Jordanville, “we have noticed a whole new ‘tone’ in the converts of recent years: much less of the ‘know it all’ spirit, emphasis on ‘canons’ and ‘Typicon,’ etc., and much more just basic Orthodox Christianity.”<sup>17</sup>

Today we see a rising number of such converts who, as Fr. Seraphim liked to say, “get the point” of Orthodoxy. The same old convert pitfalls are still there, and there will always be people falling into them, no matter how many warnings they receive. But the warnings of Fr. Seraphim, found throughout his writings, have not been in vain. Although they cannot provide any kind of sure-fire formula for a “prelest-free” spiritual life, they have helped many souls to take that “vertical” path beneath the externals, to the heart of ancient Christianity.

## *Across the Country*

**I**N May of 1979, Fr. Herman made a long-awaited pilgrimage to Mount Athos. He went primarily in order to see his Athonite spiritual father, Schemamonk Nikodim of Karoulia, and to help him prepare for publication the spiritual diary of the latter's elder, Hieroschemamonk Theodosius, which describes the condition of the heart as it prays the Jesus Prayer.<sup>1</sup> On his way to Mount Athos, Fr. Herman visited Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York.

Fr. Herman was gone on his trip for over a month — longer than he had ever been away from the monastery before. The letters which Fr. Seraphim wrote to him during that time reveal how much he valued and depended on his co-laborer. After Fr. Herman had been away for a week, Fr. Seraphim wrote to him: “We have been all right this week, working fairly well, and with only a few visitors. I find myself rather nervous being ‘in charge’... but there’s no great suffering yet.”<sup>2</sup> In another week he wrote: “I get time for writing only on Sundays — if this were a permanent situation I wouldn’t get much done. The two of us can accomplish much, but separately not much, I think... Give thanks to God for everything, and take what you can of value from the old world. May God return you safely. We miss you!”<sup>3</sup>

When he heard that Fr. Herman was going to be held longer at Jordanville than originally planned, Fr. Seraphim began to be concerned about something else: that their life in the wilderness would again be threatened. To Fr. Herman he wrote:

Why do they want you to stay in Jordanville for two weeks? If it’s

absolutely necessary or useful, then of course you should. But if it's just so they can "test" you and see if you're "worthy" to be having an independent existence outside of Jordanville, or to prepare you for bishop — then run from it as fast as possible. Vladika Nektary on his last visit mentioned again his desire to retire with us here, but said that now he would not, because now we will be taken away for bishops in two or three years, and then no one knows who will be "appointed to Platina," and he wouldn't like it. I suggested to him that we would take the path of St. Sergius of Radonezh<sup>[a]</sup> instead of [Bishop Gregory] Grabbe (who says that according to Metropolitan Anthony [Khrapovitsky] one can *not* refuse to be a bishop), and he was consoled a little.

I deeply, *deeply* feel that we have God's work to do here, and if we allow ourselves to be taken from it we will betray our calling, and probably be flops besides. Vladika Laurus apparently looks on us with the eyes of the organization, not giving much importance or value to what we do, and only looking for the right hole to plug us into for the "good of the whole." Your two weeks in Jordanville (if it is not really very necessary or useful) would hurt not so much me as our common work — making it seem less urgent to the church world, and making you very "visible."

Forgive me if I'm not looking at this right. You will know best what to do when you return.<sup>4</sup>

It so happened that during the same year Fr. Seraphim was also to make a pilgrimage to Holy Trinity Monastery, staying there for five days. This was to be the farthest trip of his life. With his monastic proclivity to work out his salvation in one place, it is doubtful that he would have made this trip at all had he not been invited to give lectures at the Holy Trinity Monastery's annual St. Herman Pilgrimage on December 12/25. The priest who wrote him asked him to give two lectures: one called "Orthodoxy in the USA," and another called "Mixed Marriages: How They Affect the Church." Fr. Seraphim agreed to give the

former, but understandably declined the latter.

Not thinking much of himself, Fr. Seraphim was a bit unconfident about following in the footsteps of his monastic co-laborer, who had inaugurated the Pilgrimages at Jordanville six years earlier. To a friend he wrote: “Please pray that I will be able to say a fruitful word there. Fr. Herman spoke at the Pilgrimage there in 1973 and gave a flaming word, but people weren’t as prepared for it then as they are beginning to be now. Only I’m a dull speaker compared to Fr. Herman, so please pray that I will be able to get some ‘punch’ over.”<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, in Jordanville there was considerable anticipation about Fr. Seraphim’s pending visit. Thomas Anderson, the boy who had lived with the Platina fathers in the early 1970s, was an eighteen-year-old seminarian at Jordanville when Fr. Seraphim went there. “The seminarians were in awe of Platina,” he recalls. “They said they would like to go there, but thought it would be too hard for them. They looked at it as a kind of ‘Little House on the Prairie’: people in the California wilderness, struggling on a mountain, printing books in the English language. They had a lot of respect for Fr. Seraphim, and were excited that he would be coming to talk to them.”

By the time of Fr. Seraphim’s pilgrimage to Jordanville, the great Orthodox thinkers and writers there — Archbishop Averky, Archimandrite Constantine, I. M. Andreyev — had already reposed. The righteous Archbishop Andrew (Fr. Adrian) of New Diveyevo Convent in New York had reposed during the previous year.<sup>[b]</sup>

Fr. Seraphim chose to travel across the United States by train rather than by airplane. As Fr. Alexey was later to explain, this was “because Fr. Seraphim felt the train, being slower, was a more civilized mode of transportation... With visits to other parishes on the way, [the trip] would provide an important opportunity to see firsthand what the life of our parishes was, outside the small world of the San Francisco archdiocese.”<sup>6</sup>

Before Fr. Seraphim left, Fr. Herman gave him the obedience of keeping a

journal of his trip. This journal, the most detailed record we have of a segment of Fr. Seraphim's life, provides a very insightful picture of who he was and what motivated him at this time, less than three years before his death. Here we present extracts from it:

*December 3/16, 1979*

After the All-night Vigil in the Redding Church of the Most Holy Theotokos "Surety of Sinners," and an abundant meal afterwards, early Sunday morning Fr. Herman, Br. Theophil, and Sisters Mary, Nina, and Solomonina saw me (Fr. Seraphim) off at the train depot. All promised to be obedient to Father Herman in my absence and to pray for my trip. Several of the sisters expressed the idea that the trip would be important for what I could say to help put the right spiritual "tone" in the church atmosphere among the Russian youth — the tone of struggle, simplicity, sobriety, and not the cold "correctness" that is so tempting to converts. I will be speaking about these very things. May God help me!

A slight accident marked the beginning of the trip. Before I could find my seat in the train, I bumped my suitcase against a chair and it opened, spilling everything. A small temptation from the evil one! In a few minutes I gathered everything together in the dark and sat down.

My seat companion was a young black boy, and in the morning we had a little talk before he left the train at Davis in order to catch a bus to his home in Fairfield. In the dark I slept with my feet on his basketball, and it turns out he has an athletic scholarship to a Christian Bible college in Portland. His name is Richard Clark... a very quiet and polite young man, a freshman. I told him a little of myself and my trip and gave him an *Orthodox Word*, telling him to write if he ever had any questions about Orthodoxy, and asking him to pray for my trip. My first encounter thus was one with the freshness and innocence that still remains in America.

A three-hour wait in the Oakland Amtrak Depot was occupied with letters

to Fr. Sergei Kornic, Fr. Alexey Young, and Fr. Herman; with a small meal; and with thoughts on whether I can say what is needed in Jordanville, and whether the youth is ready to listen...

The train went with little incident through California. In the dining car... one woman pointed to me and said: “Ayatollah!”<sup>[c]</sup> I shared a table with a young couple; we conversed over unimportant things.

After supper, about on the Nevada border, a young woman with her child greeted me — her husband is Greek Orthodox. The young man sitting behind me heard this and moved next to me, and there began a conversation of several hours on Christianity and religion. He is a disillusioned Protestant, learning Russian in order to be able to go to a land where Christians are persecuted and hopefully are not hypocrites as in the West. He asked many questions, being an ex-charismatic, and I finally gave him *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* to read.

#### *December 4/17, Monday*

The whole day we were traveling through Wyoming, a vast state with nothing but frozen, barren hills, and a few small cowboy towns. Why couldn't the smoke of Orthodox prayers go up from this still almost-virgin land? Through much of this landscape I talked more with my young friend, Mark Comstock, who had read and liked the chapter on the “charismatic” movement. He got off the train in the middle of Wyoming, taking a copy of the book and promising to visit our monastery (he lives in Auburn in the Sierras)...

The rest of the day I worked on my talk for Jordanville. May God bless my words and help me to speak for the profit of souls!

I had supper in the dining car, sitting with a mechanic from Oregon and an urbane Anglican from San Diego. The people on trains all seem quite polite and civilized.

#### *December 5/18, Tuesday*



I awoke after dawn going through Iowa. From Nebraska on (which we passed through last night) it is clearly another part of America — large towns, with very serious farm communities, not the empty, wild west. I like Iowa very much — old-fashioned houses, with the fertile land the obvious center of daily life, and no temporary houses and projects as in California.

At 10:00 a.m. we crossed the vast Mississippi, half filled with ice. Actually, it's only about twice as wide here as our own Sacramento [River]....

At 1:25 p.m., just on time, the train arrived in Chicago. The two hours before the connecting train to Cleveland were spent in writing postcards, taking a brief look outside the depot in Chicago, and calling Fr. Theodore [Jurewicz] in Cleveland....

*December 7/20, Thursday*

I spent the day with Fr. Theodore, who gives an impression of light-mindedness but is actually a very serious young priest (just thirty years old). His children keep him busy, but he still has time for painting icons — where his heart obviously lies. For much of the day his young catechumen David was with us — a very quiet, serious young man (eighteen years old) who wants to be a monk. Fr. Theodore is preparing him for baptism at Christmas. Fr. Theodore took me to his old and new (not yet completed) churches, which were somewhat as in the dream I had of them several weeks ago; and also to the O.C.A. St. Theodosius Cathedral.[\[d\]](#)

In the evening about twelve parishioners gathered to hear an impromptu talk... A summary of my talk on the subject of our *identity* as Orthodox Christians:

Who are we? Does it really make any difference that we are Orthodox Christians rather than Protestants or Roman Catholics, Muslims or Buddhists, or unbelievers?

This question arises because of some tragic cases in which Orthodox



young people leave the Orthodox Church. There was a Greek Orthodox girl, daughter of an Orthodox priest in northern California, who evidently didn't bother to find out what her Church teaches, and joined the community of an evangelist of the so-called "Church of Christ." He had ideas of communes and appealed to her idealism. She followed him to South America to find a new way of life in a town named after the evangelist — Jonestown. Probably you all know what happened there just one year ago. What is to stop our Orthodox young people from doing things like this?

Another example: a young Russian boy who grew up in New Jersey. He attended church frequently but didn't really know why he was Orthodox and not something else, or what Orthodoxy is. Having no firm identity and faith to guide him, he easily fell in with what people around him were doing. By the age of eighteen he had already married and divorced and was into drugs. I met him then — a basically normal Russian boy, but not quite certain what he was. The next year he was in jail for selling drugs. Within three or four years drugs had become a habit, leading to paralysis. A few months ago he died, bitter and cursing God. Why?—because he didn't know who he was, or what Orthodoxy is.

Another example: in San Francisco, a few blocks from one of our Russian Orthodox churches on California Street, is a house painted black; inside is a temple of Satan. Recently some sociology professors and students at the University of California at Berkeley made a study of the regular members of this "temple." They found that one of the largest groups of people who belonged were sons and daughters of Russian Orthodox parents; and their theory is that Russian Orthodox children, if they are not fully aware of their own Faith, are easier than others to convert to satanism, because their religion is so demanding, and if they don't fulfill its demands their souls feel an emptiness.

Many people don't realize it, but religion is the most powerful thing in

human life. The world is now undergoing what one might call a “religious revival” — but most of it is *false* religion. Young people, including Russian and other Orthodox young people, are bowing down and worshipping idols in Hindu temples, living “gods” like Maharaj-ji; are meditating in Zen and other pagan temples throughout America; and are committing themselves to fanatical “religious” leaders like Jim Jones — why?

I’d like to say a word about my own experience. I was a religious seeker like many young people today — Zen, etc. Then I went to a Russian church for the first time — I felt something then but didn’t know until later that this was grace. I met a holy bishop (Archbishop John) and read much about Orthodoxy, its teachings and saints. Finally I became a monk, and went with a young Russian fellow-seeker (and finder) to a wilderness area in northern California to try to imitate in a small way what we had read of desert-loving monks in Russia, and also to continue printing *The Orthodox Word* which Archbishop John had blessed. As far away as we are from towns and Orthodox people, this past year and a half we have baptized ten people in our monastery (in a week during the summer). And there are four new catechumens. Examples: the guitar-player George, converted by his guitar teacher, a Russian boy, through his icons. Girls from a Protestant community in northern California. A college student converted by reading church history (the Ecumenical Councils, etc.). One new catechumen’s wife is a typical American with a Texas-burger stand. What brings them to Orthodoxy?—The grace of God. Many young Orthodox people are losing faith, and God is calling others in. We should become serious about our faith.

And what of Russia today? There is a tremendous revival of interest in Orthodoxy after sixty years of deprivation. People are being baptized by the thousands; some don’t know why they are being drawn to the Church — the grace of God is operating.

What is happening in Russia today is an example and inspiration to us.

An example is Fr. Dimitry Dudko, who spent eight and a half years in a concentration camp, suffering much. He gave talks at Vigil services; his legs were broken; he was warned not to talk, because Orthodoxy is dangerous to the government. Other examples: Nun Valeria, Vladimir Osipov, Alexander Ogorodnikov. We should begin helping them: by prayer, by helping with “Orthodox Action,”<sup>[e]</sup> by sending letters (some addresses are in *The Orthodox Word*).

After the talk there was a lively discussion. At midnight Fr. Theodore and David took me to the train depot. The train was an hour late, and we drank coffee together before I left. I was deeply touched by this simple, struggling priest in our American wasteland. Fr. Theodore urged me to visit him again on the way back to California.

*December 8/21, Friday*

About 8:00 in the morning I was met by Fr. Laurence<sup>[f]</sup> with one of Bp. Laurus’ cars. As we drove the twenty miles to Jordanville I was somewhat apprehensive about what I would find there — perhaps some coldness and criticism. Fr. Laurence warned me on the way not to talk too much about Archbishop John, so it wouldn’t seem I was “bragging,” like Archbishop Andrew [Fr. Adrian] “bragged” about knowing Elder Nektary. This caused me more apprehension, even though I had not intended to speak of Archbishop John at all.

We arrived at Jordanville just before noon. I went first to Bp. Laurus’ office for a short talk, then to Fr. Vladimir<sup>[g]</sup> in the office. Then Br. Gregory showed me the church, and we came to the refectory a little late for lunch. The informality of the refectory was a little disconcerting at first, with everyone freely reaching for whatever he wanted, but I soon grew used to it. Fr. Panteleimon<sup>[h]</sup> and Fr. Anthony welcomed me very warmly, as did Fr. Gury and Fr. Germogen, and later Fr. Michael Pomazansky. There was only an inch or two

of snow at Jordanville, but the day of my arrival was quite cold—5 degrees. It began to warm up the next day, and the snow soon melted — unusual for this time of year.

After lunch and a rest (by order from Fr. Vladimir) I was taken on a tour of the monastery by Fr. Laurence — library, printshop, bindery, office, barn, vegetable storage, sheds, woodworking shop, seminary — a vast enterprise, with everyone knowing his place.

No one “falls over” me here; I am left pretty much to myself, except when someone wants to talk to me. I got some books from the bookshop today — free from Fr. Vladimir. In the evening, after supper, there was Compline and evening prayers with the moving veneration of all icons by the whole community. But in general I am not “overwhelmed” by the beautiful Jordanville chanting — it is as though I have heard it all through Fr. Herman’s accounts.

At night Fr. Peter Herrin left a note on my door to come and see him across the hall. He wants to come to us in Platina in order to “do” more for the Orthodox mission. He is still immature, but I understand his point well — here everyone knows his place and works hard at it, but no one gets very “inspired” or has the “excitement” we know in our missionary labors. I told him to pray and to write Fr. Herman.

I visited Fr. Macarius today — unfortunately, he is rather bored and sleepy; the “low key” atmosphere does not inspire him.

A Serb, Todor, visited me — he is a “zealot” who is interested in our monastery, but I rather discouraged him by telling him we eat three times a day, etc.

I had a little talk with Alyosha, a young idealistic seminarian from the Soviet Union; he wants to have *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* translated into Russian.

After evening prayers, I attended an English Akathist in the basement church, led by Fr. Ioannikios for a few converts.

*December 9/22, Saturday*

At 5:00 a.m. a sepulchral voice awakened: “Now is the hour of prayer; Lord Jesus Christ God, have mercy on us!”<sup>[i]</sup> Then a loud buzzer to make sure we get up. Although exhausted, I do make it to church. After morning prayers and Nocturnes I begin to venerate the icons with the monks [who are leaving], and have to be told by Vladika Laurus that these are the *working* monks, and I should stay.

Today I have talks with Vladika Laurus, Fr. Hilarion,<sup>[i]</sup> and Fr. Ioannikios. Our problems with the Boston line are discussed a little, but nothing is decided except that everyone wants to avoid fights. It’s obvious the Boston “pull” has ended here for most people, but one must still “take Boston into consideration” and watch what one says. One wishes there were more of an actual “Jordanville line” to answer Boston with — but perhaps the present atmosphere is about as good as one can expect...

At 4:00 p.m. there are Ninth Hour, Small Vespers, Compline, and the Rule before Communion. Fr. Ignaty has me read the Canon to the Guardian Angel.

After supper at 6:00, the Vigil begins at 7:00 p.m. I have been provided with Br. Eugene’s klobuk (which he laments he can’t wear yet) and join the right kliros, harmonizing with Fr. Ignaty (I can’t sing as high as he does). The Vigil ends at 11:00 p.m. The singing is excellent, but somehow, even participating in it, I am remote and detached from it. Apparently I’m just not a “people” person — my heart is in the quiet wilderness, though by my deeds I am no desert-dweller at all.

*December 10/23, Sunday*

After Nocturnes at 8:00, Liturgy begins at 9:30 with the meeting of the bishop. As usual, I become confused what to do and come out late to greet the bishop. I serve together with seven other priests.

Shortly after lunch I am to have a talk for novices and seminarians, but others show up also.

## *Talk to Jordanville Seminarians and Novices*

I see here future pastors, monks, zealous Orthodox Christians, and pilgrims. Who are you? What is your identity? You should be those who realize what Orthodox Christianity is all about and what it means to be Orthodox. Here no one is going to force any of you to have this realization — you have to do it yourself. It's good to think about this from time to time. Are you ready to do what St. Peter says: to give an account of your faith to those without? [\[k\]](#)

Once I was picked up on the road to Platina, and at the end of the ride I was asked: can you tell me what Russian Orthodoxy is in five minutes? Maybe you won't ever have precisely this experience, but something similar may happen to you — and you must be prepared to answer with something deeper than beards and black robes. Often people can find out about faith by very small things — you make the sign of the Cross before eating, or have an icon that someone sees — and people begin to ask you about faith.

Here are some questions you may be faced with in life:

1. Why shouldn't I commit suicide? Many young people now do, because there is no meaning in their life. Can you tell them the meaning of life? I know someone who gives answers to this question: the Buddhist abbess of Shasta Abbey — she is kind and compassionate and has a telephone “hot line” to save despairing people. Maybe you know about some externals of Christianity — but can you tell what you believe in such a way that someone else might be convinced and saved by it?—This is apologetics, a theology course which is taught in the seminary.

2. Why shouldn't I join a cult?—Zen, Jim Jones, Hare Krishna, the Moonies, etc. What's wrong with them? You will have a course in comparative religion — but you'll have to take it seriously in order to answer such questions. You'll have to know what is true and what is false

religion.

3. What's wrong with "born-again" or "charismatic" Christians? If people around you are against them, you'll say they are bad — but you'll never convince anyone who is involved in them unless you yourself [understand] what is wrong with them. Do you know that people like this — at least some of them — are hungering for Orthodoxy? I know some people like this who were so moved on hearing someone give an account of why he was Orthodox that they came to church and were converted.

In our times you can't just be Orthodox because your parents were, or because you live in an Orthodox community — you have to have a *conscious* faith and be ready at any time to give an account of it. And you have to be precise about what Orthodoxy is...

I hope you will concentrate especially on one thing: the *living Orthodox word*. I know Protestants who say: your Orthodox Faith is dead. Your services are in a foreign language, with empty rituals, and nobody prays in church. Of course, this is a superficial judgment — but it can be true of many of us.

St. John of Kronstadt is an example of someone who was constantly waking people up. He loved to read Canons and stop to comment on them. Everything he did was *living*.

The whole of salvation is given to us in our Orthodox Church services and prayers — but unless we put our hearts to it, these will be dead for us.

How are you to become informed? You must start paying attention, going deeper into what goes on around you. You have readings of Lives of Saints at meal times, telling about men who lived like angels. People in the world don't even hear of such things — but you have the opportunity if you open your ears.

St. John Chrysostom teaches that it is impossible to be saved without reading spiritual books. Of course, there are exceptions for those in prison camps and the like. But if you have the opportunity and don't use it, what

answer will you be able to give?

Which books?—Abba Dorotheus, *Unseen Warfare*, St. John of Kronstadt, Fr. Dimitry Dudko (*Our Hope*).

The world is waking up to the treasure of the Orthodoxy which we already have. St. Seraphim's prophecy of Russia's resurrection is beginning to happen today...

Toward the end of my talk Vladika Laurus entered together with the Russian writer [Vladimir] Soloukhin (author of *Dark Boards*, about ancient icons), who then gave a brief talk and answered questions. He is somewhat religious, sometimes goes to church in Moscow ("we are all baptized"), and spoke of changes for the better in Russia, which make possible his books (which are "secular" appreciation of religious things). His next book is *Optina Hermitage*, due to appear in Moscow in January; he has not read Kontzevitch's book, but plans to read it now. He ended his talk with good comments on modern art ("You can have a poem without rhyme, or without rhythm, or even without meaning — but not without all three in the same poem!") which show that Russian art, after all, has preserved something of the traditional principles of art....

*December 11/24, Monday*

... At 3:00 p.m., the first meeting of the Pilgrimage took place in the Seminary hall. I sat with Fr. Cyprian at the head table and translated his talk with questions and answers afterwards....

At the Vigil I was chief celebrant, which made me nervous as usual, and I made many mistakes. Truly, I am no "professional," and this is probably best for me. Some of the stichera were sung in English.

After the Vigil Fr. Ioannikios visited me in my cell (he had conducted me to the cemetery on Saturday) and told of some of his sorrows and difficulties. Truly he has a difficult time and is not getting the spiritual help he needs.



*December 12/25, Tuesday. The Feast of St. Herman*

After rather little sleep, I went at 7:00 in the morning to serve Proskomedie; [\[1\]](#) I was rather more apprehensive about serving than I was about speaking later on, but all went well and I didn't make too many mistakes.... Twelve priests served... The service was very triumphant, with a rousing sermon by Fr. Valery at the end, comparing St. Herman with St. Seraphim. During the sermon Vladika Laurus blessed me to bless the icons of St. Herman I had brought with me, and I distributed them to all the pilgrims when they came to kiss the Cross.

Shortly after lunch everyone met in the Seminary hall, and after Fr. George's introduction and Vladika Laurus' greeting words, I gave my talk ["Orthodoxy in the U.S.A." [\[m\]](#)][\[n\]](#)—mostly reading from my text, but also adding some things as I went along. About 130 people were present, and all listened quite attentively.

There was a lively discussion [afterwards] concerning how to preserve one's Orthodoxy, which showed a serious response from many. Need was expressed by several people for *Lives of Saints for children*, which perhaps seems to be one of the great needs of today.

After the discussion Fr. George described briefly our monastery and the good, quiet feeling he had there, and then showed a few slides he had taken on his visit. Fr. Vladimir Malchenko then showed slides of his visit to Mount Athos, especially of the abandoned Russian sketes which are falling into ruin. Vladika Laurus ended the Pilgrimage with words of thanks and appreciation — all in a very "low key." Several people came up to talk to me afterwards, including a young Protestant convert... Many books from the Monastery bookstore were on display, and some people took addresses from Keston College for writing to Orthodox people in Russia and Romania.

[Later] Fr. Valery took me to his cell (the "Metropolitan's Room") and talked with me about... the do-nothingness and bad feeling at the Synod. [\[n\]](#) This is truly a bad symptom of the state of our church life.

After supper and Compline, Br. Eugene came to visit me in my cell. He

seems sad, and expressed dissatisfaction at the looseness of life in the Monastery. I told him not to think too highly of himself.

Fr. Hilarion came by to ask me if he could print my talk in *Orthodox Life*, and then Fr. David, a young ryassaphore monk, came by for a long discussion on “fanaticism” and on making Orthodoxy accessible to ordinary Americans. We discussed the word “Christmas,” “label-readers” who warn you of the ingredients of cookies<sup>[o]</sup> (I told him it was all right to read labels for yourself, but not for others), the new “super-zealous” attitude of the Ipswich parish which is changing from Russian to Greek music because only it is “correct” and prayerful, etc. We agreed on almost everything — I was encouraged by his “normal” attitude towards church matters.

There were discussions in the refectory about my talk (I heard later) until late at night; evidently it roused much interest...

#### *December 13/26, Wednesday*

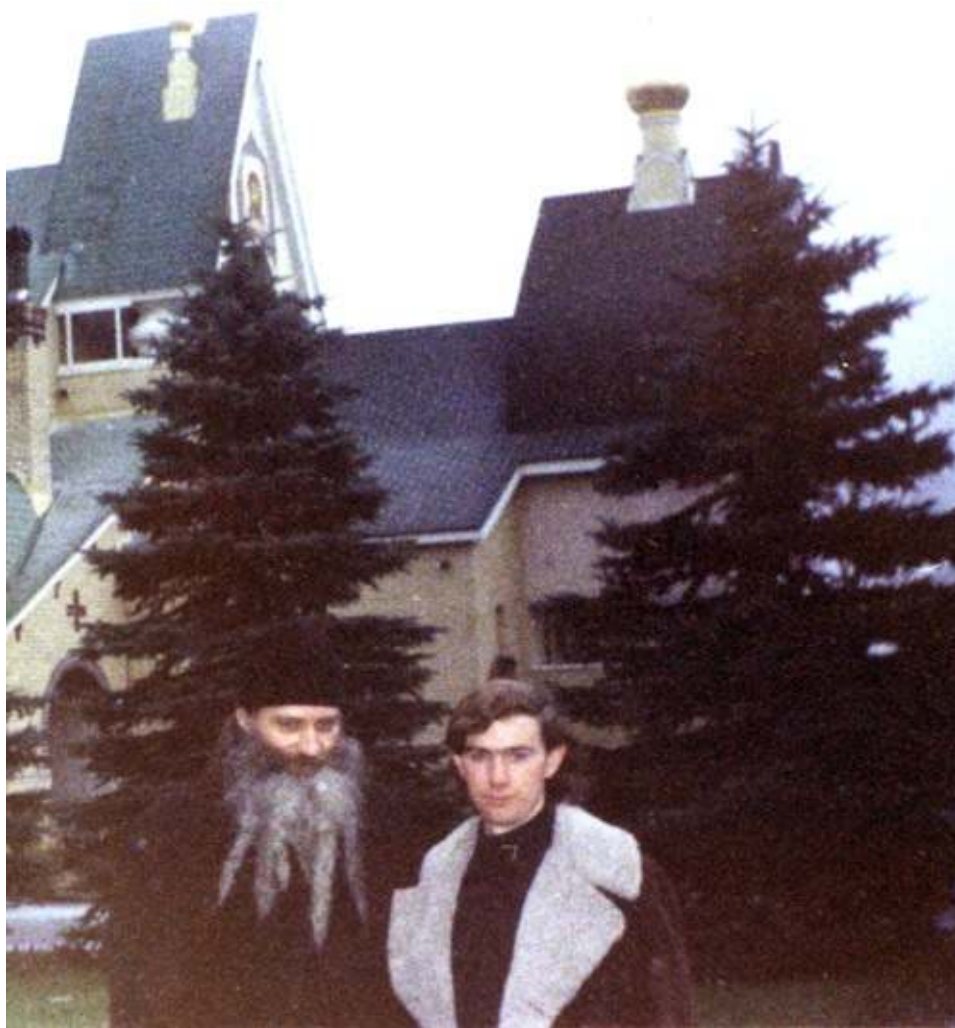
Having gone to bed at 1:00 a.m. I slept through the early service, intending to go to Liturgy. But somehow I thought the bells for Liturgy were the call to Matins, and I came to church only when everything was finished. I went to bid farewell to Vladika Laurus, to Fr. Hilarion, and others, and had a nice talk with Br. Thomas [Anderson] and Philip Graham, son of the deacon in Ipswich, who is troubled by the “super-correct” tendency in the parish. The young people here have a very *normal* view of these things — a good sign.

After serving a Litia<sup>[p]</sup> at the tombs of Metropolitan Anastassy and Archbishop Tikhon (I thought it was the sepulchre of Archbishop Averky, which I actually didn’t see), I left with my godfather Dimitry [Andrault de Langeron] for the next leg of my journey.

My stay at Jordanville was very rewarding, although I feel I would wither away in this atmosphere. Many here suffer from the “don’t do anything extraordinary” atmosphere — a certain deadness and boredom is present; and there is not enough inspiration or even appreciation of what is given here —

even the Lives of Saints are read at trapeza in such a matter of fact way that they are scarcely heard, and Vladika Laurus deliberately refuses giving comments or interpretations. People here are “carrying on,” and many survive this treatment and become fruitful; but I doubt I could survive it. Our mission in Platina is a different one.

Late in the morning Dimitry and I finally set out, going through the more scenic parts of New York State to New Diveyevo. We stayed only an hour here, and I briefly visited Mothers Seraphima, Gavril, Maria, and Sister Daria, and then the tomb of Vladika Andrew [Fr. Adrian]....



Fr. Seraphim with Br. Thomas Anderson at Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, New York, December 1979. *Photograph courtesy of Thomas Anderson.*

We arrived at Dimitry's home in Liberty Corner, a pleasant small town with a semi-rural atmosphere, just in time for supper. I met his family for the first time, including my godson Nicholas, who is retarded and is interested in nothing but the Church and becoming a monk. It is a good, pious family, with two normal Russian girls, their mother and grandmother.

After supper we went to the home of a fellow-parishioner not far away, where I served a short Moleben and gave a talk to the six children of the parish school on the idea of *podvig* or struggle, with examples taken from the Lives of St. Thomas the Apostle, the early martyrs, bishops, desert-dwellers, as well as contemporary missionaries in Uganda and suffering people in Russia. Then I told about our monastery, with special emphasis on the animals, which delighted the children as well as the adults (one of whom is an old man who knew Metropolitan Evlogy[\[q\]](#) and many church figures in Europe).

#### *December 14/27, Thursday*

This day I rested and wrote letters and postcards, not taking advantage of the offer of one man who was present the night before — to show me New York and the Synod [headquarters].

In the evening about twelve Russians came, now parishioners of the New Brunswick parish... I gave a talk to these people (in English) about *podvig*, about suffering Russia and its religious revival, about Fr. Dimitry Dudko, about Africa and its missions...

#### *December 15/28, Friday*

Another day of rest for me, and then, after noon, Dimitry and I set out for Pennsylvania to visit Fr. Demetrios Serfes, who had called me at Jordanville and wanted very much to see me. We spent the afternoon driving through the pleasantly rolling Pennsylvania countryside (also Amish country), stopping in Harrisburg (on the impressive Susquehanna River) to pick up my railroad ticket from New York to Cleveland, arriving at dusk at Fr. Demetrios' apartment in the

small town of Mount Holly Springs....

After supper with Fr. Demetrios (whom Dimitry had met before), we went at 7:00 p.m. to his church, a nicely converted Protestant church with good iconostasis and icons, for a Paraclesis — the Canon to the Mother of God, which we read alternately. Fr. Demetrios does not sing too well, so I sang the stichera to the Russian melodies, and the people sang responses in Greek style.

After the Moleben I gave a talk right in church for the fifteen or so people who came (including children). The title was: *Orthodoxy of the Heart*. I spoke, as usual, about struggle, about appreciating the treasure and the freedom we have, about suffering Russia and our opportunity to help the Orthodox Christians there (I handed out some names), about the dangers of our “spirituality with comfort,” about making our Orthodoxy something of the *heart*, not just the mind. There was a good response — people asked serious questions about how to preserve their Orthodox faith for themselves and their children. I talked also about the pitfalls of “correctness” and not applying Orthodoxy to our own level.

After leaving church, we returned to Fr. Demetrios’ apartment (which is just a mile or two from church) and finished our supper and discussion... Dimitry was tired and went to bed, and Fr. Demetrios and I continued talking until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning. He is much less simple than I had imagined and is quite aware of differences in the Church. He felt me out on a few points — I explained, for example, about Archbishop Theophan of Poltava...

*December 16/29, Saturday*

After a few hours’ sleep, we had breakfast at the “Holly Inn,” which is owned by Greek parishioners of Fr. Demetrios. Only towards noon did we finally depart, with good impressions of this little Orthodox outpost, for the trip to [Fr. Valery Lukianov’s church in] Lakewood [New Jersey]. We were delayed by traffic around Philadelphia, and finally arrived in Lakewood only around 4:00 in the afternoon. If I had come in the morning I could have spoken to the children in the school, but it didn’t work out that way.

The All-night Vigil began at 5:00 p.m., and I served and then helped Fr. Valery with confessions. This was the Sunday when everyone was supposed to receive Communion, so there were over a hundred coming to confession. A few had real problems, and I tried to help them as best I could. After service we had supper, and then to bed. Fr. Valery's welcome was most warm, and it was good to meet his Matushka and children also.

*December 17/30, Sunday*

In the morning I helped again with confessions, then concelebrated with Fr. Valery... I gave the sermon on the Gospel — many are called but few are chosen.

After Liturgy there was a meal in the immense church hall next door (where the church school also is located), and then I gave my talk.

I spoke first in Russian, telling of the history and the present state of our monastery, then spoke in English to the young people on treasuring and going more deeply into their faith. I gave examples of Orthodox young people who have gone astray, of other Orthodox young who sought for truth outside the faith and then returned, and then of Protestants who have been converted to Orthodoxy.

Then I finished with some words for the Russian-speaking adults...

After the talk a few people came up to talk to me. One of them has a son who has gone through Buddhism, drugs, etc., then wanted to return to Orthodoxy but was put off by Fr. N—— who told him he had to repent at least a year and a half before returning to Communion; and now he is studying at Oral Roberts University to become a missionary for the down and out such as he had been. I told the man to tell his son to visit us...

After a warm farewell from Fr. Valery, and accompanied by the ringing of the church bells by Fr. Valery's children (which was very touching), Dimitry and I left....

We arrived at Grand Central Station with fifteen minutes to spare; I spent

five minutes in this city [i.e., New York City] and had no particular desire to see more. I bade farewell to Dimitry... and set off on the return journey.

*December 18/31, Monday*

I arrived at 8:00 a.m. in Cleveland and barely got off in time with all my baggage. Fr. Theodore was there to meet me, and I spent the day with him at home. He is in a way an image of our Orthodoxy in America for me — a shy young man doing his duty as best he can, not expecting much, no great “missionary” but quietly standing for the Faith. May God grant him strength and spiritual fruit. His catechumen David spent most of the day with us, and I was able to say a little to him. At 6:00 p.m. we had the Vigil in English, and one family came besides David.

*December 19/January 1, Tuesday*

At 4:00 a.m. I celebrated the Divine Liturgy with Fr. Theodore as choir... It was a moving “catacomb” service which refreshed us both. In such small, unexpected ways as this perhaps we can keep alive our faith.

After a cup of coffee Fr. Theodore saw me off, and my pilgrimage was really at an end.

I caught my train on time in Chicago, after a wait of several hours in the Chicago depot. I ate in the diner with someone from Daytonville, but had no “missionary encounters.”

*December 20/January 2, Wednesday*

St. John of Kronstadt. A quiet day on the train writing this journal and starting an article on the Shroud of Turin. Dinner in the dining car, but only polite interest shown in Orthodoxy by my table companions — a woman from Watsonville with her son and daughter.

*December 21/January 3, Thursday*

The last day of my journey. The most impressive scenery of the whole way

is the California Sierras. The eastern side is filled with deep snow, but the western slope is warm (67 degrees) and bare. Perhaps the winter will not be so bad in Platina after all.

After passing through the Sierras, I *did have* a “missionary encounter.” A young, long-haired (but beardless) man named Rick sat next to me and said he wanted to “check me out” spiritually. He is from a Fundamentalist family in Chicago and has been living in Denver, going to meetings of a cult called “Urantia” — meditation, the search for truth, etc. He is going to San Francisco to go deeper into this cult and look for whatever else he can find spiritually. I warned him about going astray spiritually, told him a little about us and Archbishop John, and told him to go to Vladika John’s Sepulchre and to ask his help to find the right way. He said: “Why should I ask someone else when I can talk to God?” I replied: “Because he’s closer to God than you are and can help you.” I invited him to visit us and gave him the last two *Orthodox Words* I had: on Andreyev, and the 1978 Pilgrimage. He thanked me and left. A self-centered and independent young man; may the little seed I sowed sprout later and come to his rescue!

Conclusions from the trip: It was fruitful in contacts; there are quiet strugglers in many places, and it is good that we help each other.

*No one* has such opportunities as we do for printing what is needed for today’s Orthodox strugglers. We must do *more*. A few may join us; we should be better organized and prepared for them. Our sisters also must be better directed to a path of *fruitfulness*.

We *must* and are in a position to be leaders in *setting the tone* for our Orthodox strugglers today — a tone not of “correctness” but of heartfelt Orthodoxy. May God grant us the strength and wisdom!



## *St. Xenia's Sisters*

*O Xenia the glorious! As a wise virgin in the midnight of thy life, thou didst go out to meet Christ thy Bridegroom, carrying a lamp aflame with love of God.*

—Service to St. Xenia, stichera for Great Vespers

**I**N 1966, soon after the death of Archbishop John, Fr. Herman had been called into the Archbishop's room in St. Tikhon's Home in order to receive what Maria Shakhmatova had prepared for the Brotherhood from among the Archbishop's belongings. Opening the files, she said he could take whatever he needed for publication. There he found a manuscript of an unpublished Church service to the as-yet-uncanonized Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg, a renowned woman fool-for-Christ and miracle-worker of the eighteenth century. He and Fr. Seraphim had always felt especially close to Blessed Xenia, who had been a contemporary of St. Herman and might have even known him in St. Petersburg.

In 1968, in anticipation of Blessed Xenia's canonization, the fathers published the service to her in the original Slavonic. In the meantime they were recording miracles which were then being performed through her intercessions. The image presented itself to them of Blessed Xenia coming from the other world to help women of modern times — those righteous souls who suffer from today's nihilistic attack on traditional modesty and virtue. In 1971, when printing the recent miracles of Blessed Xenia in *The Orthodox Word*, Fr. Seraphim wondered how the Brotherhood could help inspire God-seeking American women with a life of struggle within the Orthodox Church. Then,

when such women began coming to the hermitage four or five years later, he began to pray fervently to Blessed Xenia on their behalf.

After Fr. Seraphim's ordination, Mary and Solomonina had continued to stay in the guesthouse down the hill from the monastery. They had given up their original plan of moving to the community next to New Diveyevo. In Platina they had found a place more akin to themselves as Americans, with more emphasis on the mission to American converts. They were very content to remain there and help the fathers with their publishing work by transcribing translations from cassette tapes. Their special assignment was to help prepare the Lives of the New Martyrs of Russia for publication, first in *The Orthodox Word* and eventually in a separate book. On June 14, 1977, Fr. Seraphim recorded, "Fr. Herman presented the idea to them of producing the book *Russia's Catacomb Saints*, but with the commitment to *finish* it."<sup>1</sup> As Mary later said, "this became something of a focus for us, for myself in particular."



Icon of St. Xenia, homeless wanderer and fool-for-Christ of St. Petersburg. Painted by Fr. Theodore Jurewicz and located at St. Xenia Skete.

Barbara, meanwhile, remained in the wilds of the desert, coming to the monastery periodically.

**A**T about this time, just as the fathers had anticipated, unedifying whisperings began to be spread about the fathers having a “harem” at Platina. By now such things did not seem to disturb Fr. Seraphim. “When I told Fr. Seraphim I’d been hearing gossip,” Fr. Alexey Young recalls, “his eyes ‘snapped’ and he said firmly, ‘Well, that’s just too bad. These women want something that the institution of the Church won’t — or can’t — give, and if we don’t give it, who will? So let the old ladies gossip; we’ll take that risk.’

“This showed me his indifference to the opinions of those who didn’t understand what he and Fr. Herman were all about in the first place — something I was often to see from him through the years.”<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the fathers knew that the present situation of the women, while being suitable and workable for a time, could not continue indefinitely, especially with the arrival of more brothers at the monastery. The women needed their own place, further away from the monastery, where they could live together and labor for God in common. Perhaps, like the St. Herman Hermitage itself, this community of a few lay laborers would one day grow into a monastic skete.

In January of 1978, the fathers began to look for a piece of property where the sisters might settle. They described their needs to a real estate agent, who offered them a parcel in the area of the old lumberjack settlement of Wildwood, about twelve miles west of the monastery, where there were still some houses, a general store, and the “Wildwood Saloon.” The place appealed to the fathers, but when Fr. Seraphim presented the down payment, the man said it had been sold to an early bidder. The fathers thought this might be a sign that the venture was not pleasing to God, but then the man offered another plot in the Wildwood area,

further away from the village, which he said would be even better suited to them. The fathers went there on February 11, and found it to be exactly what they had in mind. Three feet of snow lay on the ground, and as Fr. Seraphim later said, it looked to him like “a winter paradise.”<sup>3</sup> At a higher elevation than Platina, the secluded spot had tall fir and cedar trees instead of pine and oak. Water was supplied by a spring and a small stream.

The land was bought. The sisters moved there in the summer, living under the open sky and cooking over a campfire while they built a small house-chapel to live in. A clearing surrounded by fir trees served as an outdoor chapel, in which the fathers served the Divine Liturgy occasionally. In time a foundation was laid for a church building.

Leading a semi-monastic life in Wildwood, the sisters maintained a slightly abridged cycle of services, cut their own firewood, and had a garden, chickens and goats. Soon they were joined by another young woman from Gospel Outreach, Nina, who had been converted to Orthodoxy through Mary and Solomonia’s example.

On September 11/24, 1978, as the sisters were finishing their house-chapel, Blessed Xenia was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.<sup>[a]</sup> Fr. Seraphim translated the complete service to her that had come from Archbishop John’s archives, and the fathers printed it in *The Orthodox Word* with increased prayers that she intercede before God for the sisters.



Fathers Seraphim and Herman, Fr. Alexey Young, Reader Vladimir Anderson, sisters, and pilgrims at the first house-chapel built at St. Xenia Skete, August 1979.

When Fr. Herman went to Mount Athos in 1979, one of his aims was to speak to Fr. Nikodim about the sisters, and to seek his counsel about women's monasticism in America. On hearing Fr. Herman's account, Fr. Nikodim encouraged him to lay the foundation for monastic life at the new skete. He gave his own monastic mantle, *kamilavka*,<sup>[b]</sup> and *paramon*<sup>[c]</sup> for the tonsure of the first nun, stating that no hindrance should be taken seriously, since having a place whereon the Jesus Prayer is performed brings light to the world. He said that the women's skete should preferably be in the form of a simple, unobtrusive Athonite kalyve.

**I**N serving as the spiritual fathers of the sisters' community, Fathers Seraphim and Herman discovered that the common problems in a women's community were somewhat different than those in a men's. The women were generally stronger and more mature than the men who came to the Platina monastery. The men surpassed the women in crudeness, insensitivity and faintheartedness; but the women had their own demon: remembrance of wrongs.

The men were likely to lash out when someone or something displeased them, while the women were likely to keep it inside and dwell on it. The men would have their immature fits and soon get over them, but the women would have their prolonged “cold wars.”

On November 18, 1979, Fr. Seraphim gave the women a talk in which he tried to establish them more firmly in monastic principles: the basic Christian principles by which they could war with and overcome the demonic forces and their fallen human nature. Many of his comments were drawn from the counsels of Abba Dorotheus, which the sisters had been reading. “You have to conform your life more to the monastic ideal,” he told them. “This is what gives meaning to your life and will make you fruitful.

“Up to now you’ve lived much on self-will. This has been necessary because only gradually has each of you seen more clearly what she wants; and each of you has drawn nearer to desiring the monastic ideal by seeing the fruitlessness of self-will. Monastic life, however, doesn’t come by itself, but by responsible, hard work, by concentration and concern for what you’re doing.

“You *must* now work harder at these monastic principles:

1. *Love and forgiveness.* Try not to offend each other, and if you are offended — then forgive. The sun must not set on your anger or coldness. (According to the teaching of St. John Cassian, one is not allowed to pray in church until one has forgiven the others in the monastery.) If cheerfulness isn’t there, then at least realize that *you* are to blame for it, and don’t chew over the causes for it — it’s *your* cold heart. The very fact of your thinking ‘who’s to blame’—means that you’re trying to justify yourself.

2. *Openness to each other.* Know what each other is doing. Start the day’s task in the morning and ask for a *blessing for* anything not already directly assigned.

3. *Common life*—services and meals together. The new chapel here must have the daily cycle of services. Your cells and cell rules (of prayer) will be separate; but basic, everyday life is common. Everyone should sing in the choir.

4. *Caring*—doing work well. Abba Dorotheus says valuable things on the proper attitude towards work. There should be a sense of urgency about work.

5. *Deep humility about ourselves*. We should think: ‘I am fallen, Lord have mercy on me.’—And we should help others in the same state as we are.”<sup>4</sup>

As Fr. Seraphim wrote in his Jordanville diary a month after he gave this talk, “The sisters must be better directed to a path of *fruitfulness*.” First, however, there was a problem to be solved, a problem deeper than the mere petty squabbles between them. Although the fathers had tried to establish them in a common life in Wildwood, these different women, it seemed, had different callings. Barbara, of course, absolutely wanted desert monasticism. Mary wanted to dedicate her life entirely to God and assumed this would mean becoming a nun, but at this point she had not made a final decision regarding monasticism. Nina said she did want monasticism, but she was not nearly as determined as Barbara. And Solomonia was not sure whether her calling lay in becoming a nun or getting married.

Due to what she saw as the unsettledness and lack of common monastic aim at the Wildwood skete, Barbara had remained out in the woods, staying occasionally at the “Abbot Nazarius cell” which had been built for her in Etna. Solomonia, meanwhile, moved out of the skete and began working as a nurse in Redding, from where she continued to help the fathers with *The Orthodox Word*.

The fathers had to pray about what to do next. If the Wildwood skete became a monastic one, they could not leave a devoted, energetic Orthodox laborer like Mary out in the cold and risk wasting her talents and potential to serve God. Fr. Seraphim had always placed much hope in her. Back in 1976, two days after she had first visited the St. Herman Monastery, he had written to Fr. Alexey Young about her: “She’s very much in Barbara McCarthy’s spirit, brimming with life, not satisfied with ‘correctness,’ wanting to give herself entirely to serving God — but not capable of fitting into the ‘ordinary’ Orthodox situations of today.... Outwardly she has much to learn, but her heart is deeply



Orthodox — it’s just a matter of her finding her place to bear fruit.”<sup>5</sup>

In the meantime, the Brotherhood’s missions were growing, demanding a unifying voice, a publication that would set the tone for a movement of American Orthodox converts. As we have seen, the fathers had long ago envisioned a Patristically oriented, popular-level newspaper called *Orthodox America*, which would report on inspiring Orthodox events and activities in America and give Orthodox Americans of all backgrounds a place to share their ideas and dreams.



Fathers Seraphim and Herman with Mary Mansur in front of the Redding Public Library, November 1980. *Photograph by Fr. Vladimir Ivlenkov.*

By the middle of 1980, the Platina fathers felt that the time had come to implement their idea — for the sake of the American Orthodox mission and, on a more local level, for the sake of Mary. They informed Archbishop Anthony about what they wanted to do, and the Archbishop gave his blessing. On the Feast of All Saints of Russia in June, after serving a Sunday Liturgy and performing two baptisms at the Redding parish, Fr. Seraphim had a talk with Fr. Alexey Young and Mary about the newspaper. Mary remembers him posing to her the question: “Have you ever heard of *Orthodox America*?” He asked Mary



and Fr. Alexey to take on the project together, and they readily agreed. The projected publication would both replace and incorporate Fr. Alexey's *Nikodemos*, which Fr. Alexey felt he could no longer keep going single-handedly due to his added pastoral burdens.

After the talk Fr. Seraphim served a Moleben, and the birth of *Orthodox America* was publicly announced.

The first issue came out in July. "As editor," recalls Fr. Alexey, "I would provide editorials and other articles and generally oversee the paper, while Mary, who was given the position of co-editor, was to be responsible for materials on the persecuted Church, for translations, and for putting the paper together."<sup>6</sup>

Working almost full-time at her new obedience, Mary put into it all her zeal for serving God. Since there was no electricity at the skete in Wildwood, at first Mary traveled about with a backpack and electric typewriter, producing several issues in the homes of various friends. Then, in the fall, the Platina fathers paid rent for a trailer in the town of Platina, which became the headquarters of the newspaper and the new home of Mary.

As with *Nikodemos*, the Platina fathers were always close by to help in the work of *Orthodox America*. Fr. Alexey recalls: "The trepidation that tempered our enthusiasm at the outset of the venture gradually dissipated under the steadfast support and encouragement of both fathers. They in turn were delighted by the newspaper's popularity. Among the first subscribers was Fr. Seraphim's non-Orthodox mother — which made him very happy."<sup>7</sup>

Soon after Fr. Seraphim's repose, Fr. Alexey wrote of him in the newspaper: "As our readers know, Fr. Seraphim was a contributing editor: in addition to editorials and signed articles, he produced many translations (for which he never took credit) and unsigned articles.<sup>[d]</sup> More importantly, he was the constant *conscience* of our staff, encouraging us and urging us on, but also gently reminding us when we had (in one of his favorite expressions) 'missed the point.' And what was the point? *To bring basic Orthodox Christianity to as many Americans as will listen*. Nothing more: an apparently simple task; but

also, *nothing less*: a labor of gigantic proportions. He believed in us, stubborn and stupid as we usually were, and more than that, he believed in the importance and value of this work and had great expectations for it.”<sup>8</sup>

**I**N the August of 1980, after the St. Herman Summer Pilgrimage had ended, the fathers wished to tonsure Barbara McCarthy into monasticism, and to formally dedicate the Wildwood skete to St. Xenia. In the afternoon of the feast-day of the Dormition of the Mother of God, August 15/28, Fr. Herman announced that the tonsure was to take place the following day.

The rite of tonsure took place in Wildwood before the Divine Liturgy, with many pilgrims in attendance. Since the church was still unfinished, the services took place in the outdoor chapel. It was moving for the pilgrims to behold the monastics performing their rite in the forest, before a large log cross and the icon of the Saviour that had been given as a blessing of Elder Michael of Valaam.



Fr. Seraphim with brothers, sisters, and pilgrims at one of the three crosses that the fathers erected alongside the road leading to the St. Herman Monastery and over Noble Ridge, 1981.

When Sister Barbara came forward to be tonsured, Fr. Seraphim covered her with his mantle, thus becoming her “elder from the mantle.” In making her a full (stavrophore) nun, Fr. Herman gave her the name Brigid, after the first woman monastic saint of the land of her Irish ancestors. Before this, Fr. Seraphim had always encouraged her to get in touch with her Western Orthodox roots by reading the Lives and writings of the Western (especially Celtic) Saints and Fathers.

At the same service, Nina was tonsured a ryassaphore nun — a preparatory stage before the full tonsure. The rite finished, the nuns were to remain, according to tradition, for three days and nights in church — in this case, an outdoor forest church — praying for the world.

Fr. Seraphim became the father confessor of the new nuns of St. Xenia Skete. A week after their tonsure he returned to the skete, and noted in his Chronicle that he found the mothers “calm and happy.”<sup>9</sup>

**U**NDER Mother Brigid’s direction, and with the clarity of a monastic aim established, the skete thrived. The nuns finished building a wooden church after the tradition of the Russian Northern Thebaid, where they held the daily cycle of services and where Fathers Seraphim and Herman came to serve Liturgy. In 1981 a seventeen-year-old Orthodox convert came to the skete determined to dedicate her life to God, and other young women converts came later. They built little cells for themselves out of logs from the forest; they supported themselves by making prayer-ropes, and continued growing a garden and raising chickens and goats. When they had to go to the post office and general store, they would walk through the meadows and woods, carrying home their mail and provisions on the back of a pack-goat.

Some visitors did not understand why normal, college-age American women would decide to embrace such a life. More than once the sisters were

referred to as “the campfire girls.” A local newspaper, trying to create a sensational, exposé news item, ran an article with the headline: “Seventeen-Year-Old Girl — Forced to Build Her Own Dwelling.” But the St. Xenia sisters, like the wise virgins of the Gospel parable, continued to wait patiently on the Lord, unshaken by the opinions of this world.

In spite of the difficulties they encountered in the early years, the sisters knew that St. Xenia was taking care of her convent. On one occasion the Saint was even seen roaming the woods and blessing the property.

Fr. Seraphim also did not cease to look after the sisters who had been placed under his care. Five years after his repose, women pilgrims gathered at the skete in large numbers in order to attend the St. Herman Summer Pilgrimage. Many of them had to sleep outdoors, and some, having never slept in the forest before, were afraid of the rattlesnakes, scorpions, bears, and mountain lions that inhabited the area. One night at 2:15 a.m., a young woman pilgrim (E. W.) who had camped near the skete’s “Dormition cell” clearly saw a tall monk, with a long gray beard and a tall black klobuk, walking slowly up the path about five feet away from her. He was walking with his head bent down, and she did not speak to him because she assumed he was praying. She noticed that his feet made no sound as he walked on the brush-covered path. A few minutes earlier another woman (C. D.), in a different part of the skete, saw the same monk, whom she recognized as Fr. Seraphim.

Up to today the skete has remained, in Fr. Seraphim’s words, a “paradise” for those with eyes to see, with holy shrines drawing people to prayer beneath tall fir trees. The sisters are daily reminded of the presence of St. Xenia through the skete’s icon of her, depicting her in a kerchief and in her husband’s uniform. Next to it is an icon of St. Ioasaph of Belgorod, one of the last saints canonized in pre-Revolutionary Russia, which Fr. Nikodim had sent as a blessing to the sisters. Years ago the fathers entrusted the sisters to St. Ioasaph as their heavenly guardian, and together with St. Xenia he protects American women who come to the skete with prayer.





The church at St. Xenia Skete, December 1992.



St. Xenia Skete, 1991.

Both during Fr. Seraphim's lifetime and after, the St. Xenia Skete has published ascetic writings, including a series of books called the "Modern Matericon": the Lives of women desert-dwellers, fools-for-Christ, holy nuns,

and founders of convents.<sup>[e]</sup> The sisters have presented these texts to American women as a means of raising their awareness of traditional monasticism and of the Orthodox principles of spiritual life. As if in gratitude to Fr. Nikodim, they have also prepared two volumes of the Lives of contemporary Athonite elders.

In the decades following Fr. Seraphim's repose, many of the nuns who were tonsured at St. Xenia Skete have started monastic communities in other parts of the country: Alaska, Missouri, Indiana, and Arizona. Young American women — all of them converts to Orthodoxy — continue to enter these convents, receive their monastic formation and tonsure there, and join the original St. Xenia sisters in offering their entire lives to God.

**I**N today's society, where the very concept of Christian virtue and purity is being held up to mockery, the existence of desert refuges for women becomes increasingly important. In them the successors of Christ's Myrrh-bearers can take on the daily warfare of acquiring purity of heart, striving to become fit habitations for the grace of the Holy Spirit. In the words of Fr. Adrian, they can "hold what is God's in honor," and preserve at all costs what women have always preserved for the Church: faithfulness to the Heavenly Bridegroom, Christ. Bearing one another's burdens and accepting with love all who come to them, they can provide a haven of salvation for young women who find their way out of the moral quagmire of our times.

One of the original sisters of St. Xenia Skete has said: "At no point in the history of our skete, no matter who has been here, has the life been easy. It's always been a struggle. But the common zeal for what Mother Brigid originally envisioned — the desert, the common life, the mission to publish ascetic texts — was what carried us through. Not much is given to women in our spiritually destitute age, but still we have the flame of the desert impetus of our righteous women forebears. In order to keep that flame alive, we must fight against unseen legions and our own fallen nature. With pain of heart and labor, we must pursue the desert vision."

# PART XI





Old Russian icon of the Judgment, showing the twenty stations of the aerial toll-houses.  
*Photograph courtesy of A. Dean McKenzie, John F. Waggaman, and the Timkin Art Gallery.*



## *The Soul After Death*

*No matter how absurd the idea of the toll-houses may seem to our “wise men,” they will not escape passing through them.*

—St. Theophan the Recluse<sup>1</sup>

A FEW weeks before his death, when discussing the book of Genesis with a group of young students, Fr. Seraphim began by asking, “Why should we study a book like this? Why shouldn’t we just be concerned to save our souls, instead of thinking about these things, like what’s the world going to be like at the end, or what was it like at the beginning?... Isn’t it safer to just occupy ourselves with saying our prayers and not think about these big subjects?”

Fr. Seraphim gave several answers to this question, concluding with the most important of all. “Our Christianity,” he said, “is a religion which tells us about what we are going to be doing in eternal life. It is to prepare us for something eternal, *not of this world*. If we think only about *this* world, our horizon is very limited, and we don’t know what’s after death, where we came from, where we’re going, what’s the purpose of life. When we talk about the *beginning* of things, or the *end of* things, we find out what our whole life is about.”<sup>2</sup>

This statement, as simple as it is, not only reflects the leitmotif of Fr. Seraphim’s life, but also explains why he studied and wrote about certain subjects more than others. From his youth he had been driven to penetrate into the meaning and ultimate designation of man’s existence, and this was why he sought so intensely to know the beginning and end of all things. It was what

gave the apocalyptic tenor to his writings, what made him choose his subjects for *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God* and *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, as well as for the lectures he gave toward the end of his life concerning the end of the world. It was not coincidental that, during the St. Herman Pilgrimages, he chose to lead participants through a detailed study of the prophetic books of Genesis, Daniel, and the Apocalypse.

But while all these studies and writings delved deeply into the beginning and end of the whole world, there was another dimension of Christian eschatology that they did not directly touch: the end of each man's earthly existence. Fr. Seraphim was not to neglect this dimension in his writings, either. The last book that he completed before his death was about death itself and the life beyond, the thought of which had been his constant companion since his college days. The writing of this book came about in the following way.

In 1976–77, due in part to new techniques of resuscitating the “clinically dead,” the subject of life after death suddenly became one of widespread popularity in the Western world. As Fr. Seraphim later noted: “The book that kindled the contemporary interest in this subject was published in November 1975, and was written by a young psychiatrist in the southern United States (Dr. Raymond A. Moody, Jr., *Life After Life*). He was not then aware of any other studies or literature on this subject, but even as the book was being printed it became evident that there was already great interest in this subject and much had already been written about it. The overwhelming success of Dr. Moody's book (with over two million copies sold) brought the experiences of the dying into the light of widespread publicity, and in the four years since then a number of books and articles on these experiences have appeared in print.” Reputable scientists and physicians either authored these books or gave them their wholehearted endorsement.

During this surge of public interest, the Platina fathers read in the main journal of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America a letter expressing interest in Dr. Moody's book. The letter writer asked for an Orthodox

perspective on the phenomenon described in the book, but was told by the editors that a clear teaching on this subject had never been developed in Christianity. In another place, a priest of the Greek Archdiocese told the author of an after-death book that Orthodoxy does not have “any specific idea of what the hereafter will be like.”<sup>3</sup>

The fathers were appalled to read such statements. “The whole of Orthodox Christianity is geared toward the life beyond death,” Fr. Herman said to Fr. Seraphim, “and these Orthodox people say that they don’t even really know what is there! What in the world are we doing, then?”

The fathers also saw the danger involved in vague and indefinite “Orthodox” statements on the afterlife. If Orthodox believers are led to think that their Faith does not have an answer to their questions on the afterlife, they will turn to those outside who *do* claim to have an answer. And, more often than not, they will receive the explanations offered by occultism or by modern parapsychology.

At the monastery, the fathers themselves began to receive letters from people asking for an Orthodox explanation for the seemingly inexplicable phenomena appearing in contemporary books; and this again emphasized to the fathers the need of making clear the Orthodox teaching. Fr. Herman began to urge Fr. Seraphim to write an article, giving him for his Lenten spiritual reading the third volume of the writings of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *A Homily on Death*. Reading this book (which only existed in Russian) in his forest cell, Fr. Seraphim was stunned. He told Fr. Herman that he found it “overwhelming,” that he had never realized there was *such* a depth of Orthodox teaching on the afterlife. He asked Fr. Herman if, in response to the current need, he should just translate this book of Bishop Ignatius for publication; but Fr. Herman replied that no, something more contemporary was needed. He encouraged Fr. Seraphim to take Bishop Ignatius’ teachings and apply them to all the modern “after-death” experiences, and also to all the occult literature to which people were now turning in search of explanations. He went to town and bought for Fr. Seraphim

all the contemporary “after-death” literature he could find. Fr. Seraphim set out to work, and soon came to Fr. Herman with a long list of important aspects of the subject which he felt should be addressed. It became clear to both fathers that not just an article, but a whole book, was called for.

**I**N 1977 Fr. Seraphim began to serialize his book, entitled *The Soul After Death*, in the pages of *The Orthodox Word*. In presenting the ancient Patristic teaching on the life beyond, he drew from a wealth of sources spanning two millennia. These came first of all from the *ascetic* tradition of the Church: the lives of holy hermits and desert-dwellers whose spiritual eyes were open, enabling them to mystically perceive the realm beyond death. Numerous early Holy Fathers wrote extensively on the afterlife, including St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory the Great (the Dialogist), St. John Cassian, Blessed Augustine, and St. John Climacus. Closer to our own time, more teachings on this subject have come from new Fathers who were tied to the ascetic tradition: St. Theophan the Recluse, St. Ambrose of Optina, Archbishop Andrew of New Diveyevo, the Serbian theologian Fr. Justin Popovich, Fr. Michael Pomazansky, and especially St. John Maximovitch. Also, the ancient services of the Church contain many prayers which shed light on what the soul expects to experience at death.

Fr. Seraphim’s chief source, however, remained St. Ignatius Brianchaninov. We have said that Fr. Seraphim did for the twentieth century what St. Ignatius had done for the nineteenth. In this case, just as St. Ignatius once found it necessary to expose nineteenth-century spiritualism in light of true Christian teaching on the afterlife, so now Fr. Seraphim felt the need to confront twentieth-century parapsychology in the same way.

In making use of non-Orthodox “after-death” literature as well as some occult texts on the subject, Fr. Seraphim stated that he was following St. Ignatius’ example of “presenting a false teaching as fully and fairly as needed to expose its falsity so that Orthodox Christians will not be tempted by it.” Like St. Ignatius, Fr. Seraphim found that “non-Orthodox texts, when it is a matter of

actual *experiences* that are being described (and not mere opinions and interpretations), often provide striking confirmations of Orthodox truths. Our chief aim in this book has been to present as detailed a *contrast* as necessary to point out the full difference that exists between the Orthodox teaching and the experience of Orthodox saints on the one hand, and the occult teaching and modern experiences on the other. If we had merely presented the Orthodox teaching without this contrast, it would have been convincing to few save the already-convinced; but now, perhaps, some even of those who have been involved in the modern experiences will be awakened to the vast difference between their experience and genuine spiritual experience.”

“However,” Fr. Seraphim was careful to point out, “the very fact that a good part of this book discusses *experiences*, both Christian and non-Christian, also means that not everything here is a simple presentation of the Church’s teaching on life after death, but also contains the author’s interpretations of these various experiences. Concerning these interpretations, of course, there is room for a legitimate difference of opinion among Orthodox Christians. We have tried as far as possible to present these interpretations in a provisional way, without trying to ‘define’ such matters of experience in the same way that the Church’s general teaching on life after death can be defined. Specifically, regarding occult ‘out-of-body’ experiences and the ‘astral plane,’ we have simply presented these as they have been described by participants in them, and compared them to similar manifestations in Orthodox literature, without trying to define the precise nature of such experiences, but we have accepted them as real experiences wherein actual demonic forces are contacted, and not as mere hallucinations. Let the reader judge for himself how adequate this approach has been.”<sup>4</sup>

**A**s he had in *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, Fr. Seraphim presented all the facts and evidence first, and only then drew his conclusions. In Chapter One he began by detailing some aspects of today’s “after-death” experiences — the “out-of-body” experience of the “meeting with others,” the

“beings of light,” etc.—which have been reported to occur in the first minutes or hours of “clinical death” when the soul is still hovering close to earth, before the body is resuscitated by doctors. These experiences he compared with references from Western and Eastern Patristic writings and Lives of Saints, as well as an account by a nineteenth-century Serbian Orthodox Christian who had been “clinically dead” for thirty-six hours.

In order to provide an understanding of modern encounters with “beings of light,” and to see what these “beings” may be, Fr. Seraphim devoted Chapter Two to examining the Orthodox doctrine of angels, both holy and fallen. As opposed to the modern idea — based on the seventeenth-century philosophy of Descartes that everything outside the material realm belongs simply to the realm of “pure spirit” — Fr. Seraphim showed that angels, while indeed spiritual in relation to man, are actually material in relation to God, Who alone is wholly immaterial.<sup>5</sup> Having described experiences of angels and demons as found in Orthodox literature, he wrote: “Until quite recently it was perhaps only a few ‘old-fashioned’ or ‘simple-minded’ Orthodox Christians who could still believe in the ‘literal truth’ of such accounts; even now some Orthodox find them hard to accept, so pervasive has been the modern belief that angels and demons are ‘pure spirits’ and do not act in such ‘material’ ways. Only with the greatly increased demonic activity of recent years do these accounts once again begin to seem at least plausible.”<sup>6</sup>

In Chapter Three, entitled “Appearances of Angels and Demons at the Hour of Death,” Fr. Seraphim wrote about how “the newly deceased is usually met by two angels.... The mission of these angels is to take the soul of the newly reposed on its journey into the afterlife. There is nothing vague about them, either in appearance or action; having a human appearance, they firmly grasp the ‘subtle body’ of the soul and conduct it away.”<sup>7</sup>

Chapter Four, “The Vision of Heaven,” explored the experiences of non-Orthodox Christians, pagans, unbelievers, and even suicides who claimed to have entered a kind of paradisaal realm in the first minutes after clinical death. “It

is clear,” Fr. Seraphim concluded, “that we must be extremely cautious in interpreting the ‘visions of heaven’ that are seen by dying and ‘dead’ people... Most, perhaps indeed all, of these experiences have little in common with the Christian vision of heaven. These visions are not spiritual, but *worldly*. They are so quick, so easily attained, so common, so earthly in their imagery, that there can be no serious comparison of them with the true Christian visions of heaven in the past (some of which will be described below)....

“Nevertheless, it cannot be doubted that these experiences are extraordinary; many of them cannot be reduced to mere hallucinations, and they seem to occur outside the limits of earthly life as generally understood, in a realm somewhere between life and death, as it were.”<sup>8</sup>

The next two chapters, consisting almost entirely of Fr. Seraphim’s translations of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov’s writings, set forth the Christian teaching on this realm which the soul first enters after death. But in order to understand this realm, Fr. Seraphim stated, “we must look at it in the whole context of man’s nature. We shall have to know of man’s nature before his fall, the changes it underwent after the fall, and the capabilities man has for entering into contact with spiritual beings.”<sup>9</sup>

In Chapter Five, “The Aerial Realm of Spirits,” Fr. Seraphim quoted St. Ignatius to explain how man, having originally been capable of the sensuous perception of spirits, has generally lost this capability as a result of the fall. Since the fall, men are capable of seeing spirits only by “a certain alteration of the senses, which is accomplished in a way inexplicable to a man.” By a man’s own means (by God’s allowance, but not by His will), a man can enter into communion with fallen spirits; but he cannot enter into communion with angels except by God’s will. “It is not characteristic of holy angels to take part in something not in agreement with the will of God, something not pleasing to God.”<sup>10</sup>

There is not anything especially important about the sensuous perception of spirits: “Sensuous perception without spiritual perception,” St. Ignatius writes,

“does not provide a proper understanding of spirits; it provides only a superficial understanding of them. Very easily it can provide the most mistaken conceptions, and this indeed is what is most often provided to the inexperienced and to those infected with vainglory and self-esteem. The spiritual perception of spirits is attained only by true Christians, whereas men of the most depraved life are the most capable of the sensuous perception of them.”<sup>11</sup>

“This teaching of Bishop Ignatius,” Fr. Seraphim commented, “written over a hundred years ago, could well have been written today, so accurately does it describe the spiritual temptations of our own times, when the ‘doors of perception’ (to use the phrase popularized by one experimenter in this realm, Aldous Huxley) have been opened in men to a degree undreamed of in Bishop Ignatius’ day.”<sup>12</sup>

Chapter Six, “The Aerial Toll-houses,” dealt with the Patristic teaching of the Particular Judgment that commonly occurs three days after death. About this, St. Ignatius wrote: “A judging and distinguishing are required to define the degree of a Christian soul’s inclination to sin, in order to define what predominates in it — eternal life or eternal death. The unhypocritical Judgment of God awaits every Christian soul after its departure from the body, as the holy Apostle Paul has said: *It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment* (Heb. 9:27).

“For the testing of souls as they pass through the spaces of the air there have been established by the dark powers separate judgment places and guards in a remarkable order. In the layers of the under-heaven, from earth to heaven itself, stand guarding legions of fallen spirits. Each division is in charge of a special form of sin and tests the soul in it when the soul reaches this division. The aerial demonic guards and judgment places are called in the Patristic writings the *toll-houses*, and the spirits who serve in them are called the *tax-collectors*.”<sup>13</sup>

Fr. Seraphim quoted many Patristic writings, Church services, and Lives of Saints which contained references to the “toll-houses” and “tax-collectors.”



Among the Holy Fathers he cited was St. John Chrysostom, who, in describing the hour of death, taught: “Then we will need many prayers, many helpers, many good deeds, a great intercession from angels on the journey through the spaces of the air. If when travelling in a foreign land or a strange city we are in need of a guide, how much more necessary for us are guides and helpers to guide us past the invisible dignities and powers and world-rulers of this air, who are called persecutors and publicans and tax-collectors.”<sup>14</sup> Turning to the Divine services of the Church, Fr. Seraphim quoted such prayers as the following, from the *Octoechos* by St. John Damascene: “O Virgin, in the hour of my death rescue me from the hands of the demons, and the judgment, and the accusation, and the frightful testing, and the bitter toll-houses, and the fierce prince, and the eternal condemnation, O Mother of God”<sup>15</sup>

Here Fr. Seraphim, knowing the modern rationalist emphasis on the “literal” meaning of texts and the “realistic” or this-worldly understanding of events described in Scripture and Lives of Saints, had to speak some words of caution. Continuing to quote from Orthodox writers both ancient and modern, he indicated how the teaching on the “toll-houses” should be regarded: “No one aware of Orthodox teaching would say that the toll-houses are not ‘real,’ are not actually *experienced* by the soul after death. But we must keep in mind that these experiences occur not in our crudely material world; that both time and space, while obviously present, are quite different from our earthly concepts of time and space; and that accounts of these experiences in earthly language invariably fall short of the reality. Anyone who is at home in the kind of Orthodox literature which describes after-death reality will normally know how to distinguish between the spiritual realities described there and the incidental details which may sometimes be expressed in symbolic or imaginative language. Thus, of course, there are no visible ‘houses’ or ‘booths’ in the air where ‘taxes’ are collected, and where there is mention of ‘scrolls’ or writing implements whereby sins are recorded, or ‘scales’ by which virtues are weighed, or ‘gold’ by which ‘debts’ are paid — in all such cases we may properly understand these images to

be figurative or interpretive devices used to express the spiritual reality which the soul faces at the time.” As an angel instructed St. Macarius of Alexandria when he had just begun telling him about the toll-houses: “Accept earthly things here as the weakest kind of depiction of heavenly things.”<sup>16</sup>

In Chapter Seven of his book, Fr. Seraphim examined “out-of-body” experiences described in ancient and modern occult literature—*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and the writings of Theosophy, Emanuel Swedenborg, and Robert Monroe — and related these in a striking way to what he had already said about the “after-death” experiences described by contemporary scientific authors. These latter, “after-death” experiences, he said, “are, purely and simply, ‘out-of-body’ experiences, something well known especially in occult literature, which have been happening with increasing frequency in recent years to ordinary people who are not at all involved in occultism. These experiences, however, in actual fact tell us almost nothing of what happens to the soul after death, except that it does survive and is conscious.

“The realm into which the soul immediately enters when it leaves the body and begins to lose contact with what we know as ‘material reality’ (whether after death or in a simple ‘out-of-body’ experience) is neither heaven nor hell, but an invisible realm close to earth which is variously called the ‘After-death’ or ‘Bardo plane’ (*Tibetan Book of the Dead*), the ‘world of spirits’ (Swedenborg and spiritism), the ‘astral plane’ (Theosophy and most of occultism), Locale II (Monroe)—or, in Orthodox language, the aerial world of the under-heaven where fallen spirits dwell and are active in deceiving men for their damnation. This is not the ‘other world’ that awaits man after death, but only the invisible part of *this* world that man must pass through to reach the truly ‘other’ world of heaven or hell. For those who have truly died, and are being conducted by angels out of earthly life, this is the realm where the Particular Judgment begins at the aerial ‘toll-houses,’ where the spirits of the air reveal their real nature and their hostility towards mankind; for all others, it is a realm of demonic deception at the hands of these same spirits.

*“The beings contacted in this realm are always (or almost always) demons, whether they are invoked by mediumism or other occult practices, or encountered in ‘out-of-body’ experiences. They are not angels, for these dwell in heaven and only pass through this realm as messengers of God. They are not the souls of the dead, for they dwell in heaven or hell and only pass through this realm immediately after death on their way to judgment for their actions in this life....*

“It may be asked: What of the feelings of ‘peace’ and ‘pleasantness’ which seem to be almost universal in the ‘out-of-body’ state. What of the vision of ‘light’ which so many see? Are these only deceptions also?

“In a sense, it may be, these experiences are ‘natural’ to the soul when separated from the body. Our physical bodies in this fallen world are bodies of pain, corruption, and death. When separated from this body, the soul is immediately in a state more ‘natural’ to it, closer to the state God intends for it; for the resurrected ‘spiritual body’ in which man will dwell in the Kingdom of Heaven has more in common with the soul than with the body we know on earth.... In this sense, the ‘peace’ and ‘pleasantness’ of the out-of-body experience may be considered real and not a deception. Deception enters in, however, the instant one begins to interpret these ‘natural’ feelings as something ‘spiritual’—as though this peace were the true peace of reconciliation with God, and the ‘pleasantness’ were the true spiritual pleasure of heaven. This is, in fact, how many people interpret their ‘out-of-body’ and ‘after-death’ experiences, because of their lack of true spiritual experience and awareness.”<sup>17</sup>

Here Fr. Seraphim was again pointing out what he had written many years earlier for *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God* about the confusion between the “psychic” and the “spiritual.” Even before his conversion to Orthodoxy, he had become aware through the writings of René Guénon that this was a source of great deception in our materialistic age.

Fr. Seraphim followed his discussion of deceptive experiences with a chapter on “True Christian Experiences of Heaven.” In setting forth the Patristic

understanding of the “location of heaven and hell,” he wrote: “Heaven is certainly a place, and it is certainly *up* from any point on the earth, and hell is certainly *down*, in the bowels of the earth; but these places and their inhabitants cannot be seen by men until their spiritual eyes are opened, as we have seen earlier with regard to the aerial realm. Further, these places are not within the ‘coordinates’ of our space-time system: an airliner does not pass ‘invisibly’ through Paradise, nor an earth satellite through the third heaven, nor can the souls waiting in hell for the Last Judgment be reached by drilling for them in the earth. They are not *there*, but in a different *kind* of space that begins right here but extends, as it were, in a different direction.”<sup>18</sup> This is especially intriguing in view of the modern scientific theory that there are many more dimensions to reality than the three which we commonly know. As Fr. Seraphim indicated, “Modern scientists themselves have come to admit that they are no longer sure of the ultimate nature and boundaries of matter, nor where it leaves off and ‘psychic’ reality begins.”<sup>19</sup>

Fr. Seraphim told how numerous incidents in the Lives of Saints show this other kind of space “breaking into” the “normal” space of this world. Citing accounts of true experiences of heaven from several Saints’ Lives, he saw certain characteristics that they had in common: “It is an ascent; the soul is conducted by angels; it is greeted by and joins the company of the inhabitants of heaven.” From other accounts, “more important characteristics are added in this experience: the brightness of the light of heaven; the invisible presence of the Lord, Whose voice is heard; the Saint’s awe and fear before the Lord; and a tangible sensing of Divine grace, in the form of an indescribable fragrance. Further, it is specified that the multitudes of ‘people’ encountered in heaven are (in addition to the angels who conduct souls) the souls of martyrs and holy men.”<sup>20</sup>

In comparing such accounts to contemporary “after-death” literature, Fr. Seraphim noted some essential differences between them. The most striking difference, he said, is that in the true experiences of heaven “the soul is *always*

conducted to heaven by an angel or angels, and never ‘wanders’ into it or goes of its own will or motive power.... In the contemporary experiences the soul is most frequently offered a choice to remain in ‘paradise’ or go back to earth; while the genuine experience of heaven occurs not by the choice of man but only at the command of God, fulfilled by His angels. The common ‘out-of-body’ experience of ‘paradise’ in our days has no need of a guide because it takes place *right here*, in the air above us, still *in this world*; while the presence of the guiding angels is necessary if the experience takes place *outside* this world, in a different kind of reality, where the soul cannot go by itself. (This is not to say that demons cannot masquerade as ‘guiding angels’ also, but they seldom do so in today’s experiences.)”<sup>21</sup>

If today’s “after-death” experiences, in which a person is revived after only a very short period of “clinical death,” can usually be identified with occult “out-of-body” states rather than true experiences of heaven, what is their meaning for contemporary mankind? In Chapter Nine, devoted exclusively to this question, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “The marked increase in ‘other-worldly’ experiences today is doubtless one of the signs of the approaching end of this world. St. Gregory the Great, after describing various visions and experiences of life after death in his *Dialogues*, remarks that ‘the spiritual world is moving closer to us, manifesting itself through visions and revelations.... As the present world approaches its end, the world of eternity looms nearer.... The end of the world merges with the beginning of eternal life’ (*Dialogues* IV, 43).

“St. Gregory adds, however, that through these visions and revelations (which are much more common in our time than they were in his) we still see the truths of the future life imperfectly, because the light is still ‘dim and pale, like the light of the sun in the early hours of the day just before dawn.’ How true this is of today’s ‘after-death’ experiences! Never before has mankind been given such striking and clear proofs — or at least ‘hints’—that there is another world, that life does not end with the death of the body, that there is a soul that survives death and is indeed more conscious and alive *after* death. For a person with a

clear grasp of Christian doctrine, today's 'after-death' experiences can only be a striking confirmation of the Christian teaching on the state of the soul immediately after death; and even today's occult experiences can only confirm for him the existence and nature of the aerial realm of fallen spirits.”<sup>22</sup>

For Chapter Ten, the last chapter of his book, Fr. Seraphim presented a summary of the Orthodox teaching on the fate of the soul after death. This summary consisted of an article by Archbishop John Maximovitch, into which Fr. Seraphim inserted explanatory titles, comments, and comparisons, together with quotes from various Holy Fathers. Here it was explained in detail how the dying person's spiritual vision often begins even before death; how the soul encounters spirits after death and inclines toward those more akin to it; how it usually remains close to earth for two days before moving into other spheres; how on the third day it experiences the Particular Judgment while passing through the aerial “toll-houses”; how it is then conducted through heaven and hell by angels; how, usually on the fortieth day, it is assigned to the place where it will await the Resurrection; and, finally, how it will one day face the Last Judgment, at which time this whole corruptible world will come to an end, the everlasting Kingdom of Heaven will dawn, and all departed souls will be joined to their resurrected bodies.

**W**HILE it was being serialized, *The Soul After Death* elicited a wide response from Orthodox readers. Some sent their own accounts of after-death experiences which they had heard about firsthand. Fr. Seraphim published a few of these, both in *The Orthodox Word* and in the completed book.

The initial Orthodox response to *The Soul After Death* was virtually one hundred percent positive. Helen Kontzevitch, lending the weight of her Patristic authority, went so far as to state: “The book is more than remarkable. It is a theological classic. This book should be used as a textbook in theological, academic institutions. I am delighted with it in the greatest way.”

Nevertheless, there was a notable exception to such positive response — an

exception that indicated to Fr. Seraphim just how needed his book had been. Even as *The Soul After Death* was being serialized, the editor of an Orthodox magazine in Alaska, *The Tlingit Herald*, began to print articles attacking the teaching set forth there. “These attacks,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “were directed, not only against the teaching of the present book, but also against the teaching set forth in the publications of Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville... against the sermon of Archbishop John Maximovitch, ‘Life After Death,’ which appeared in *The Orthodox Word*, 1971, no. 4, and is reprinted above in Chapter Ten of this book; against the whole teaching of Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov which has inspired this book; and in general against the teaching which has been set forth in so many Orthodox sources in the past several centuries and expresses the living piety of the Orthodox faithful even today.”<sup>23</sup>

Treating traditional Orthodox sources as “fantastic literature and spiritual delusion,” Fr. Seraphim’s critic was led to radically reinterpret Patristic texts and develop self-contradictory theories of his own. As Fr. Seraphim wrote in an appendix to his book entitled “Answer to a Critic” (in which he refrained from mentioning the man by name): “The critic is so opposed to the activities of the soul in the other world, especially after death, such as are described in numerous Lives of Saints, that he ends by teaching a whole doctrine of the soul’s ‘repose’ or ‘slumber’ after death — a device which renders all these activities simply impossible! He states: ‘In the Orthodox understanding, at death, the soul is held to be assigned to a state of repose by an act of the Will of God, and enters into a condition of inactivity, a sort of sleep in which it does not function, hear or see’; the soul in this state ‘can know nothing at all, nor remember anything at all.’

“Even among the heterodox, such a doctrine of ‘soul slumber’ is to be found in our times only in a few of the sects which are far from historical Christianity (Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists); how astonishing it is, therefore, to find it here proclaimed so categorically as *Orthodox!*...

“There would be little point in searching in the Fathers for specific ‘refutations’ of this doctrine, for it was seldom taken seriously enough in the



Church to require a specific refutation. In [Chapter Ten](#) above we have cited the teaching of St. Ambrose that the soul is ‘more active’ when freed from the body after death, St. Abba Dorotheus’ statement that the soul ‘remembers everything at its exit from this body more clearly and distinctly once freed from the earthliness of the body,’ and St. John Cassian’s teaching that the soul ‘becomes yet more alive’ after death; and similar statements could be found in many Fathers. But such citations are only a small part of the Orthodox evidence that refutes the theory of ‘soul-slumber.’ The whole Orthodox piety and practice of prayer for the dead surely presupposes that souls are ‘awake’ in the other world and that their lot can be alleviated; the Orthodox calling on the saints in prayer, and the saints’ response to this prayer, is unthinkable without the conscious activity of the saints in heaven; the immense Orthodox literature on the manifestations of saints after death cannot simply all be cast away as ‘fables.’ If the critic is right, then the Church has certainly been ‘wrong’ for quite a few centuries.”<sup>24</sup>

The critic’s greatest wrath was directed against the Orthodox ascetic teaching on the toll-houses encountered by the soul after death; “and one suspects,” noted Fr. Seraphim, “that it is his desire to destroy the very concept of them that has led him into such a self-contradictory theory as that of ‘soul-slumber.’” The critic caricatured the teaching on the toll-houses, portraying them in an over-literal, this-worldly manner and then dismissing them as “hallucinations,” the product of “Oriental astrology cults.” As Fr. Seraphim again pointed out, however, “It is obvious to all but the youngest children that the name of ‘toll-house’ is not to be taken literally.... The accounts themselves, however, are neither ‘allegories’ nor ‘fables,’ but straightforward accounts of personal experiences in the most adequate language at the disposal of the teller. If the descriptions of the toll-houses seem too ‘vivid’ for some, it is probably because they have not been aware of the actual nature of the unseen warfare waged during this life. Now too we are constantly beset by demonic tempters and accusers, but our spiritual eyes are closed and we see only the *results* of their



activities — the sins into which we fall, the passions which develop in us. But after death, the eyes of the soul are open to spiritual reality and see (usually for the first time) the actual beings who have been attacking us during our lifetime.

“There is no paganism, no occultism, no ‘oriental astrology,’ no ‘purgatory’ whatever to be found in the Orthodox accounts of the toll-houses. These toll-houses teach us, rather, of the accountability of each man for his own sins, of the fact that at death there is a summing up of his success or failure in battling against sin (the Particular Judgment), and that the demons who have tempted him throughout life make their final assault upon him at the end of his life, but have power only over those who have not sufficiently fought the unseen warfare in this lifetime.

“As for the literary forms in which they are expressed, the toll-houses appear alike in the Divine services of the Church (the Church’s poetry), in the ascetic writings of the Fathers, and in the Lives of Saints. No Orthodox person reads any of these texts in the crudely literal way the critic has read them, but approaches them with respect and the fear of God, looking for spiritual benefit. Any spiritual father who has tried to educate his spiritual children in the age-old tradition of Orthodox piety can testify to the beneficial effect of the Orthodox sources which mention the toll-houses.”<sup>25</sup>

Fr. Seraphim mentioned how his and Fr. Herman’s elders in the Faith had taught about the toll-houses. Fr. Adrian, for example, during the Sacrament of Confession used to take his spiritual children through the sins of the twenty toll-houses, having them check their consciences at each step. Fr. Herman remembered having learned much from this about the nature of sins, including subtle sins which he might otherwise not have known about. For example, when cleansing people’s consciences at the “toll-house” of stealing, Fr. Adrian pointed out that this sin included not only the stealing of objects, but also the taking of ideas from others and making as if they were one’s own.

Fr. Seraphim also recalled what Bishop Sava had said about the tollhouses during the funeral of Archbishop John: “All present felt they were witnessing the

burial of a saint; the sadness at parting from him was swallowed up by the joy of acquiring a new heavenly intercessor. And yet several of the hierarchs present, especially Bishop Sava of Edmonton, inspired the more fervent prayer of the people by citing the ‘fearful toll-houses’ through which even this holy man, this miracle of God’s grace in our times, had to pass. No one present thought that our prayers alone would save him from the ‘tests’ of the demons, and no one pictured in his mind an exchange of ‘tolls’ at some ‘houses’ in the sky; but these appeals helped to inspire the fervent piety of the faithful, and doubtless this helped him to get through these toll-houses. The holy man’s own life of good deeds and almsgiving, the intercession of the saints whom he glorified on earth, the prayer of the faithful which was actually another product of his love for them — doubtless all this, in a way known to God, and which we need not search out, helped him to repel the assaults of the dark spirits of the air. And when Bishop Sava made a special trip to San Francisco to be present at the services for the fortieth day after Archbishop John’s repose, and told the faithful: ‘I have come to pray together with you for the repose of his soul on this significant and decisive fortieth day, the day when the place is determined where his soul will dwell until the general and terrible Judgment of God’—he was again inspiring the prayer of the faithful by citing another belief of the Orthodox teaching on life after death. Such things are seldom heard by Orthodox Christians nowadays, and therefore we should all the more treasure the contact we still have with such representatives of the Orthodox ascetic tradition.”<sup>26</sup>

Besides the rationalistic, this-worldly approach to spiritual texts characteristic of modern man, Fr. Seraphim discerned another, deeper reason why people nowadays (including people who frequently speak about Orthodox “spirituality”) would be inclined to overlook or reinterpret the Orthodox teaching on the afterlife: “The Orthodox teaching on life after death is rather severe and demands a very sober response on our part, full of the fear of God. But mankind today is very pampered and self-centered and would rather not hear of such stern realities as judgment and accountability for sins. One can be much more

‘comfortable’ with an exalted teaching of ‘hesychasm’ that tells us that God is not ‘really’ as stern as the Orthodox ascetic tradition has described Him, that we ‘really’ need have no fear of death and the judgment it brings, that if only we occupy ourselves with exalted spiritual ideas like those in the *Philokalia* (dismissing as ‘allegories’ all the passages on the toll-houses)<sup>a</sup> we will be ‘safe.’...

“The true Orthodox teaching on life after death, on the other hand, fills one precisely with the fear of God and the inspiration to struggle for the Kingdom of Heaven against all the unseen enemies who oppose our path. All Orthodox Christians are called to this struggle, and it is a cruel injustice to them to dilute the Orthodox teaching to make them more ‘comfortable.’ Let each one read the Orthodox texts most suited to the spiritual level at which he presently finds himself; but let no one tell him that he can dismiss as ‘fables’ the texts he may find ‘uncomfortable.’ Fashions and opinions among men may change, but the Orthodox tradition remains ever the same, no matter how few may follow it. May we ever be its faithful children!”<sup>27</sup>

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM’S critic had come not from among the so-called “liberal” Orthodox thinkers (who, even if they found the Orthodox ascetic tradition on the afterlife hard to swallow, were wise enough scholars not to question the overwhelming testimony for it in Patristic and liturgical texts), but from among the “reformers on the right.” *The Tlingit Herald*, where the critic’s articles had appeared, was published by a parish of the super-correct faction. But even the leaders of that faction were wise enough not to attack the Orthodox ascetic tradition publicly; and that is why they let the “critic” take the risk for them. As one of these priests of the faction admitted to Fr. Seraphim, the “critic” was only the “man-in-the-middle,” taking the ideas of others and expressing them in his own way. “I think he is like a ‘barometer’ of the opinions of our ‘Greek-convert’ wing,” Fr. Seraphim wrote in a letter. “Some of the things which... others *believe* but would not *say* except within their own ‘party,’ he

speaks out for everyone to hear.”<sup>28</sup> The critic went so far as to dare to ridicule, not only the teaching on the “toll-houses,” but even the whole Orthodox practice of praying for the dead. And in the end it was he rather than the others who was reprimanded by Orthodox bishops for teaching things contrary to the Church.

After Fr. Seraphim’s “Answer to a Critic” was published in *The Orthodox Word*, the critic retaliated with a thirty-seven-page “Open Letter” to Fr. Seraphim, accusing him repeatedly of deliberately “tricking” his readers, and saying that both he and St. Ignatius Brianchaninov had willfully attempted to distort the Scriptures: “Bishop Ignaty did not accept the teaching of the Scriptures and the Church... and evidently, neither do you.”

Fr. Seraphim had no interest in replying to this “Open Letter” and thus in entering into public debate with his critic. “His whole polemical approach to Church questions,” he wrote, “is profoundly distasteful to us — as, I am sure, it is to almost all the clergy in our Church.... I must say that for my part, although I realize [the critic’s] articles were occasioned by my own articles (they will bear my signature in the book form), I do not regard this ‘debate’ as primarily a personal one at all. For one thing, it hasn’t really been a ‘debate’ at all, since all the attacking is coming from his side; and for another, the attack is not really against me, since the basic part of my articles is simply a retelling of the teaching of Archbishop John Maximovitch, Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, Bishop Theophan the Recluse, etc.—but rather an attack against this teaching itself.”<sup>29</sup>

Thus, apart from his “Answer,” Fr. Seraphim published nothing more in response to the attacks. This “Answer” itself proved to be such a valuable document, so full of further references from the Holy Fathers, Lives of Saints, and Church services on the state of the soul after death, that the Orthodox believer may well be glad that Fr. Seraphim’s book did not go without protests. As Fr. Seraphim put it: “Perhaps a ‘positive’ side of [the critic’s] articles is that they have caused us to present the Orthodox teaching with maximum clarity, keeping in mind any possible distortions.”<sup>30</sup> The critic’s articles also helped

induce Fr. Michael Pomazansky to write a valuable article on the Patristic teaching of the toll-houses, which was published in both Russian and English.<sup>[31](#)</sup>

**T**HE SOUL AFTER DEATH was first published in book form in 1980. Its presentation proved convincing to truth-loving readers because it reflected, not what people might “want” to believe about the afterlife, but what had been revealed by God to the Holy Fathers of the Church. Reading the teaching of the Holy Fathers on the future life is like reading their teaching on Genesis: a whole mystical realm opens up. It is a realm far beyond the experience, not only of scientific researchers, but also of advanced occultists who have made innumerable “out-of-body” journeys. The occultist relies on his own and (often unknown to him) demonic powers; while the Christian ascetic is guided and informed by the immeasurable God Who brought into being both the visible and invisible worlds.

The Orthodox teaching set forth in *The Soul After Death* produces a powerful impression on the human soul. “True experiences or visions of life after death,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “generally have the effect of shaking one to the depths of one’s being and (if one has not been leading a zealous Christian life) of changing one’s whole life to make preparation for the life to come.”<sup>[32](#)</sup> By not at all diluting the teaching and experience of the Orthodox Church to cater to the modern self-pampered mentality, Fr. Seraphim has created the same effect on people through his writings. Since his death, thousands of people have been changed forever by the sobering truth contained in his book, becoming inspired not only to repent and fight the unseen warfare, but also to pray more fervently for the dead. The following account was sent to the St. Herman Monastery in August of 1991 by a Greek Orthodox doctor of veterinary medicine. Among other things, her story sheds some light on the state of Fr. Seraphim’s own soul after death:

I bought a copy of Fr. Seraphim Rose’s *Soul After Death* from Epiphany

Book Service. From the minute I started reading this book, I couldn't put it down; it was everything my mind and soul were thirsting for, the depth of the mysteries of Orthodoxy. I devoured the book and praised God that He allowed me to find the truth. The truth of which every Orthodox Christian should know about life and death. A truth that my own Greek Orthodox Church [in America] refuses to expound on.

Most of that week was spent reading, and experiencing celestial joy just to know the truth at last. I told my husband David that now we would know how to provide for our loved ones after death. My husband was anxiously waiting for me to finish the book so he could read it. When I finally finished reading the book, I told my husband that no matter where in the world Fr. Seraphim was, we were going to find him, speak to him, and be blessed by him.

I wrote a letter to Fr. Seraphim Rose at the monastery in Platina, but received an answer telling me that Fr. Seraphim was with the Lord. At the same time we received a brochure about the Pilgrimage and Theological Course to be given at the monastery in August, and so with heavy hearts we went to the monastery to visit Fr. Seraphim's grave and learn more about him. We stayed the whole week of the Pilgrimage, and what we experienced during that week was spiritual joy, God's agape (love), and a glimpse of heaven. This was the otherworldliness that was so struggled for by ascetics and saints throughout history, and we were blessed just being there to experience this magnificent state.

Ever since I found out that Fr. Seraphim had died of a blood coagulation condition, I knew in my heart that he could have been helped so much more with natural therapies than with what conventional medicine had offered him. I was grieving that he didn't have to die at the height of his spirituality, especially when we needed him so much, and he had touched so many hearts. We desperately needed him here, on the earth.

On the second night of the Pilgrimage, I saw Fr. Seraphim Rose in a

dream. He came to me, wearing his black *ryassa* [robe], looking very humble and clasping his hands in front of him. His face radiated tranquility and deep concern. As soon as I saw him, I said, “Father Seraphim, I wanted to help you so much; you didn’t have to die; why didn’t you wait for me to help you? I know I could have helped you with natural therapies.... They would have saved you, I know it!” My heart was sick, and my voice to him was desperately crying. He looked at me with such forgiving love and grace, and said to me, “You couldn’t help me, nothing could help me.... I’m where I want to be now, I’m with God.” As he started disappearing before my eyes, I kept repeating, “We love you, we love you so much.”

It’s a joy being there at the monastery. Fr. Seraphim’s presence can be felt there.... Coming to the monastery allows us to step into the REAL world — the only world that truly counts.

God bless you all,  
Joanne Stefanatos, D.V.M.

**T**HE SOUL AFTER DEATH is now in its seventh English printing, and continues to be in demand throughout the English-speaking world. As with Fr. Seraphim’s other writings, however, the book has had by far its greatest impact in Russia, where after Fr. Seraphim’s death various Russian translations of it were distributed in typewritten manuscripts. Even while writing the book, Fr. Seraphim had known that the ascetic teaching on the “severe” realities of the afterlife would find its best reception in places where people experienced the severe realities of the present life. In his conclusion he had written: “The suffering Church of Russia — probably due to its sufferings as much as to its innate conservatism — has preserved the traditional Orthodox attitude towards the other world much better than other Orthodox Churches today.”<sup>33</sup>

In the summer of 1989 a monk from the St. Herman Monastery made a pilgrimage to Valaam Monastery in Russia, where he unexpectedly came across a copy of *The Soul After Death*. This was the first time anyone from the

Brotherhood had gone to Russia. (Fr. Herman, it will be remembered, had been raised in Latvia.) At that time there were still no monks on the island of Valaam. The monastery had been closed since 1940, had fallen into decay, and had just begun to be restored, being inhabited by villagers and restoration workers. As the monk who went there recalls:

“Hardly had I walked a hundred yards in the direction of the main monastery, when I saw a young bearded man walking straight at me. Coming close, he asked anxiously, ‘Are you from Platina?’ ‘Yes,’ I replied, taken aback. He breathed a sigh of relief and happiness, and kissed me three times. ‘Come with me,’ he said.

“As we were walking I asked the young man how he knew about Platina. ‘We have the works of Fr. Seraphim Rose,’ he said.

“He took us through the gate of the monastery and then turned. We went through a door I had seen many times in photographs, then climbed some steps and entered a hallway. It was dark and in a state of dilapidation; debris was everywhere. Suddenly he opened a door, and we entered a clean, bright room.

“Three more young Russians were in the room. On walking in, the first words we heard were, ‘This is a real monk’s cell!’ They were spoken by Irina, a woman — probably in her twenties — who was standing by what must have been the kitchen of this tiny domicile. We were offered to sit down and have some tea. ‘We are very poor,’ Irina apologized. ‘We don’t have much. But here is some bread made right here on Valaam.’

“We learned that the young Russian man who had brought us here was named Alexey. The other two people in the room — a young man and woman — said little, either out of shyness or an inability to speak English, but seemed to take great delight in what was happening.

“As Irina prepared the tea, Alexey placed before me a book, carefully bound in gray leather. On the cover, embossed in gold, were the words ‘The Soul After Death’ in Russian. A Russian translation of Fr. Seraphim’s book! I opened it to find that it was all typed by hand. It was so lovingly done — I was



deeply touched. These poor Russians could not afford — or were not allowed — to print and photocopy such books, so they had to pass them on to each other in typewritten copies.

“A thought came to me, and I pulled an envelope out of my bag. ‘Here is a hair from Fr. Seraphim’s beard,’ I said. I had planned to leave it in St. Herman’s Field [on Valaam], but now I had found a better place for it. At once their faces lit up. They sighed with awe and gathered near, treating as a holy relic what I had brought. Having crossed themselves and kissed it, they put it tenderly away.”<sup>34</sup>

By the following summer, there was already a brotherhood of Russian monks living on Valaam. At this time another monk of the St. Herman Monastery went on pilgrimage there, where he bore witness to the continued veneration of Fr. Seraphim. He was given a wooden Paschal egg painted by people on Valaam, depicting one of the Valaam sketes with Fr. Seraphim standing in the foreground.

In May of 1991, two portions of *The Soul After Death* were printed in one of the leading Soviet magazines, *Science and Religion*. In earlier years this magazine had been used as a vehicle to undermine faith in God; now it was being used to provide the clear Orthodox Christian answer to the contemporary “after-death” experiences which science was at a loss to explain adequately.

Later in 1991, right before the collapse of the Soviet regime in Russia, a Russian edition of *The Soul After Death* was finally published there in mass quantities; and since then many other editions have come out. Besides these Russian editions, the book has now been published in Greek, Serbian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Georgian, Latvian, Polish, Italian, French, German, and Malayalam (south Indian); and it is currently being prepared for publication in Chinese and Indonesian.

After Fr. Seraphim’s repose, more criticisms of the Orthodox teaching contained in his book have been published. In particular, some Orthodox Christians continue to express strong disagreement with the teaching on the toll-

houses. Most of these criticisms have come from people living in America; very few have come from people living in Orthodox lands, where *The Soul After Death* is generally held in high regard. The reason for this was ascertained in advance by Fr. Seraphim himself: the lifestyle in America is so pampered and self-centered that the Orthodox teaching on the afterlife seems too severe by contrast, whereas in Orthodox lands people have a more sober outlook on life and thus have little or no problem in accepting the Orthodox teaching on death.

During Fr. Seraphim's lifetime, the main defenders of the Orthodox teaching contained in his book were his fellow members of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, especially Fr. Michael Pomazansky. After his death, other expositions of this teaching were made by members of the Orthodox Church in Greece, and also by members of the Greek Archdiocese of America — the same Church whose formerly vague pronouncements on the afterlife had helped induce Fr. Seraphim to write his book in the first place. In 1984 the Greek-American church writer Constantine Cavarinos published a treatise in Greece, *The Future Life According to Orthodox Teaching*, in which he stated that the teaching set forth in Fr. Seraphim's book is "the traditional Orthodox teaching."<sup>35</sup> Several years later three more good books on the subject were published in Greece, all of which present the Orthodox Patristic teaching on the toll-houses (in Greek, *telónia*): *The Mystery of Death* by Nikolaos P. Vassiliadis (1993),<sup>36</sup> *After Death* by Archimandrite Vasilios Bakogiannis (1994),<sup>37</sup> and *Life After Death* by Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos of Nafpaktos (1994).<sup>38</sup> All of these books were translated and published in English shortly after their original publication in Greek. Then, in 1998, an entire book of Orthodox Patristic references to the toll-houses was compiled in Greek: *Do the Toll-Houses Exist?* by Christos Constantine Livanos.<sup>39</sup> The following year, St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery in Florence, Arizona, published an English translation of the counsels of its renowned Elder, Ephraim (formerly the Abbot of Philotheou Monastery, Mount Athos), in which the Orthodox teaching of the toll-houses was set forth unequivocally. In this soul-profiting book, entitled *Counsels from*

*the Holy Mountain*, it is stated: “Although some modern theologians doubt the existence of the toll-houses, toll-houses are mentioned either explicitly or implicitly by countless saints, including St. Paul, St. Makarios of Egypt, St. Basil the Great, St. Ephraim the Syrian, Abba Isaiah, St. Hesychius the Presbyter, St. Diadochos of Photiki, St. Theognostos, St. Athanasios the Great, St. John Chrysostom, St. John of the Ladder, St. John of Damascus, St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, St. Theophan the Recluse, St. John of Kronstadt, and St. John Maximovitch.”<sup>40</sup> Fr. Seraphim would have been deeply gratified to hear such pronouncements coming from members of the Greek Orthodox Church, and especially of the Greek Archdiocese of America.

**W**HILE mentioning the impact of *The Soul After Death* on the world, we should not neglect to consider its impact on Fr. Seraphim’s own soul. Archbishop John had written his article on life after death (the one that Fr. Seraphim had used to summarize the Orthodox teaching) only a year before his own death. And now his disciple Fr. Seraphim had completed a whole book on the subject only two years before dying. Such was the Providence of God. One cannot but think that their writing on this subject served as a preparation to their entrance into the life beyond. It is like people who, before embarking to a far country, learn as much as possible about the country from the writings of those who have been there. When they arrive at their destination, they already know much of what to expect — although the reality proves infinitely greater and more varied than any description can convey.

Today Fr. Seraphim is in that far country. And the book he left behind is his offering to all people, to lead them out of the darkness of this fallen world and into *a better country, that is, a heavenly one; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city* (Heb. 11:16).

## *Theology Above Fashions*

*The preaching of the Apostles and the doctrines of the Fathers sealed the one Faith of the Church; and, wearing the garment of truth woven from the theology from on high, She, the Church, rightly divides and glorifies the great mystery of piety.*

—Kontakion of the Holy Fathers of the Ecumenical Councils

*In the time ahead the devil will be using every chance to get true Orthodox Christians upset at each other over matters big and (mostly) small. We must firmly try not to take the bait.*

—Fr. Seraphim Rose, 1974<sup>[1](#)</sup>

**I**N 1976, a month after the tenth anniversary of Archbishop John’s repose, Fr. Seraphim gave a talk to his assembled brothers on what he called the “chief characteristic” of Archbishop John’s theology: *freedom*. “He is entirely immersed in the Orthodox tradition,” Fr. Seraphim said, “and he is himself a source of true Orthodox theology. He has no kind of foreign influences or any overemphasis on one part of tradition because of some controversy... The important thing we learn from his writings is: stand above the level of fighting in theology. If you take up any writing of Archbishop John, whether a sermon or a long article, you see that *there is absolutely no controversy*. Even when he is ‘fighting’ someone like Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, and has to show where he is quoting the Fathers wrongly and where his teaching is not Orthodox — even there you do not get the impression that he is fighting, like our academic theologians. On the contrary, he is very calm. There is a certain teaching of the

Fathers — he presents it; and where Fr. Sergius Bulgakov goes off, he shows it. His words are convincing not by virtue of logical argumentation, but rather by his presentation of the Patristic teaching in its original texts.

“Some people who go to academic schools are very fond of ‘proving’ that someone else is way off and thus ‘triumphing.’ It’s like undergraduate fighting. Archbishop John was above that, showing calmly and clearly what is the true teaching of the Church, and not getting excited over small points. This freedom of his theological spirit is very important for us....

“For Archbishop John, the teaching of the Church was first of all what we read in the Kontakion of the Holy Fathers: something ‘woven from the theology from on high.’ It comes from God; there’s a different flavor to it; it’s not simply what you read in books. What you read in books helps you; it’s good to learn it. But we must remember that above that is a theology that comes from on high, from God.

“This is what makes Archbishop John so inspiring for us today, and actually an example for us not to get involved with small points, with small controversies, but to remember that theology is something which comes from above, from God. He himself, being present every day at the Divine services, used above all this source when presenting theology. Probably more than any other theologian of modern times, he quotes the services of the Church, because for him theology was not a matter of just reading books and writing things out, but was first of all a matter of absorbing the teaching of the Church in the services. And that is why the attitude of controversy, of polemics, is absent in his works, even when he is proving what’s right and what’s wrong.”[\[a\]](#) [2](#)

**I**N speaking of Archbishop John’s theological spirit, Fr. Seraphim had of course been describing the example that he himself had been striving to follow. As the years had passed at the monastery, he had begun to change the tone of his published writings on contemporary Church matters — away from the harsher polemical tone that he had sometimes taken in his earlier years of zealotry. The

change was subtle and gradual, but a definite turning point can be seen to have occurred in 1976, the same year that Fr. Seraphim offered the above observations on Archbishop John's writings. That was the year, it will be remembered, when the problems arising from the "super-correct" zealotry came to a head: a time of much suffering for Fr. Seraphim, when he realized that his earlier "zealot" articles had "helped to produce a monster."<sup>3</sup> With the suffering came more humility and maturity in the Faith. In looking at what had become the super-correct faction, with its perpetual fighting, he saw what he did *not* want to become; he saw that taking a harsh tone against others in the Church, no matter the "rightness" of the cause, was most often counterproductive. In his article on the "Royal Path," written in 1976, he observed: "Unfortunately, it sometimes happens, especially in the heat of controversy, that basically sound Orthodox positions are exaggerated on one side, and misunderstood on the other, and thus an entirely misleading impression is created in some minds that the cause of true Orthodoxy today is a kind of 'extremism,' a sort of 'right-wing reaction' to the prevailing 'left-wing' course now being followed by the leaders of Orthodox Churches."<sup>4</sup>

In view of this, and in view of the humbling responsibilities and challenges that the priesthood brought into his life, it was only natural that Fr. Seraphim's writings would change in tone. He himself was aware of the change. In a letter of 1981, commenting on articles in *The Orthodox Word* over the years (particularly those dealing with the Moscow Patriarchate), he noted that there was "a meekening of our tone," and that "our bishops have told us that they prefer this approach."<sup>5</sup> In another letter, to the editor of an Orthodox journal in England, he wrote: "God has given us the talent of freedom, and we who can walk and write and print have an obligation to inspire those we can with the true Orthodoxy of the heart. I'm not against a 'polemical' article here and there (your articles in the last issue were good)—but such articles have to be only incidental to something more important that is being said and should have a compassionate tone that rises above mere polemics and anger."<sup>6</sup>

FATHER Seraphim also shied away from becoming involved in protracted public controversies, with their endless copies of rejoinders and self-justifications. When he saw the Orthodoxy that had been handed down to him being attacked, he would usually write a single article to defend it, as Archbishop John had done; but then he would leave it at that. As we have seen, he did not raise a finger when the critic of *The Soul After Death* took up arms against him with a scathing “Open Letter”; and thus the “controversy” which the critic had evoked eventually died down of itself. A year later, another opportunity for a public theological controversy arose when Fr. Seraphim got word that one of the priests of the super-correct faction was planning to print a book by Dr. Kalomiros on creation and evolution which would include excerpts from Kalomiros’ correspondence with Fr. Seraphim. People had already been making photocopies of this correspondence, which Dr. Kalomiros had sent out against Fr. Seraphim’s express wishes. Trying to nip any further controversy in the bud, Fr. Seraphim wrote to the priest: “I am *absolutely opposed* to the publication of my correspondence with Dr. Kalomiros on this subject. I can only see it as an attempt to cause more disputes among Orthodox Christians and to sow discord among the small flock of Christ. There is enough of that already without adding more fuel to the fire... My only concern is to avoid an unnecessary public ‘fight’ between members of one and the same Orthodox Church.”<sup>7</sup>

When asked for his advice, Fr. Seraphim also tried to mitigate disputes in which he himself was not directly involved. In 1979, he began receiving letters about a personal battle being waged between two Orthodox monasteries in America. The Abbot of one monastery was having emotional fits and developing a serious heart condition because the head of another monastery was questioning his credentials and claiming to know his “real” background. The first monastery had an attorney hired to sue the other for “character assassination” if sufficient evidence of public slander could be collected. When the monastery sent Fr.

Seraphim an article defending their Abbot against slander, Fr. Seraphim advised the monks to “give up battling on this controversial level.” “Our only hope to clear the air,” he said, “is to avoid controversy whenever possible, to rise above it as much as we can, to set our eyes on what is above and not be distracted by the things below. All easier said than done!—but we can make an effort.”<sup>8</sup>

Also in 1979, when an Orthodox missionary wrote to him complaining about the statements and writings of certain bishops, Fr. Seraphim advised him that “the best thing is to ‘forget’ it.” “All of this,” he went on to say, “is a sad background for our present Orthodox labors — here you are right. But please listen to this: *We simply cannot let our attitudes, inspiration, and missionary labors take their tone from all these negative factors: we must ourselves be generating a positive outlook that will inspire ourselves and others.*”<sup>9</sup>

**I**N identifying the cause of today’s church controversies, Fr. Seraphim wrote that “It is all somehow bound up with the great problem of our present-day Orthodoxy (where it tries to be serious and faithful to tradition): too much calculation and not enough heart. We’ve seen this... in the priests who follow the ‘Boston line,’ in numerous converts; well, why look further — I see it in myself, it’s part of the air we breathe in our ‘enlightened,’ mind-oriented times.”<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere he wrote: “There must be more *heart* in our Orthodoxy and less ‘canonical logic,’ which leads to discord and schism.”<sup>11</sup>

In order to see a different tone prevail in the Church, Fr. Seraphim strove to preach what he called “the *positive* Orthodox Gospel.”<sup>12</sup> In 1978 he wrote a lengthy essay on Blessed Augustine which he said was “an attempt in this direction — to correct the one-sidedness of some ‘theological experts’ without engaging in a battle over it, pointing rather to the ordinary Christian virtues of moderation, forgiveness, tolerance, etc.—which are often lost sight of when the emphasis is placed on ‘correctness.’”<sup>13</sup> He said he hoped his essay, entitled “The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church,” would help to remove Augustine as a scapegoat for today’s academic theologians, and thus “help free



us all to see his and our own weaknesses in a little clearer light — for his weaknesses, to a surprising degree, are indeed close to our own.”<sup>14</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Blessed Augustine’s theological exaggerations were not unlike the errors of the more recent hierarch Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky. Just as Archbishop John had once tried to emphasize the best in Metropolitan Anthony and gently correct his teaching, so now Fr. Seraphim did with regard to Blessed Augustine. In the words of St. Photius of Constantinople, which Fr. Seraphim quoted: “We do not take as doctrine those areas in which they strayed, but *we embrace the men*.”<sup>15</sup>

First published in *The Orthodox Word*, Fr. Seraphim’s essay was posthumously issued in book form as part of the St. Herman Brotherhood’s series called “Orthodox Theological Texts.” In the spirit of Archbishop John, this series was intended to present the positive teachings of the Church as a non-controversial counterbalance to modern theological deviations.

Fr. Alexey Young, in an introduction to the study of Augustine published a year after Fr. Seraphim’s death, recalls: “In his personal life Fr. Seraphim especially shrank from any kind of controversy or disturbance. Whenever passions were likely to be aroused, he wished to be far away. It is ironic, therefore, that this peaceful monk more than once found it necessary to speak out (with the printed word) in defense of an ‘underdog.’ An ‘underdog’ was anything or anyone in Church life that he believed was being treated unfairly, uncharitably, arrogantly, or dishonestly, or made to serve the interest of petty politics.

“I remember well that summer day in 1978 when Fr. Seraphim asked me to listen as he read aloud a lengthy essay he was preparing on the subject of Blessed Augustine. Comments about this particular Church Father had been appearing in some publications, the tone of which were often passionately immoderate. No one in the Church had ever before spoken of a Holy Father in this way. It alarmed Fr. Seraphim to see such a worldly and irreverent tone; he saw this as a sign of deep immaturity in Church life today: ‘We, the last

Christians, are not worthy of the inheritance which they (the Holy Fathers) have left us... we quote the great Fathers but we do not have their spirit ourselves.’ He asked for a spirit of humility, lovingness, and forgiveness in our approach to the Fathers of the Church, rather than ‘using’ them in a hard and cold manner that showed disrespect and lack of understanding....

“‘The basic question,’ Fr. Seraphim said to me when he was studying Blessed Augustine, ‘is, what should be the *Orthodox* approach to controversies?’—for controversies do occur in Church life from time to time, allowed by God for our growth and understanding. As the reader will see for himself, Fr. Seraphim found the answer to this question, and gave it clearly in the balanced and, above all, fair study of Blessed Augustine which follows. The Saint’s strengths and weaknesses are examined, the opinions of other Holy Fathers on Augustine are consulted and given, and, above all, the *spirit* of the man... is clearly portrayed, perhaps for the first time in the English language.

“Fr. Seraphim titled his essay ‘The *Place* of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church.’ He called it this because there are those today who wish to exclude Augustine altogether from the company of Church Fathers.... Some writers boldly — and without justification — call him a ‘heretic’ and unfairly ascribe to him almost every subsequent error of Latin and Protestant Christendom. Fr. Seraphim, on the other hand, wanted nothing more than to give a sense of Orthodox *perspective* to this issue, explaining to those who seemed not to know that Blessed Augustine does indeed have a proper ‘place’ in the Church — not, to be sure, among the great Fathers, but nonetheless a position of well-deserved recognition by other Holy Fathers.”<sup>[16](#)</sup>

Fr. Seraphim spent two days in the Berkeley university library gathering historical sources which shed light on Blessed Augustine’s place among the Fathers. In his study he discussed the errors which Augustine made concerning the theological question of grace and free will — errors stemming from overstatement and the Western tendency toward “over-logicalness” — and then showed that these errors had never caused him to be considered a “heretic” by

the Church at large, either in his own time or afterward. Even the later Orthodox confessors against Latin innovations (St. Photius of Constantinople, St. Mark of Ephesus) had called Augustine “great,” “holy,” and “blessed.” And in our own day, Archbishop John had showed special reverence for him, commissioning the writing of a special service in his honor and celebrating it every year.<sup>[16](#)</sup>

“The ‘controversial’ aspects of Blessed Augustine’s dogmatic writings,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “have sometimes taken up so much attention that the moral side of his works has been largely neglected. But his main benefit to us today is probably precisely as a *Father of Orthodox piety*—something with which he was filled to overflowing. Modern scholars, indeed, often find it disappointing that such an ‘intellectual giant’ should have been such ‘a typical child of his age, even in matters where we should not expect him to be so,’ that ‘strangely enough, Augustine fits into a landscape filled with dreams, devils and spirits,’ and that his acceptance of miracles and visions ‘reveals a credulity which to us today seems incredible.’<sup>[17](#)</sup> Here Blessed Augustine parts company with the ‘sophisticated’ students of theology in our own day; but he is one with the simple Orthodox faithful, as well as with all the Holy Fathers of East and West who, whatever their various failings and differences in theoretical points of doctrine, had a single deeply Christian heart and soul. It is this that makes him unquestionably an *Orthodox* Father and creates an impassable abyss between him and all his heterodox ‘disciples’ of later centuries — but makes him kin to all those who are clinging to true Christianity, Holy Orthodoxy in our own days.”<sup>[18](#)</sup>

Fr. Seraphim saw that today’s Orthodox detractors of Blessed Augustine came from both the “liberal” and “super-correct” schools of modern theology — another sign to him that these two seemingly opposed schools were but two sides of the same coin. For these detractors, Fr. Seraphim stated, “Blessed Augustine becomes, not merely a ‘scapegoat’ on which one loads all possible theological errors, justly or unjustly, but something even more dangerous: an excuse for an elitist philosophy of the superiority of ‘Eastern wisdom’ over everything

‘Western.’” Many of Blessed Augustine’s detractors wanted to cast him out with the heretics because he was not “perfect” in his theology. Yet, as Fr. Seraphim pointed out, “A strange self-contradiction besets this ‘patristic elite’: their language, their tone, their whole approach to such questions — are so very *Western* (sometimes even ‘jesuitical’!) that one is astonished at their blindness in trying to criticize what is obviously so much a part of themselves.”<sup>19</sup>

In keeping with his own principle, Fr. Seraphim did not identify this problem without putting himself into it. He wrote:

“The ‘Western’ approach to theology, the over-logicalness from which, yes, Blessed Augustine... did suffer, the over-reliance on the deductions of our fallible mind — is so much a part of every man living today that it is simply foolishness to pretend that it is a problem *of someone else* and not of ourselves first and foremost. If only we all had even a part of that deep and true *Orthodoxy of the heart* (to borrow an expression of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk) which Blessed Augustine... possessed to a superlative degree, we would be much less inclined to exaggerate his errors and faults, real or imagined....

“Today all we Orthodox Christians, whether of East or West — if only we are honest and sincere enough to admit it — are in a ‘Western captivity’ worse than any of our Fathers in the past have known. In previous centuries, Western influences may have produced some theoretical formulations of doctrine that were wanting in preciseness; but today the ‘Western captivity’ surrounds and often governs the very atmosphere and tone of our Orthodoxy, which is often theoretically ‘correct’ but wanting in true Christian spirit, in the indefinable savor of true Christianity.

“Let us then be more humble, more loving and forgiving in our approach to the Holy Fathers. Let the test of our continuity with the unbroken Christian tradition of the past be, not only our attempt to be precise in doctrine, but also our love for the men who have handed it down to us — of whom Blessed Augustine was certainly one, as was also St. Gregory of Nyssa, despite their errors.”<sup>20</sup>

**A**T the same time the Platina fathers were serializing the essay on Blessed Augustine, they were printing in *The Orthodox Word* selected theological homilies of St. Symeon the New Theologian (†1022). In his continuing endeavor to acquaint contemporary mankind with true teaching on the *beginning* and *end* of its earthly existence, Fr. Seraphim chose to translate those homilies which dealt with the state of Adam in Paradise, his transgression, the redemption of mankind through Jesus Christ, and the future transfiguration of the physical world. In 1979 this translation, to which the fathers gave the title *The Sin of Adam and Our Redemption*, came out separately as one of the “Orthodox Theological Texts.”<sup>[c]</sup>

In presenting St. Symeon’s positive Orthodox teaching on Adam and the first-created world, Fr. Seraphim was silently counterbalancing the claims of modern Orthodox representatives that Patristic teaching was compatible with evolutionism. And since St. Symeon wrote at length about our redemption coming specifically through Christ’s sacrificial death on the Cross, his homilies also served to counterbalance the false “dogma of redemption” without bringing it up as a controversy.

St. Symeon was well qualified to give the teaching on the beginning and end of all things, having so shone forth in mental prayer as to have experienced deification (*theosis*): participation in the uncreated grace of God. As Fr. Seraphim wrote, St. Symeon was “one of the greatest saints of the Orthodox Church, a late Father who stated the teaching of the Orthodox Church so Divinely and clearly that he was the third and last, after St. John the Evangelist and St. Gregory Nazianzen, to be called ‘Theologian’ by the Church.”<sup>21</sup>



St. Symeon the New Theologian (949–1020).

In his introduction to St. Symeon’s homilies, Fr. Seraphim asked: “How does St. Symeon give us the teaching which is authentically Christian, and not a mere result of speculation and guessing?”

“St. Symeon speaks from Divine revelation. First, his basis is always scriptural — but we are astonished to see a depth of meaning in his use of scriptural quotations which we would never have seen by ourselves. And this is because, second, he *speaks from personal experience*.”<sup>22</sup>

From the writings of other Holy Fathers of the most exalted spiritual life — St. Gregory of Sinai and St. Isaac the Syrian — Fr. Seraphim went on to show that such saints have been granted by God to behold in Divine vision (*theoria*) the creation of the visible universe, the first-created world, and “the composition of visible things.” “The surest interpreters of Genesis and the Apocalypse,” Fr. Seraphim affirmed, “are those Holy Fathers who, like Moses and St. John the Evangelist themselves, beheld the beginning and the end in the state of Divine vision.... St. Symeon is one of the Church’s great seers of the treasures of faith;

he speaks of them with such certainty precisely because he has seen them.”<sup>23</sup>

From the heights of spiritual knowledge, St. Symeon wrote with remarkable depth about the condition of the creation both before the fall and after the General Resurrection. As Fr. Seraphim explained in his public lectures, “St. Symeon the New Theologian is very explicit that the material creation — and not just Paradise — before Adam’s fall was incorrupt and without death.... Only after the fall did the creatures begin to die. When the new world comes, *the new heaven and the new earth* (Apoc. 21:1), then *the meek... will inherit the earth* (Matt. 5:5). What earth is that? It is this earth you see right here, only it will be burned up and restored so that all the creatures now will be incorruptible. That is what the whole creation is striving for, what the creatures are groaning after. When St. Paul said they were *made subject to vanity* (Rom. 8:20), this means they were made subject to corruption, through the fall of man.... In the General Resurrection, all of creation will be delivered from corruption together with man, just as it once became subject to corruption because of him.”<sup>24</sup>

Fr. Seraphim’s aim in presenting St. Symeon’s homilies was wholly practical. In the book’s introduction he wrote: “[St. Symeon’s] profound homilies on Adam and the future age are of special value to Orthodox Christians because they give the theological foundation of the Christian life of struggle: the original state of man from which Adam fell tells us of our deepest nature, of which our present fallen nature is a corruption that is to be overcome; and the future state of blessedness is the goal to which our Christian struggle is aimed, and to which we can attain, by God’s grace, even despite our fallen state.”<sup>25</sup>

Because of its practical value, and because it speaks with unsurpassed clarity about such foundational matters as the creation, the fall, the redemption, and the future age, this collection of St. Symeon’s homilies has come to be regarded by some readers as the most important book the St. Herman Brotherhood has ever published. Although St. Symeon speaks from the heights, he does so in such a comprehensible manner that his homilies can be used to catechize people who are just coming to the Orthodox Faith, as well as to



enlighten those who have partaken of the life of the Church for many years. It was Fr. Seraphim's wish that they would "serve to inspire — in a sober-minded way — the Christians of these last times on the narrow path that leads to salvation and deification."<sup>26</sup>

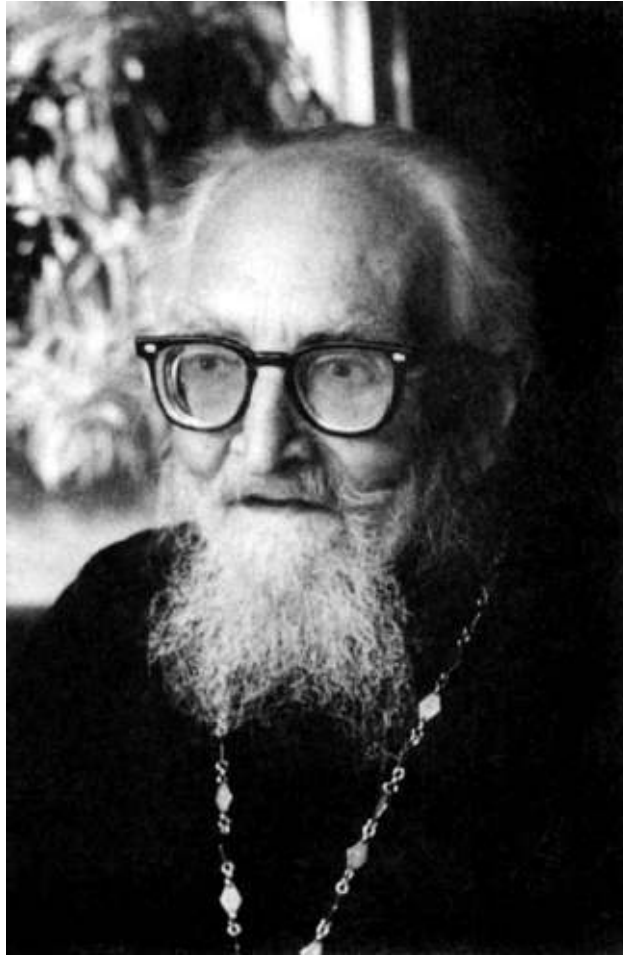
ANOTHER "Orthodox Theological Text" that the Platina fathers translated and published in book form was Archbishop John's *The Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*. Having discovered the original Russian version of it in a rare Church Calendar published in Czechoslovakia in 1933, they had found it to offer an exceptionally clear and concise treatment of a subject that often proved troublesome to Orthodox converts, especially those coming from Protestantism. In a study that was both historical and theological, Archbishop John showed how the Church has honored the Mother of God throughout the centuries, discussed the chief errors which have attacked this veneration, and concluded with a summary of what the Church knows of the Mother of God's earthly life. For Fr. Seraphim, the authority of this work by Archbishop John was similar to that of St. Symeon's homilies, since Archbishop John himself had direct mystical contact with the Mother of God.

Later, while Fr. Seraphim was on his pilgrimage to Jordanville, Fr. Herman and the brothers labored to make available in a separate volume all the material that the Brotherhood had published about Archbishop John in English. They succeeded in completing it before Fr. Seraphim's return and presented it to him as a surprise Christmas gift. At the end of the book, entitled simply *Blessed John*, Fr. Herman had placed a beautiful Akathist service to Archbishop John which Fr. Seraphim had written years earlier.<sup>[d] 27</sup>

IN 1974 Fr. Seraphim began, with the blessing of Archbishop Averky and Fr. Michael Pomazansky, to translate one of the main Jordanville seminary textbooks: Fr. Michael's *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. Fr. Seraphim believed that this book was terribly needed in the English language in order to ground



Orthodox converts in the unbroken theological tradition, again as counterbalance to deviations both on the left and on the right. “One of the major advantages of this book,” he wrote by way of introduction, “is its simplicity of presentation. It was written not for academic theologians, but primarily for pastors, and thus it has a practical approach that is missing in many works of contemporary academic theology. In his theological writings, Fr. Michael remains deeply rooted in the tradition of the Orthodox Church, not trying to supersede with his own private opinions any revelation that the Church has handed down to us. Indeed, he avoids presenting mere ‘opinions’ altogether, since his intent here is to write about exactly *what the Church teaches*—what pastors can give to their flocks as the certain, unchanging teaching of the Church — and not about what is ‘disputed.’ There is a distinct *wholeness* in Fr. Michael’s approach, which allows for no confusion over the Church’s actual teaching.”<sup>[28](#)</sup>



Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky (1888–1988).

For the English edition of the book, Fr. Michael prepared a new, revised version of it, one that was directed not only to seminarians and Russians, but to contemporary man in general and the English-speaking world at large. He sent to the fathers changes, additions, and a new introduction, corresponding with them often about the book's progress and even helping to fund it out of his own means.

In their correspondence with Fr. Michael, the fathers had discussed with him the danger that the false "dogma of redemption" posed to the English-speaking Orthodox world since the publication in English of Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky's controversial work in 1979. Having been personally mentored and influenced by Metropolitan Anthony since the days of his youth in

Russia, Fr. Michael was greatly devoted to the Metropolitan's memory. Nevertheless, when the fathers expressed their concerns Fr. Michael took them seriously, and in response he sent the Brotherhood new sections to be incorporated into the English edition of *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. In these sections he underlined yet further the teaching of the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers on the redemption of mankind coming through Christ's Crucifixion and consequent Resurrection.<sup>[e]</sup>

When Fr. Seraphim had begun to translate *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Fr. Michael — then eighty-six years old — wrote to the fathers that he would very much like to live to see it completed.<sup>29</sup> Ironically, it was Fr. Michael and not Fr. Seraphim who lived to see it in published form. Although Fr. Seraphim finished translating Fr. Michael's book and adding to it many of his own helpful annotations and appendices, he died before he was able to have it printed. It was printed in 1984, two years after Fr. Seraphim's repose. In 1988 Fr. Michael reposed in Jordanville, just days short of his hundredth birthday.

The English version of *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* proved very popular, and was received with gratitude by simple believers who were not partisans in current theological disputes. The only criticisms of it came from the academic theologians both on the right and on the left, who deplored its "Westernisms": in particular, the organization of the book according to a "Western," "systematic" model, and Fr. Michael's acknowledgment of Blessed Augustine as an Orthodox Father.

In working on the book, Fr. Seraphim had been well aware of the current fashionable criticisms of "systematic theology," but, like Archbishop John, he regarded such criticism as "getting excited over small points" — the manner of presentation being incidental to the content and spirit of the theology itself. In Archbishop John's own writings, there was no theological system. And yet, as Fr. Seraphim pointed out in the introduction to *The Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*: "He did not protest against the great works of 'systematic theology' which the nineteenth century produced in Russia, and he made free

use in his missionary work of the systematic catechisms of this period (as, in general, the great hierarchs of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have done, both in Greece and Russia, seeing in these catechisms an excellent aid to the work of Orthodox enlightenment among the people); in this respect he was above the fashions and parties of theologians and students, both past and present, who are a little too attached to the particular way in which Orthodox theology is presented.”<sup>[30](#)</sup>

In 1986, another book of dogmatic theology came out as an alternative to Fr. Michael’s, written by one of the super-correct priests whose main purpose seemed to be to prove, not only that Blessed Augustine was a heretic, but that he was “the Church’s greatest heresiarch, the major source of every Roman Catholic and Protestant error.”<sup>[31](#)</sup> This highly polemical work evoked several articles from the Orthodox world in defense of Blessed Augustine.

Today Fr. Michael Pomazansky’s preaching of the “positive Orthodox Gospel” has prevailed, and continues to reach the hearts of simple believers. Of course, no single book of Orthodox theology can claim to speak the final word on its subject. As Fr. Seraphim recognized, Fr. Michael’s book was incomplete in some areas, particularly in its discussion of creation.<sup>[f](#)</sup> Nevertheless, with its strengths far outweighing its weaknesses, it has become widely regarded as the most accessible and reliable introduction to Orthodox theology in English.<sup>[g](#)</sup> Readers comment on how surprised they are to find that this textbook is not only highly informative, but also highly *inspiring*. Years before the book came out, Fr. Seraphim knew that it would have such an effect. In an article he wrote on Fr. Michael in 1981, he observed that Fr. Michael was “one of the few” today who were writing Orthodox theology in such a “warm-hearted and inspiring tone,” observing also that he was part of “an older generation that is fast vanishing.”<sup>[32](#)</sup>

In the same article, Fr. Seraphim defined the true purpose of theology, revealing what he had learned from the older generation of theological writers and expressing his Brotherhood’s highest aim in publishing all its theological

texts. “Theology,” he wrote, “is not primarily a matter of arguments, criticisms, proofs, and disproofs; it is first of all men’s *word about God*, in accordance with the Divinely revealed teaching of Orthodoxy. Therefore, its first purpose is always to inspire, to warm the heart, to lift one above the petty preoccupations of earth in order to glimpse the Divine *beginning and end of* all things so as to give one the energy and encouragement to struggle towards God and our heavenly homeland. This is certainly the meaning and spirit of the theology of Orthodoxy’s three pre-eminent ‘theologians’: St. John the Evangelist, St. Gregory Nazianzen, and St. Symeon the New Theologian; they, one may say, have set the tone for Orthodox theology, and this remains the tone and the task of theology even in our cold-hearted and analytic age.”<sup>33</sup>

## *The Resurrection of Holy Russia*

*We can only dare to think about the salvation of Russia with complete seriousness when we have become different. We must force ourselves to change in the most fundamental way—to cease being what we were when, willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or in ignorance, by our own hands or just by indifference, we cast Russia into that terrifying, bloody abyss in which it remains even until now.... It is not for us to enjoy ourselves, to amuse ourselves, to dance on the grave of Russia, brought down to its deathbed by us, but rather to repent in tears—really to repent, as the holy Church teaches us, with a firm intention to alter our life radically, to renew our spirit.*

—Archbishop Averky (†1976)<sup>1</sup>

*If a man be not crowned (with martyrdom), let him take care not to be far distant from those who are.*

—Clement of Alexandria (†223)

**D**URING the last few years of Fr. Seraphim's life, a marked change began to be felt in Russia and other Communist-dominated countries. The collapse of Communist ideology — which at first occurred not politically but inwardly, in people's minds and hearts — was now being accompanied by a national religious awakening. The resurrection of Holy Russia was beginning to occur according to prophecy, and it now became the primary focus of Fr. Seraphim's attention. Together with his teaching on Orthodoxy of the heart, it became the theme that recurred most in his later talks, articles, and letters. As can be seen

from his Jordanville journal, he invariably spoke of Russia's resurrection in connection with the value of redemptive suffering.

For Fr. Seraphim, all these themes — Orthodoxy of the heart, the resurrection of Holy Russia, redemptive suffering — came together in the person of Fr. Dimitry Dudko. By 1980, through his sermons, articles, public discussions, and even a weekly newspaper, Fr. Dimitry had converted and baptized over five thousand adults himself. He had become an outspoken critic not only of politically enforced atheism, but also of the "Sergianism" and paralyzation of his own bishops in the Moscow Patriarchate. He was striving to call the world's attention to the phenomenon of the New Russian Martyrs, and to the plight of Christians who were even then being imprisoned and tortured under the Communist Yoke. At the head of the New Martyrs he was praying to Tsar Nicholas II and his family, referring to him openly as "Great Martyr Nicholas." And all this he was doing, in Fr. Seraphim's words, "right in the jaws of the atheist beast, as it were."



Fr. Dimitry Dudko (1922-2004). Portrait by Maria Vishniak.

“The evils of our time,” Fr. Seraphim noted, “are so great that sometimes we lose sight of the greater power of what we have to oppose them with.... But Fr. Dimitry Dudko, almost more than anyone else today, is preaching the *positive* Orthodox Gospel, even though he is overwhelmed with the evils of contemporary society.”<sup>2</sup>

“Solzhenitsyn spoke of *Gulag*—a secular term; Fr. Dimitry speaks of *Golgotha*—the Christian understanding of the Soviet experience. The central part of Fr. Dimitry’s — and contemporary Russia’s — message to us is that all



the sufferings inflicted by atheism have a meaning — we can find Christ in them.”<sup>3</sup>

In a talk he gave in September of 1980 on “The Orthodox Revival in Russia,” Fr. Seraphim quoted the words of Fr. Dimitry on Russia’s Golgotha:

“In our land has occurred Golgotha; the torments of all the martyrs begin gradually to cleanse the air.... The present crucifixion of Christ in Russia, the persecutions and mockings only lead to the resurrection of faith in men.... This gives us strength, firmness, makes us better than we are now.... How many martyrs there have been in Russia — and therefore, how many holy feelings! Will these holy feelings really give no fruit? And perhaps we live and will live only by the feelings of the holy martyrs, being supported by them.... In our country now in Golgotha. Christ is crucified. Golgotha is not merely sufferings, but such sufferings as lead to resurrection and enlighten men.”<sup>4</sup>

Fr. Dimitry had himself tasted of this Golgotha. In his youth he had suffered eight and a half years in a concentration camp for writing a religious poem, and in 1975 he had been the victim of a planned automobile “accident” that had broken both his legs and left him barely alive. In 1980, at age sixty-one, he still felt the constant pressure both of the Soviet State and the Moscow Patriarchate to stop his religious activity. Fr. Dimitry’s Orthodoxy, wrote Fr. Seraphim, “is a profoundly ‘suffering Orthodoxy’ which goes deeper than the comfortable academic Orthodoxy that is so easy to hold in the free West; it is simply Orthodoxy in action, filled with love for the suffering brother in front of one. In his ‘letter from exile’ Fr. Dimitry well says: ‘If I will simply speak of Orthodoxy and not see suffering Russia, Orthodoxy for me could be something of the head.’”<sup>5</sup>

Recognizing that “the great problem of our present-day Orthodoxy is too much calculation and not enough heart,”<sup>6</sup> Fr. Seraphim saw that Fr. Dimitry’s message was just what was needed today. Fr. Dimitry himself, when accused in his own church for using religion as a “cover,” frankly replied: “I sat in a camp for eight and a half years, but I bear no grudges. Don’t you know that people

who engage in politics don't speak this openly? Politicians are always calculating, but as you see, I don't calculate. I speak, risking my own life and the lives of my family. There are no politics in my words. There's no animosity or slander in my words, no hidden meanings of any sort. Just pain. Pain for everyone and everything. There's nothing else there."<sup>7</sup>

"Fr. Dimitry's words," wrote Fr. Seraphim in a letter, "are *such* a breath of fresh air for people today... He speaks right to the heart of today's people, both in Russia and outside."<sup>8</sup>

In other letters Fr. Seraphim remarked: "Fr. Dimitry gives us a chance to get around some of our own problems here; here they don't like us to talk about uncanonized saints — but Fr. Dimitry openly refers to 'Holy New Martyr Nicholas' (the Tsar)."<sup>9</sup> [\[a\]](#)

Over the years the Platina fathers received two brief notes from Fr. Dimitry. "All the rest of our correspondence with him," Fr. Seraphim noted, "is probably in the GPU files."<sup>10</sup> In the meantime, between 1978 and 1980, Fr. Seraphim translated into English the entire first four issues of Fr. Dimitry's newspaper *In the Light of the Transfiguration* (printed by Fr. Alexey Young in *Nikodemos*), several letters and appeals abroad from Fr. Dimitry (printed in *The Orthodox Word* together with a photograph of him on the front cover), and an entire book of Fr. Dimitry's *Resurrection Sermons* (which Fr. Seraphim was unfortunately not given permission by the Russian publisher in Canada to print).

By this time, Fr. Dimitry had become an internationally known figure. In his guilelessness and forthrightness he had bared his long-suffering soul before the world, and was as a lamb ready for slaughter. As if the Soviet persecutions were not enough, he also had to endure attacks coming from his fellow Orthodox Christians in the free West, which in some ways were probably even more painful to him. As Fr. Seraphim noted in his "Orthodox Revival" talk: "Fr. Dimitry's truthfulness and fiery faith have made many enemies — sadly enough, even among Orthodox Christians. Some have found him too emotional, too apocalyptic, too messianic — and it is true that such fiery, urgent, Orthodox

preaching hasn't been heard in Russia and probably the whole Orthodox world since the days of St. John of Kronstadt; many Orthodox people have become self-satisfied with their 'correct and proper' Orthodoxy and are somehow offended when Orthodoxy is preached and communicated so warmly to everyone who will listen. Others are infected by the tragic suspiciousness of our times, largely inspired by the Communist spy system, and simply do not trust him, some even suspecting him of being a KGB agent. Still others miss his message because they want to check each of his words for possible 'heresies,' and some of such ones have thought that he is an 'ecumenist' because he has no hostility towards non-Orthodox Christians, even though he quite clearly distinguishes Orthodoxy from their teachings."<sup>11</sup>

In January of 1980 Fr. Dimitry was again arrested and imprisoned. Right before his incarceration he had written to his critics abroad:

"You are bold to criticize us without seeing what is what, and not knowing our circumstances.... Is it not time to learn to understand each other, to help each other, to rejoice for each other?... Russia is perishing, the whole world is perishing, protecting itself behind a false prosperity; and we hinder each other from doing the work of God.... The people for whom I have decided to give over my whole life have suddenly begun to poison me. O Lord, forgive them!... Help me to bear this very heavy cross!"<sup>12</sup>

In America the loudest criticism of Fr. Dimitry was raised by the super-correct Orthodox faction. Even while Fr. Dimitry was languishing in prison and being subjected to refined Soviet torture methods, the newsletter of the super-correct group printed a long article on him which attempted to catch him in his words and thus prove that, being in the rival jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, he was an ecumenist and a heretic. The article concluded with the statement that, if Fr. Dimitry were to die in prison without having first renounced his ties with the Moscow Patriarchate, he would *not* die as a martyr but would "only commit suicide." The author asked "pious Orthodox Christians" to correctly pray, not for Fr. Dimitry, but for persecuted Orthodox Christians

who were in no way associated with the Moscow Patriarchate.

“Now the attack is against Fr. Dimitry,” noted Fr. Seraphim in a letter, “and we (and Fr. Alexey Young) who have defended him are publicly accused of ‘telling outright fibs’ and of being ‘unprincipled and irresponsible.’ Again, we are not primarily concerned with the attack against us personally. But this is an attack against one of the best representatives of living Orthodoxy, the Orthodoxy of the heart!”<sup>13</sup>

To counter this attack, Fathers Seraphim and Herman published in *The Orthodox Word* a Decree from their ruling hierarchy, Archbishop Anthony, which called for special prayers to be offered for Fr. Dimitry and other believers who were then incarcerated in Russia.<sup>14</sup> Hoping to evoke some human sympathy for Fr. Dimitry from among his critics, the fathers also wrote a letter to the editor of the newsletter which had published the uncharitable article on him. Hardly a week passed, however, before it was reported that Fr. Dimitry had apparently “broken” under pressure in prison. Reporting on this in *The Orthodox Word*, Fr. Seraphim wrote:

“Many Orthodox Christians in the free world were saddened to hear of Father Dimitry Dudko’s ‘confession’ on Soviet television (June 20, 1980), when he read a prepared statement renouncing all his articles and books and acknowledging himself guilty of ‘anti-Soviet activity.’ This occurred after Fr. Dimitry had been imprisoned for five months and had been allowed to see no one, not even members of his own family. One can only guess the pressures and psychological weapons (including injection of mind-weakening drugs) that caused Fr. Dimitry to read this statement, which was evidently composed for him by the KGB.”<sup>15</sup>

In his “Orthodox Revival” talk, Fr. Seraphim stated further: “I think it is not too difficult to understand, in general terms, what happened to him: he was ‘broken,’ not in his Orthodox Christian faith (which he was perhaps not even asked to give up) but in his sense of *mission*. Even before his arrest he wrote of his ‘sleepless nights’ when he read of how his own Orthodox Russians abroad

were attacking him and spreading innuendos about him: Why can he speak so openly? How can he have such contacts abroad? Why do they let him print a ‘newspaper’?

“How petty we can sometimes become when face to face with such an evident miracle as Fr. Dimitry’s words in these past years! His atheist torturers undoubtedly played to the full the doubts and suspicions and accusations of his fellow Orthodox in order, finally, to make Fr. Dimitry, cut off from contact with even his own family, doubt his own mission to speak the saving Orthodox word when *everyone* seemed to be against him.

“I think we in the free world who did not sufficiently value and support Fr. Dimitry are at least partly to blame for his tragedy. As far as we know, no one has been able to get into contact with Fr. Dimitry yet, but one person who was able to speak briefly to his Matushka reports that she could only say: ‘What have they done to him?’”<sup>16</sup>

A few days after Fr. Seraphim had heard of Fr. Dimitry’s “confession,” he had spoken his personal feelings about it in a letter:

“May God help this poor man in his hour of trial; one can hardly imagine the pressures and tortures placed upon him to extract this (chiefly, I would think, threats against his family and spiritual children).<sup>[b]</sup> I hope there will be no gloating over this on the part of his enemies. For my part, I think the lesson in this for us is to *go deeper* within ourselves. It can be very consoling to know that someone there is a ‘hero’ and is saying boldly what even we in freedom seldom have the courage or strength to say; but now we can appreciate a little better the *suffering* we must all go through to be true Orthodox Christians in these terrible times. This ‘confession’ does not invalidate a single word he said before, as I see it; but now it is others who will have to continue this work. We must all pray for each other more, and have more love and sympathy for each other. May God help us all! I sense the clouds becoming ever darker over America too.”<sup>17</sup>

Just as Fr. Seraphim had feared, some people in the free world took advantage of this sad incident to proclaim, in effect, “I told you so” — as though

Fr. Dimitry's "confession" proved that he had not been genuine in the first place. The super-correct newsletter published articles by the Boston monastery which once more attempted to show that, after all, nothing good can be expected to come from inside the Moscow Patriarchate.

This reaction had to do with much more than just Fr. Dimitry. It was symptomatic, once again, of what Fr. Seraphim considered the great problem of Orthodoxy today, "which in essence boils down, I think, to a question of a dead Orthodoxy of the head, of calculation, vs. the true Orthodoxy of the heart."<sup>18</sup>

In defending Fr. Dimitry Dudko, Fr. Seraphim was actually defending this Orthodoxy of the heart. And, once again, he was defending the "underdog."

In 1980 Fr. Seraphim wrote and published in *The Orthodox Word* a "Defense of Fr. Dimitry Dudko," in which he answered point-by-point the accusations leveled against him. In response to the notion that Fr. Dimitry was practically a "heretic" for not leaving the Moscow Patriarchate and "joining the Catacomb Church," Fr. Seraphim described the real problems involved in someone (especially a public figure like Fr. Dimitry) joining this illegal organization which was virtually inaccessible to all but a small number of people. These problems, he wrote, "are not at all as simple as they seem to someone enjoying the freedom and leisure of the West, where one need only look in a clergy listing or even a telephone book to find official representatives of whichever Orthodox jurisdiction one might choose.... No one aware of church life in Russia could possibly condemn Fr. Dimitry for not 'joining the Catacomb Church'; if he did, it would be a miracle — but it is not something one could expect or demand of him... One cannot quote canons to a drowning person; we cannot turn away from such people and tell them to 'join the Catacomb Church' before we will offer them our support. The agony of suffering Orthodoxy in our days cannot always be solved by a change of jurisdictions."<sup>19</sup>

Elsewhere Fr. Seraphim said: "Let us not feel smug because we are not in the Moscow Patriarchate, whose generals (bishops) indeed have become corrupted and are paralyzed. The Sergianist spirit of legalism and compromise

with the spirit of this world is everywhere in the Orthodox Church today. But we are called to be soldiers of Christ in *spite* of this!”<sup>20</sup>

Fr. Seraphim affirmed many times that he was in one and the same Church as Fr. Dimitry, even though at the present time, as long as the Moscow Patriarchate in Russia was enslaved to Communism, he could not be in formal communion with him. Fr. Dimitry himself understood this, and expressed this paradox well when he wrote: “The unity of the Church at the present time consists in division.... Right now we cannot be one; we must separate in order to preserve unity. The kind of unity where they want to drive us all into a single herd — this is precisely the worst kind of division.... We must all learn to understand each other, to be tolerant towards each other. This will also be a pledge of our unity. Let everyone be guided by his own conscience; each one stands or falls before God, and God will judge everyone.”<sup>21</sup>

These remarks of Fr. Dimitry on “unity within division,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “as baffling as they are to the legalistic mind, are the closest attempt I’ve seen to express this perplexity of the church situation in our times.”<sup>22</sup>

Fr. Seraphim also emphasized that the division between the Russian Church Abroad, to which he himself belonged, and the Moscow Patriarchate, to which Fr. Dimitry belonged, was only a temporary division, and should end when Communism collapses and the Church in Russia is free again, as indeed it is today: “Fr. Dimitry’s voice is a pledge that our lack of communion with the Moscow Patriarchate is only a temporary thing, because the Orthodoxy of someone like Fr. Dimitry is one with our own.”<sup>23</sup> And again: “The problem of his bishops, intercommunion [between the Church Abroad and the Moscow Patriarchate], etc., still remain — but all the time it becomes more and more obvious that these questions, in the Russian Church at least, are temporary and superficial and do not hinder the deeper unity between us and true sons of the Russian Church like Fr. Dimitry.”<sup>24</sup>

Despite Fr. Dimitry’s supposed “defeat,” Fr. Seraphim still called him a chief witness of Russia’s resurrection: “He is a forerunner of resurrected Russia,



and the fact that he himself now seems to have fallen, that is, is no longer able to speak out as he did before, is only a proof that this resurrection is still in *process*. It cannot be completed while atheism still reigns in Russia and the church organization bows down to the commands of the atheists; but it is presently *underway* and in God's time will produce its full fruits, despite the immense odds against it.

“But Fr. Dimitry, for all his belief and hope in Russia's resurrection, still warns us that it will not happen without *us*, that is, each Orthodox believer. In one of his final letters before his imprisonment he wrote: ‘It is precisely now that, not only for those living in Russia, but for the believers of the whole world also, the most responsible moment is approaching: when the resurrection that has begun will touch our souls.... One must begin increased prayer for all the persecuted in Russia... All possible help should be shown to the persecuted and their families.... Upon our unity depends the resurrection which has begun.’”<sup>25</sup>

With such a call, it is no wonder that Fr. Seraphim, in virtually all of his public lectures toward the end of his life, urged his fellow Americans to pray for suffering Russian Christians, mentioning a number of them by name and saying something about each of them. Addresses would be published in *Orthodox America* so that believers could send letters of encouragement to the persecuted, as well as appeals to the persecutors asking them (in Fr. Dimitry's words) “to cease their criminal work.”

In his “Orthodox Revival” lecture Fr. Seraphim had stated that, “In the early centuries of Christianity, the prayer of Christians for those undergoing imprisonment, slave-labor, and martyrdom was a tremendous source of strength not only for those suffering, but for those praying for them as well. It can be the same for us today. Let us gather their names and pray for them in church and at home.”<sup>26</sup>

This was so important to Fr. Seraphim that, when he was invited to give a lecture at a conference which would be attended by the super-correct contingent, he wrote privately to a sympathetic priest: “I personally feel... that my



participating in the Conference — knowing that prayer for Fr. Dimitry and his fellow sufferers in the Moscow Patriarchate *could not be offered publicly*, and open support for and defense of them *could not be given*—would be a betrayal of Orthodoxy on my part. I would be turning my back on my suffering Orthodox brothers and telling others not to pray for them.”<sup>27</sup> Without making a big issue over it, Fr. Seraphim wrote to the Conference organizer “respectfully declining” the invitation.

Fr. Seraphim also remembered his suffering brethren in Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Albania, Georgia, Latvia, and other Communist-dominated lands, praying for them by name whenever specific information about them reached him (which did so more rarely than information from Russia). From among the thousands of these Orthodox confessors whose names were never heard of in the West, a few voices were getting through. One of these was the voice of Fr. George Calciu, a daring preacher of “Orthodoxy of the heart” who had done in Romania what Fr. Dimitry had in Russia. The very last issue of *The Orthodox Word* that Fr. Seraphim worked on before he died contained the first installment of Fr. George’s “Lenten Sermons”: a series of burning pleas for pastoral self-sacrifice which had originally been addressed to Orthodox seminarians and students in Romania. Fr. Seraphim thought these talks to young people were superb — and very timely. As he wrote in his Introduction: “These talks were originally given on the Wednesday evenings of Great Lent in 1978, in the chapel of the Bucharest Orthodox Seminary where Fr. George was a professor. They aroused great interest and controversy, thereby revealing the potentiality for an Orthodox revival among the suffering Romanian people that is very close to what is happening in the Soviet Union, where the talks of Father Dimitry Dudko have had a similar effect.”<sup>28</sup>

When Fr. Seraphim was publishing these sermons, Fr. George was enduring his second prison term, his first one having lasted sixteen years. He was released in 1984, two years after Fr. Seraphim’s repose; and in 1985 he was permitted to leave Romania. From 1989 until his repose in 2006, he served as the priest of

Holy Cross Romanian Orthodox Church in Alexandria, Virginia, becoming a beloved spiritual father to many souls, and a close friend and mentor of the St. Herman Brotherhood.[\[c\]](#)

**W**ITH his basically nonpartisan approach, Fr. Seraphim was not to be spared, in 1981, one final run-in with the super-correct, super-partisan ecclesiology. This time even the chief hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad, Metropolitan Philaret, unwittingly got involved. On September 22, 1980, he had written to the Brotherhood:

Dear Fr. Herman,

I am sending you material for printing... about the last elder of Glinsk Hermitage, Archimandrite Tavrion. According to the information which I have, this wise and pious elder belonged at first to the Catacomb Church; but seeing how the believing people were scattered like sheep without a shepherd, he joined the official church, but in his activity he stood absolutely apart from it, giving all his strength to the spiritual guidance of believing souls....\_

May God help you. Peace be to you and the brethren.

With love,  
Metropolitan Philaret<sup>29</sup>

As it turned out, the Metropolitan had sent a tremendously moving document, showing true Church life in Russia in the midst of almost impossible Soviet conditions, and a righteous, loving, clairvoyant Elder who was very much in the spirit of the Elders of Optina. Interestingly, Elder Tavrion, who had reposed only two years before, in 1978, had shown great love for Fr. Dimitry Dudko, saying, “Fr. Dimitry has such a simple, childlike faith that God has chosen him to be a confessor. There’s nothing to fear.”<sup>30</sup>

At this time there were several other such inspiring manuscripts about

contemporary righteous ones being secretly written and circulated in Russia, but most of these never made it to the West before Russia became free again. On receiving such a rare, up-to-date document, therefore, the Platina fathers lost no time in publishing it. And to quell any objections from the super-correct wing about their publishing the life of a catacomb priest who later served in the Moscow Patriarchate, they accompanied it with Metropolitan Philaret's cover letter, as well as two documents from the Catacomb Church.

Far from warding off disturbances, however, the Metropolitan's letter raised a cry of indignation from those on the far right, who could hardly believe that their own Metropolitan could call someone in the Moscow Patriarchate a "wise and pious elder." This time the super-correct party started a whole campaign, with petitions sent out for everyone to sign, and an official delegation sent to protest at the Metropolitan's residence in New York. The petition stated that the photograph of and article on Archimandrite Tavrion which the Metropolitan had sent "serve as Soviet propaganda to mitigate our attitude toward Soviet clergy and the Soviet Church by showing us that there are in fact 'wise and pious elders' who are part of the Soviet Church.... Our bishops must come together and make a public statement with regard to this grave matter. The editors of *The Orthodox Word* need to rectify the damage done by retracting their statements and printing a statement of our Synod of Bishops on this most important matter."

One of the super-correct priests, Fr. Seraphim noted, "is trying to force our old Russian parishioners to write letters of protest to the Metropolitan, and the poor old ladies don't understand what it's all about! What a narrow straitjacket of logic they want to force us into, and how little it suits the real needs of the Orthodox mission today.... [They] are just *not* 'where it's at'—they're fighting windmills with their jesuitical logic and justifying their own 'purity,' while what is needed is loving and aware hearts to help the suffering and searching and bring them to Christ."<sup>31</sup> In another letter Fr. Seraphim called this kind of Christianity "Alice-in-Wonderland Orthodoxy."

As he had before, Fr. Seraphim voiced his concern over the dangers that the super-correct ecclesiology posed for the Russian Church Abroad: “Our Russian Church Outside of Russia can continue to be a beacon-light to the other Orthodox Churches — but it will not be so if we become a sect such as [the super-correct faction] would make us out to be (and a sect which would only be warring with other small “sects” in Greece).”<sup>32</sup>

The Metropolitan and other bishops of the Church Abroad felt called upon to put an end to the disturbance by issuing a “Decision,” which stated that we cannot ignore any positive events in Russia, including those occurring within the Moscow Patriarchate. At the request of Archbishop Anthony, this Decision was published in *The Orthodox Word*.<sup>33</sup> Alongside it was an article by Fr. Seraphim entitled “The Response to Elder Tavrion,” which demonstrated that *The Orthodox Word* had not changed its basic position regarding the Church situation in Russia. The articles on Fr. Dimitry Dudko and Elder Tavrion, Fr. Seraphim pointed out, were only a continuation of earlier articles — beginning with the third issue — on positive events occurring within the Moscow Patriarchate, in spite of the compromises of some of its bishops.<sup>34</sup>

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM’S quick and thorough defense of Fr. Dimitry and Elder Tavrion may seem surprising, coming as it did from one who, as we have seen, preferred to avoid church disputes. Even his own novice Gregory, who had arrived at the St. Herman Monastery during the “Tavrion incident,” recalls being at first scandalized by Fr. Seraphim’s seeming obsession with such issues. “We’re Americans,” Gregory thought. “Why does he have to get so caught up in something that only concerns *Russia*?!”

Later Br. Gregory understood: The defense of Elder Tavrion was a defense of the true spirit of Christianity against the mere letter. But there was even more involved. The phenomenon of Elder Tavrion and others like him testified that Holy Russia had not disappeared, that it *would* resurrect. And the resurrection of Russia, as Fr. Seraphim stated many times, would not affect Russia alone: *upon*

*it depended the fate of the whole world.*

On August 3, 1981, at a Russian Youth Conference in San Francisco, Fr. Seraphim explained Russia's vast significance while delivering what later became one of his most widely published and talked-about lectures: "The Future of Russia and the End of the World."<sup>35</sup> "Russia," he said, "the first country to experience the Communist yoke, is also the first country to begin to wake up from it and survive it. Despite the continued reign of Communist tyranny in Russia, atheism has not captured the soul of Russia, and the religious awakening that can be seen now in Russia is undoubtedly only the beginning of something immense and elemental: the recovery of the soul of a whole nation from the plague of atheism. This is the reason why Russia today can speak a word of significance to the whole world, which is plunging into the same trap of atheism from which Russia is emerging; and this is why the future of Russia is so closely bound up with the future of the whole world, in a religious sense."<sup>36</sup>

Fr. Seraphim went on to quote numerous prophecies of Russia's holy men about her resurrection, among which were the following:

*Elder Barnabas of Gethsemane Skete*<sup>[d]</sup> (†1906): "Persecutions against the Faith will constantly increase. There will be an unheard-of grief and darkness, and almost all the churches will be closed. But when it will seem to people that it is impossible to endure any longer, then deliverance will come. There will be a flowering. Churches will even begin to be built. But this will be a flowering before the end."

*Elder Alexey of Zosima Hermitage* (†1928): "Who is it that is saying that Russia is lost, that she has perished? No, no, she is not lost, she has not perished and will not perish — but the Russian people must be purified of sin through great trials. One must pray and fervently repent. But Russia is not lost and she has not perished."<sup>37</sup>

In repeating these prophecies, Fr. Seraphim reminded his young Russian

listeners that the restoration of Holy Russia “depends upon the Russian people themselves, because God always acts through the free will of man. Just as Nineveh was spared when the people repented, and Jonah’s prophecies about its destruction proved false, so also the prophecies of the restoration of Russia will prove false if there is no repentance in the Russian people.”<sup>38</sup>

In 1938 the modern prophet Archbishop John had stated that the rebirth of Russia would be possible only after the cleansing of its terrible sins; and these sins he named specifically as oath-breaking and regicide — the killing of the God-anointed Tsar. “The public and military leaders,” said Archbishop John, “renounced their obedience and loyalty to the Tsar even before his abdication, forcing this latter from the Tsar, who did not desire bloodshed within the country; and the people openly and noisily greeted this deed, and nowhere did they loudly express their lack of agreement with it....\_ Those guilty of the sin of regicide are not only those who physically performed it, but the whole people which rejoiced on the occasion of the overthrow of the Tsar and allowed his abasement, arrest, and exile, leaving him defenseless in the hands of the criminals, which fact in itself already predetermined the end. Thus, the catastrophe which has come upon Russia is the direct consequence of terrible sins, and the rebirth of Russia is possible only after cleansing from them. However, up to this time there has been no genuine repentance, the crimes that have been performed have clearly not been condemned, and many active participants in the Revolution continue even now to affirm that at that time it was not possible to act in any other way. In not expressing a direct condemnation of the February Revolution, the uprising against the Anointed of God, the Russian people continue to participate in the sin, especially when they defend the fruits of the Revolution.”<sup>39</sup>

Over forty years after Archbishop John said this, Fr. Seraphim was able to state: “This crime [of regicide] is, as it were, a symbol of the whole falling away of Russia from Christ and true Orthodoxy — a process that took up most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and only now is perhaps beginning to be

reversed.”<sup>40</sup>

Fr. Seraphim gave his lecture on the future of Russia only a few months before the Tsar and all the New Martyrs of Russia were to be canonized by the Russian Church Abroad. This canonization, Fr. Seraphim affirmed, “is bound up with the lifting of the literal curse which has lain on the Russian land since his [the Tsar’s] martyrdom.”<sup>41</sup>

On October 18/31, 1981, the canonization of the Tsar and the New Martyrs was celebrated in New York. The service sung to them at that time had been composed entirely by Fathers Herman and Seraphim. Helping to lead the service was Bishop Nektary, the only bishop present who had himself been a member of the suffering Church in Russia, having personally known the New Martyr Patriarch Tikhon. A year and a half later, Bishop Nektary’s oneness of soul with the New Martyrs was seen in his very death, when he reposed on the Sunday of their commemoration, having attended the Vigil service in their honor the night before.

At the same Russian Youth Conference where Fr. Seraphim had spoken on the future of Russia, Bishop Nektary had also given an outstanding talk. “We have a flicker of hope,” the Bishop said in conclusion, “that the news of canonizing the Emperor as the head of all the New Martyrs of Russia will reach still-believing Orthodox Russian people in our homeland, who together with us, understanding the heaviness of the sin of regicide over Russia, will with repentant tears beg the Lord for forgiveness and in the prayerful singing of all hearts will call on the help of Tsar Nicholas: ‘Holy Tsar-Martyr and Passion-Bearer Nicholas, together with all the New Martyrs of the Russian land, pray to God for us sinners.’

“Then we believe that the holy soul of the Emperor, who feels deep sorrow for Suffering Russia, will bow down before the throne of God and will perform intensified prayer for the salvation of Russia and us sinners. ‘The blood of the martyrs is crying to Heaven.’

“And the Lord will hear our repentant plea; and — hearing the holy prayer

of His humble servant, our Tsar-Martyr — will in His power PERFORM A MIRACLE. Having taken from the conscience of the Russian people the heavy sin of regicide, with the breath of His lips He will be able to blow from the face of the Russian land the Communist yoke and all the uncleanness of the God-fighting power.

“With God, everything is possible!

“He has the power to transform sorrow into joy and WILL RESURRECT HOLY ORTHODOX RUSSIA. Amen.”<sup>[42](#)</sup>

**T**HAT was in 1981; and although Bishop Nektary and Fr. Seraphim did not live to witness it, it all came to pass as they had written.

Unfortunately, people still ask: “What did Fr. Dimitry Dudko actually *accomplish* with all his activity? In the end, all he did was to get himself and a lot of other people into trouble, and become a laughingstock to his enemies.”

Those who voice such opinions do not consider that, had it not been for the labors of Fr. Dimitry and others like him in publicly awakening the national conscience, even to the point of making public the veneration of the Tsar-Martyr, perhaps the Russian people as a whole could not have atoned for the sin of regicide and thus shaken off the atheist tyranny. Even while Russia was still enslaved, Fr. Dimitry had spoken of the possibility that Golgotha may not lead to resurrection at all: “Perhaps it will only be the Golgotha of the foolish thief.”<sup>[43](#)</sup>

In striving to turn the tide, Fr. Dimitry had reached out not only to those who were already active members of the Church. He reached out to everyone — including bitter atheists and confused agnostics, in whom the Faith of their fathers lay dormant. Evidently it had not been enough for just a select group to be turning away from evil. In order for Russia to be free again, the repentance of the evils of the past had to become a national movement, coming from the broad spectrum of Russian society. Fr. Dimitry did not of course bring this about all by himself; there were hundreds more such laborers whose names never reached Fr. Seraphim and others in the West. But he did a great deal, and *this* is what he



accomplished. In the words of Hieroschemamonk Aristocleus, who died in August 1918: “God’s scales are exact; and when even the smallest of good in the cup overweighs, then will God reveal His mercy upon Russia.”<sup>44</sup> Had it not been for Fr. Dimitry, where would these scales be now?

**I**N 1980, a few weeks before his arrest, Fr. Dimitry had looked forward to the Millennium of Christianity in Russia that was to occur in 1988, and he had asked: “What should we do so that our Christian land (which has become atheist) should come to the thousandth year of Christianity with new powers?” By October of 1987 he could write: “May God grant that a new beginning will be blessed in our much-suffering land, that all will be able to freely take a breath of fresh air.... The Millennium of Christianity in Russia is an all-Christian jubilee, a most meaningful date, and it says a lot to the whole world. May it be so, may it be so!”<sup>45</sup>

In 1987, this may have only seemed like a product of wishful thinking. But the following year did indeed bring great changes for Russia and its Church. Soon public services were being held for the Tsar-Martyr, and he was being talked about in the press and on television. A wave of love for the Holy Royal Martyrs was now free to rise from the heart of the Russian people. And in the midst of all the prophecies coming true, Fr. Seraphim’s lecture on the “Future of Russia” was also being spread and talked about on Russian television. The Russian people were thanking Fr. Seraphim for what he had done for them, for helping to show them the way of deliverance.

A few years more, and Communist totalitarianism was already a thing of the past in Russia and other Orthodox Christian countries. In July of 1993, at a large gathering at the place of the Royal Family’s execution (Ekaterinburg) on the day of the their martyrdom, a message was read from Patriarch Alexey II and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, calling the entire nation to repentance for the death of the Tsar and his family. As if echoing the words of Archbishop John, Bishop Nektary, and Fr. Seraphim, this epistle from the now-

free Moscow Patriarchate read as follows: “The sin of regicide, which took place amid the indifference of the citizens of Russia, has not been repented of by our people. Being a transgression of both the law of God and civil law, this sin weighs heavily upon the souls of our people, upon its moral conscience. *And today, on behalf of the whole Church, on behalf of her children, both reposed and living, we proclaim repentance before God and the people for this sin. Forgive us, O Lord! We call to repentance all of our people, all of our children....* Repentance of the sin committed by our forefathers should become for us a banner of unity.” Finally, on August 7/20, 2000, the Sobor of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) canonized Tsar Nicholas II and his family, together with 1,200 Russian New Martyrs and Confessors. Attended by Orthodox patriarchs and bishops from around the world, the canonization occurred in the magnificent, newly rebuilt Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow, which was itself a symbol of the resurrection of Russia — the original Cathedral having been blown up by the Communists in 1931.<sup>[46](#)</sup>

The time of Russia’s purification and repentance is not over. The words of Archbishop John, Bishop Nektary, and Fr. Seraphim about the repentance of the Russian people are just as timely today as they were before the end of Communist persecution. If the Russian Orthodox people, as one body, can follow this counsel to the end, they will fulfill the destiny about which Russia’s own prophets have spoken: to preach to all mankind a final word of repentance. At the end of his lecture on the resurrection of Russia, Fr. Seraphim stated:



Canonization icon of the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, from the glorification ceremony in Christ the Saviour Cathedral, Moscow, August 7/20, 2000.

“In the book which most thoroughly describes the events to occur at the end of the world, the *Apocalypse* of St. John the Theologian, at the opening of the seventh seal, which precedes the final plague to come upon mankind, it is said that *there was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour* (Apoc. 8:1). Some have interpreted this to mean a short period of peace before the final events of

world history, namely, the short period of the restoration of Russia, when the preaching of worldwide repentance will begin with Russia — that ‘new, ultimate word’ which even Dostoyevsky hoped Russia would give to the world.<sup>[47](#)</sup> Under present world conditions, when the events of one country are known to the whole world almost instantly, and when Russia, cleansed by the blood of its martyrs, indeed has a better chance than any other country to awake from the sleep of atheism and unbelief — we can already conceive the possibility of such an event. As Fr. Dimitry Dudko and others have said, it cannot be that the blood of Russia’s innumerable martyrs will be in vain; undoubtedly it is the seed of the last great flowering of true Christianity....

“Archbishop John ended his report to the 1938 Sobor with a prophecy and a hope that there will be a true Pascha in Russia that will shine forth to the whole world before the very end of all things and the beginning of the universal Kingdom of God: ‘Shake away the sleep of despondency and sloth, O sons of Russia! Behold the glory of her sufferings and be purified; wash yourselves from your sins! Be strengthened in the Orthodox Faith, so as to be worthy to dwell in the dwelling of the Lord and to settle in His holy mountain! Leap up, leap up, arise, O Russia, you who from the Lord’s hands have drunk the cup of His wrath! When your sufferings shall have ended, your righteousness shall go with you and the glory of the Lord shall accompany you. The peoples shall come to your light, and kings to the shining which shall rise upon you. Then *Lift up your eyes and see: behold, your children come to you from the West and the North and the Sea and the East, blessing in you Christ forever.*<sup>[\[e\]](#)</sup> Amen.’”<sup>[48](#)</sup>



## *Today in Russia, Tomorrow in America*

*We are the products of... a society of fakery and plastic everything —including plastic Christianity and plastic Orthodoxy. Let us be humble enough to recognize it.*

—Fr. Seraphim<sup>1</sup>

**R**USSIA and the other Orthodox countries under Communism had already tasted the bitter cup of poverty and inhuman slavery; the faithful Christians within them had already learned the meaning of redemptive suffering. But what of the free West, and especially of America? What was the spiritual prognosis for this prosperous land, covered with a massive “archipelago” of shopping centers and fast-food restaurants, stocked full of seemingly unlimited consumer goods, ever perfecting ways to make life on earth more comfortable and enjoyable? Speaking to a group of Orthodox Americans at the 1982 St. Herman Pilgrimage, Fr. Seraphim looked at contemporary life and gave this appraisal:

“Anyone who looks at our contemporary life from the perspective of the normal life lived by people in earlier times — say, Russia, or America, or any country of Western Europe in the nineteenth century — cannot help but be struck by the fact of how *abnormal* life has become today. The whole concept of authority and obedience, of decency and politeness, of public and private behavior — all have changed drastically, have been turned upside down except in a few isolated pockets of people — usually Christians of some kind — who

try to preserve the so-called ‘old-fashioned’ way of life.

“Our abnormal life today can be characterized as *spoiled, pampered*. From infancy today’s child is treated, as a general rule, like a little god or goddess in the family; his whims are catered to, his desires fulfilled; he is surrounded by toys, amusements, comforts; he is not trained and brought up according to the strict principles of Christian behavior, but left to develop whichever way his desires incline. It is usually enough for him to say, ‘I want it!’ or ‘I won’t do it!’ for his obliging parents to bow down before him and let him have his way. Perhaps this does not happen *all* the time in *every* family, but it happens often enough to be the *rule* of contemporary child-rearing, and even the best-intentioned parents do not entirely escape its influence. Even if the parents try to raise the child strictly, the neighbors are trying to do something else. They have to take that into consideration when disciplining the child.

“When such a child becomes an adult, he naturally surrounds himself with the same things he was used to in his childhood: comforts, amusements, and grown-up toys. Life becomes a constant search for ‘fun’—which, by the way, is a word totally unheard of in any other vocabulary; in nineteenth-century Russia or in any serious civilization, they wouldn’t have understood what this word meant. Life is a constant search for ‘fun’ which is so empty of any serious meaning that a visitor from any nineteenth-century country, looking at our popular television programs, amusement parks, advertisements, movies, music — at almost any aspect of our popular culture — would think he had stumbled across a land of imbeciles who have lost all contact with normal reality. We don’t often take that into consideration, because we are living in this society and we take it for granted.

“Some recent observers of our contemporary life have called the young people of today the ‘me generation’ and our times the ‘age of narcissism,’ characterized by a worship of and fascination with oneself that prevents a normal human life from developing. Others have spoken of the ‘plastic’ universe or fantasy world in which so many people live today, unable to face or come to

terms with the reality of the world around them or the problems within themselves.

“When the ‘me generation’ turns to religion — which has been happening very frequently in the past several decades — it is usually to a ‘plastic’ or fantasy form of religion: a religion of ‘self-development’ (where the self remains the object of worship), of brainwashing and mind-control, of deified gurus and swamis, of a pursuit of UFOs and ‘extra-terrestrial’ beings, of abnormal states and feelings....

“It is important for us to realize, as we try ourselves to lead a Christian life today, that the world which has been formed by our pampered times makes demands on the soul, whether in religion or in secular life, which are what one has to call *totalitarian*. This is easy enough to see in the mind-bending cults that have received so much publicity in recent years, and which demand total allegiance to a self-made ‘holy man’; but it is just as evident in secular life, where one is confronted not just by an individual temptation here or there, but by a constant state of temptation that attacks one — whether in the background music heard everywhere in markets and businesses; in the public signs and billboards of city streets; in the rock music which is brought everywhere by its devotees, even to forest campgrounds and trails; and in the home itself, where television often becomes the secret ruler of the household, dictating modern values, opinions, and tastes.”<sup>2</sup>

Fr. Alexey Young recalls how Fr. Seraphim “disliked fakery of all kinds, often speaking of the ‘Disneyland’ mentality of America, which was making it impossible for people to seek and find the truth.”<sup>3</sup> Looking at contemporary American life from a spiritual perspective and comparing it to life in the Soviet Union, Fr. Seraphim once asked: “Do we have any image that explains our situation as well as [the Soviet] Gulag does that of Russia? I am afraid there is an image, most unflattering to us, which is *almost* our equivalent of Gulag. It is ‘Disneyland’—an image which exemplifies our carefree love of ‘fun’ (a most un-Christian word!), our lack of seriousness... unaware or barely aware of the

real meaning and seriousness of life.”<sup>4</sup> In his talk at the 1982 Pilgrimage, Fr. Seraphim expanded on this idea:

“The message of this universal temptation that attacks men today — quite openly in its secular forms, but usually more hidden in its religious forms — is: Live for the present, enjoy yourself, relax, be comfortable. Behind this message is another, more sinister undertone which is openly expressed only in the officially atheist countries which are one step ahead of the free world in this respect. In fact, we should realize that what is happening in the world today is very similar whether it occurs behind the Iron Curtain or in the free world. There are different varieties of it, but a very similar attack is being made to get our souls. In the Communist countries which have an official doctrine of atheism, they tell you quite openly that you are to forget about God and any other life but the present one; remove from your life the fear of God and reverence for holy things; regard those who still believe in God in the ‘old-fashioned’ way as enemies who must be exterminated. One might take, as a symbol of our carefree, fun-loving, self-worshipping times, our American ‘Disneyland’; if so, we should not neglect to see behind it the more sinister symbol that shows where the ‘me generation’ is really heading: the Soviet Gulag.”<sup>5</sup>

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM had always been mindful of the prophecy of the clairvoyant Elder Ignatius of Harbin, Manchuria, who in the 1930s had said: *“What began in Russia will end in America.”*

In his address at Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, Fr. Seraphim had spoken more about the tribulations which will come upon America, and how to prepare for them. Having described the suffering of Christians in Russia and other Orthodox countries, he said: “I don’t want to frighten you, but we’d better face the fact that what they’re suffering now, or something similar, is probably coming here, and soon. We’re living in the last times, Antichrist is close, and what happens in Russia and other countries like it is the normal experience of our times. Here in the West we’re living in a fool’s paradise which can and



probably will soon be lost. Let's start to prepare — not by storing food or such outward things that some are already doing in America, but with the inward preparation of Orthodox Christians.

“Have you ever asked yourself, for example, the question how you will survive if you are placed in a prison or concentration camp, and especially in the punishment cells of solitary confinement? How are you going to survive? You will go crazy in a very short time if your mind has nothing to occupy itself with. What will you have in your mind? If you are filled with worldly impressions and have nothing spiritual in your mind; if you are just living from day to day without thinking seriously about Christianity and the Church, without becoming aware of what Orthodoxy is, and you are placed in a situation like solitary confinement where there is nothing to do, nowhere to go, no movies to see, just staying in one spot facing four walls — you will scarcely survive.

“The Romanian Protestant pastor, Richard Wurmbrand, has a tape devoted to this subject which is very interesting. In a crisis situation like that, when all our books and outward props are taken away, we can depend on nothing except what we've acquired within ourselves. He says that all the Bible verses he knew didn't help him much; abstract knowledge of dogmas didn't help much — what is important is what you have in your soul. You must have Christ in your soul. If He is there, then we Orthodox Christians have a whole program which we could use in prison. We can remember the Orthodox Calendar — which saints and feasts are commemorated when. We don't have to know the whole Calendar, but from our daily life in the Church we will remember the milestones of the Church year; whatever we have stored up in our hearts and minds will come back to us. Whatever prayers and hymns we know by heart will help us, we will have to sing them every day. You will have people to pray for.”

Even now, Fr. Seraphim pointed out, by praying for Orthodox Christians who are suffering all over the world, we can be one in soul with them and share in their sorrows: “You can go over the whole globe in your mind, one country or continent at a time, and pray for those you know, even if you can't think of their

names — bishops and abbesses, parishes and priests both Russian and missionary, the monasteries in the Holy Land, prisoners in Russia and Romania and other lands under the atheist yoke, the missions in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa where it is very difficult, the monks of Mount Athos... The more of these you are aware of and praying for now, the better it will be for you when you have to suffer yourself, the more you will have to take with you into prison.”<sup>6</sup>

**I**T had been to prepare their fellow Westerners for coming persecutions that the Platina fathers had worked so hard to make the story of the New Martyrs of the Communist Yoke known in the free West. As Fr. Herman wrote in an article for *The Orthodox Word*, “We need the New Martyrs to call us to authentic spiritual life. They touch in us something so deep and elemental that our souls and minds, made shallow by modern ‘enlightenment,’ can scarcely grasp it; and yet we know it. Let us join their army in the march to eternal bliss, making the resolve to stand for the Truth even unto the death of the body... Let us listen to the cry of the New Martyrs!”<sup>7</sup>

In 1982 the fathers, with the help of Mary Mansur, finished compiling into a single volume all the articles from *The Orthodox Word* on the New Martyrs and on contemporary, living confessors. This became the aforementioned *Russia’s Catacomb Saints*. Fr. Seraphim regarded it as a textbook for contemporary Orthodox Christians. And such was what it proved to be: a textbook on how to preserve one’s faith amid terrible conditions and indescribable persecution; a textbook that made it abundantly clear that Jesus Christ is real and worth dying for.

A compendium of 635 pages, *Russia’s Catacomb Saints* was by far the largest original book that the Brotherhood had published thus far. It was being printed when Fr. Seraphim came down with the excruciating illness that would take his life; and one wonders whether these two things were not somehow connected. After Fr. Seraphim’s long, agonizing battle with death was over, Fr. Herman said: “Fr. Seraphim suffered as he did in order to receive the glory of

martyrs.”

In keeping with Fr. Seraphim’s approach, *Russia’s Catacomb Saints* was decidedly nonpartisan in its treatment of the Russian Church, glorifying examples of sanctity and Christian heroism wherever they were to be found: in the Catacomb Church of Russia, in the Russian Church Abroad, and in the Moscow Patriarchate.

While this approach caused some people to dismiss or ignore *Russia’s Catacomb Saints*, on many others the book had the effect that Fr. Seraphim had intended. People of the West did indeed hear the “cry of the New Martyrs,” and they were never the same again. Three years after Fr. Seraphim’s death a review of *Russia’s Catacomb Saints* appeared in an American religious periodical, in which the writer confessed: “The book that I am about to review... is a book that found me. It has changed my life. I do not pretend to impartiality in writing about it. I will not be comparing it to other books about martyrs or assaying any remarks about style or form. The book is, in my opinion, simply too important for such trifles. Those who prefer to read reviews in which the reviewer maintains a detached ‘objectivity’ and a mildly superior tone that engages the reader’s interest without disturbing his comfort or point of view may skip the next few pages. Those who want to expose themselves to unabashed testimony, read on! But be forewarned! This book may affect your peace of mind. It deals with ‘matters of life and death’ in a way that ‘afflicts the comfortable, and comforts the afflicted.’ It may be a shocking realization for some — it was for me!—that Christianity is really and truly *a matter of life and death!*”<sup>8</sup>

Since Fr. Seraphim’s repose, *Russia’s Catacomb Saints* has also been spread in lands formerly enslaved by Communism. Portions of it appeared in the magazine of the Voronezh diocese in Russia, and a Serbian edition of the book was published in Kraljevo, Serbia, in 1996.

**F**OR Orthodox Americans, perhaps the most sobering part of this already very sobering book is its dedication page. Echoing the prophecy of Elder

Ignatius of Harbin, Fathers Seraphim and Herman had written there:

To the Christian Martyrs

## TODAY IN RUSSIA TOMORROW IN AMERICA

Fr. Seraphim never speculated much on precisely how freedom-loving America would one day enter an age of persecution against Christians, an age of the catacombs. “That which Russia and other countries have experienced is coming here,” he said, “—in precisely what form we cannot say, and we don’t need to become hysterical over this prospect.”<sup>9</sup> In the decades following his death, however, we do see that, while people in Russia are regaining their religious freedoms, people in America are losing them. In 1962 common prayer was banned from public schools by a decision of the U.S. Supreme Court. Today, all manifestations of Christian faith in schools — such as having voluntary Bible studies during lunch breaks, saying grace during meals, using a rosary on a school bus, having Christian meetings after school, having a Bible sit atop one’s desk, or even singing Christmas carols — can be and have been prohibited by school authorities, and court decisions have both prompted and upheld their actions. Curriculum planners have gone so far as to remove all mention of the name of God from editions of classic literature that are to be read by students.<sup>10</sup> It should be kept in mind that this is occurring in precisely those centers which shape the future generations. As Christian author Tal Brooke observed in 1989:

“For Americans who celebrate religious freedoms, the curtailment of such freedoms may seem remote — until we contemplate one blatant thing: our own public school system. Pretend that an average public school in America were suddenly to engulf the nation in size and in operations. All of a sudden voluntary Bible studies and prayer, revivals and church meetings, and all manner of

religious activities would have to be prohibited and frozen for the good of all. Those who wished to engage in such practices would have to sneak across the border — that is, if America were run along the lines of *one of its very own public schools*. This is an interesting thought.

“To a future world-at-large that is without the legacy of a United States Constitution or Bill of Rights, the same kinds of limitations we put on those people in our public schools might seem quite reasonable in a globalist-pluralist atmosphere. Religion would be fully privatized. Certainly our legal system is busy trying to do just that — limit religion entirely to the private sphere. Courtesy of the ACLU,<sup>[a]</sup> numerous displays of the Nativity that since the inception of this country were displayed openly in public parks, etc., have been banned, and cities across the country have been forced to take Nativity displays down....

“Meanwhile, we greet the subtle disappearance of these freedoms naively, unlike immigrants who have come here from Eastern Europe who nod with grim understanding. They have seen what an all-powerful state can do.”<sup>11</sup>

At the current time in now-liberated Russia, religious instruction is being given in public, state-sponsored schools, and the feasts of Christmas and Pascha are honored with ubiquitous signs announcing “Christ is Born!” and “Christ is Risen!” In secular America, by contrast, people are now fighting legally to have crosses taken down and Christian street names changed because the sight of them allegedly oppresses people, and even the simple mention of the term “Christmas” is being increasingly avoided and discouraged in the public sphere. One can hardly doubt that a strange reversal is taking place.

**W**HILE Fr. Seraphim did not make specific predictions regarding America, he did predict the fall of atheistic Communism in Russia and the rise of the new globalist system that would be built upon the foundations laid by Communism. Needless to say, the accuracy of this prediction has been strikingly confirmed in the years following his repose, and continues to be confirmed. In a talk he gave

in May of 1981—almost precisely a decade before the collapse of the Soviet regime in Russia — Fr. Seraphim said:

“The reason why Communism takes over the world is not because it’s so much smarter than capitalism or democracies or anything of the sort, but because in the West there is a spiritual vacuum, and when this vacuum is present Communism simply marches in, taking one little territory after another until, at present, it has conquered nearly half the world. But Communism does not have the final answer because it is a very negative thing. In fact, if you look at what has been happening in Russia for the last ten or twenty years, you can see that there’s a full revolt, as far as the people’s mentality is concerned: it’s against the whole system of Communism. Although the dictatorship is just as strong as ever — especially in the last two years, putting more people in prison again — and although the police is very strong and is everywhere, nonetheless, the people are rising up more and more. That is, they are rising up not in armed revolt but in their minds, and are becoming independent. This means that sooner or later the whole system is going to collapse. And so Communism does not have the answer; it cannot conquer the whole world and bring happiness as it claims it can. But in the meantime it is preparing for one very important thing which has to happen before the end of the world can come, and that is that there has to be one, unified world government, from which Christianity has somehow been kicked out. And that Communism has been doing very successfully.

“But in order to supply people with a ‘spiritual’ basis for one world government, there has to be something higher; and in the ideas of the United Nations, for example, we see something that looks like a spiritual answer.<sup>[b]</sup> The U.N. claims to be for the foundation of one world government which will not be a tyranny, based not on any particular idea like Communism but on something very vague, and with no particular Christian basis. In fact, about twenty years ago they built a meditation chapel in the U.N. building, and at that time they had a big discussion about what would be the object of worship in it. You can’t have a Cross, because then you’re immediately branded as Christian; you can’t have

anything Muslim or Hindu because again you're identified; it has to be above all religions. Finally they decided on a black stone block. People experience an awesome feeling before it, as before an idol: a very vague kind of religious interest. Of course, everybody has a religious interest: you can't hide it, and Communism is going to fall because of that. But such a vague thing is exactly what the devil likes to grab hold of. In any particular belief you can be mistaken, but at least you put your heart into it, and God can even forgive all kinds of mistakes. But if you don't have any particular religious belief and you give yourself over to some kind of vague idea, then the demons come in and begin to act."<sup>12</sup> [\[c\]](#)

What Fr. Seraphim said about a "spiritual" basis for one world government after the fall of Communism has been uncannily echoed in more recent years by the aforementioned Robert Muller, former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations. Championing the so-called United Religions Initiative, which was formed in 1995 as a "spiritual" counterpart of the United Nations, Muller has stated: "The role and responsibility of the new United Religions Organization and of the World Parliament of Religions... will be no less than to give humanity a new spiritual, planetary, cosmic ideology to follow the demise of communism and capitalism."<sup>13</sup> At the same time, Muller says, the United Nations should lead "vigorous action" against "religious fundamentalism."<sup>14</sup>

**I**N spite of the ominous signs that he saw looming on the horizon, Fr. Seraphim never ceased to have missionary dreams for his country. In his Jordanville address he related:

"Just this last week I crossed the whole of America by train — a vast land, with many different kinds of landscapes and settlements. And I thought of St. Seraphim's vision of the vast Russian land, with the smoke of the prayers of believers going up like incense to God. Perhaps someone will say to me: 'Oh, you talk like a convert! America is America. It's full of Protestants and unbelievers, and the Orthodox will always be a little minority of people who

stick to themselves and have no influence on the rest of America.’ Well, I’m not saying that we Orthodox will ‘convert America’—that’s a little too ambitious for us. However, St. Herman himself did have such a dream. He wrote a letter after participating in the first ‘missionary conference’ on American soil, when that small band of missionaries divided up the vast land of Alaska and argued over who would get the most land to cover. St. Herman, hearing this, says that he was so exalted in soul that he thought he was present when the Apostles themselves were dividing up the world for the preaching of the Gospel.

“We don’t have to have such exalted ideas in order to see that the prayers of believers could be going up to God in America. What if we who are Orthodox Christians began to realize who we are?—to take our Christianity seriously, to *live* as though we actually were in contact with the true Christianity? We would begin to be different, others around us would begin to be interested in why we are different, and we would begin to realize that we have the answers to their spiritual questions.”<sup>15</sup>

In his times, Fr. Seraphim saw hope in the fact that the voice of persecuted Orthodox lands — of the New Martyrs; of Sergei Kourdakov and Alexander Solzhenitsyn; of Fr. Dimitry Dudko, Fr. George Calciu and others — was being heard in the West, with a message clearer than at any other time in the era of Communist terror. Along with Fr. Dimitry Dudko, he believed that the seed of the New Martyrs would bring forth a blossoming of true Christianity, not only in Russia, “but also in every place that takes the sufferings of Russian Christians to heart.”<sup>16</sup>

In the face of the Golgotha that he saw coming upon America, Fr. Seraphim saw that at the same time there could be a resurrection of true Christianity in his homeland — if not outwardly as in Russia, then inwardly, in the depth of the American soul. Concluding his “Orthodox Revival” talk, he said:

“It is a law of the spiritual life that where there is Golgotha — if it is genuine suffering for Christ — there will be resurrection. This resurrection first of all occurs in human hearts, and we do not need to be too concerned what



outward form it might take by God's will. All signs point to the fact that we are living at the end of the world, and any outward restoration of Holy Orthodox Russia will be short-lived. But our *inward* spiritual resurrection is what we should be striving for, and the events in Russia give us hope that, in contrast to all the imitation and fake Christianity and Orthodoxy that abounds today, there will yet be a resurrection of true, suffering Christianity, not only in Russia, but wherever hearts have not become entirely frozen. But we must be ready for the suffering that must precede this....

“Are we in the West ready for it? Golgotha does not mean the incidental sufferings we all go through in this life. It is something immense and deep, which cannot be relieved by taking an aspirin or going to a movie. It is what Russia has gone through and is now trying to communicate to us. Let us not be deaf to this message. By the prayers of all the New Martyrs, may God give us the strength to endure the trials coming upon us and to find in them the resurrection of our souls!”<sup>[17](#)</sup>

## *Santa Cruz*

*To have found God and still to pursue Him is the soul's paradox of love, scorned indeed by the too-easily-satisfied religionist, but justified in happy experience by the children of the burning heart.*

—A. W. Tozer<sup>1</sup>

THE University of California at Berkeley, where Fr. Seraphim had earned his master's degree, was actually the center of a whole series of schools in the University of California system. In the 1960s, at the peak of the hippie movement, a new University of California was built in the Santa Cruz mountains. Located in a beautiful forest overlooking green meadows and the ocean beyond, this university was a kind of experiment in liberal education. Like Pomona, it was modeled after the European system of affiliated colleges. To avoid the impersonality of letter grades, its professors instead wrote “narrative evaluations” of each student's work. As if in defiance of “Middle America,” the university had no fraternities and sororities, and no football team.

Such a school was bound to attract idealistic students in search of alternatives to the shallowness of American culture; and thus Santa Cruz became a center of the nationwide spiritual quest that unfolded in the sixties. The university bulletin boards would be covered with advertisements for various spiritual teachers: Zen, Tibetan, and Sufi masters, and Hindu gurus such as Rajneesh, Muktananda, and Sri Chinmoy. Other fashionable “alternatives” included organic hallucinogens, American-Indian shamanism, and militant lesbian-feminism which was often bound up with witchcraft.

Amidst this gamut of contemporary currents ranging from the erroneous to the highly dangerous, God's own "alternative" was made present: a vibrant Orthodox Christian fellowship had sprung up on campus, dedicated to St. Seraphim of Sarov. The fellowship had been started by an Orthodox student from Fr. Seraphim's hometown of San Diego, James Paffhausen,<sup>[a]</sup> with the blessing and encouragement of a former novice of Old Valaam, Bishop Mark of Ladoga (then living in San Francisco). Later it had come under the guidance of Fr. John Newcombe, a nearby priest who, being himself a convert to Orthodoxy, had a mission to bring young Americans to a knowledge of the truth. In the St. Seraphim of Sarov Fellowship, the conversions had a domino effect, with converts bringing other young seekers to their new-found faith.

The students in the fellowship loved the books published by the St. Herman Brotherhood, including those by Fr. Seraphim. One student, James N. Corazza,<sup>[b]</sup> recalls: "I shall never forget the evening — after a year and a half of difficult searching — when I finished *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* and everything fell joyously into place, and I knew beyond all doubt and vacillation that my future was to be in Christ's Church."<sup>2</sup>

In the spring of 1981, the fellowship invited Fr. Seraphim to give two lectures on the campus: one for the general public and another for a university course which two of the members were taking: "World Religions in the U.S."

Fr. Seraphim was more than glad to come. On May 14 he set off for the campus, taking Theophil along with him. His arrival and stay there have been described as follows by one of the students, a freshman named John:

"It was the first time I met Fr. Seraphim. I was not baptized nor even a catechumen then, having learned about Orthodoxy only a month or so before from one of the students in the 'World Religions in the U.S.' course. We were standing in front of the college, when Fr. Seraphim drove up in an old, beat-up pickup truck. At first he looked striking and unapproachable to me, with his long hair and exceedingly long gray beard. But suddenly he approached me, said, 'Christ Is Risen!' and then kissed me three times in the Orthodox manner — a

custom which was then still new and strange to me.

“The next thing I remember is walking with Fr. Seraphim through the college. Dinner had just ended, and the students were milling and hanging around outside the cafeteria. Everyone was staring at Fr. Seraphim, but he walked through them as naturally as if he had been at home. For me, an eighteen-year-old kid at the time, it was exhilarating to walk beside him. In the middle of this progressive, ‘hip’ American college, he seemed like someone who had just stepped out of the fourth-century Christian desert.

“Fr. Seraphim was taken to a wooden A-frame building which served as the University Religious Center. About forty people, some of them Orthodox Christians from surrounding areas, gathered for his talk.

“Since it was the Paschal season, Fr. Seraphim began by leading everyone in singing ‘Christ Is Risen’ before an icon of Christ. After a short introduction by a member of the fellowship, he gave his lecture, entitled ‘Contemporary Signs of the End of the World.’<sup>[c]</sup> At first he went into the Orthodox teaching on the Apocalypse based entirely on Holy Scripture, and then he spoke specifically about modern phenomena which betokened the coming end.

“I was struck first of all by the sobriety of his presentation. He was somehow able to heighten people’s awareness without feeding apocalyptic fears. A doomsday fanatic would have been just as disappointed in his lecture as would a believer in a future age of earthly blessedness.

“Having said that we should watch for the signs of the end in order to prepare ourselves against deception, Fr. Seraphim reminded us that all this should be done in a spiritual way:

If we ourselves are leading a conscious spiritual life, conducting unseen warfare against our fallen nature and the demons who are against us, we will be constantly expecting the coming of Christ into our soul. With our death, of course, we are to meet Christ. For anyone who has this kind of feeling in his soul, it is quite natural to expect soon the coming of Christ.

The only danger is if you go overboard and begin to try to place dates, to calculate exactly when it's going to happen, to be too concerned about specific events that are occurring and too quick to place them into categories so that they fit into chapters of the Apocalypse. This was done in the famous book that came out a few years ago, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. In twenty years it will be outmoded, and the author will have to go through all the things he talked about in the book and fit them into new events. It doesn't pay to go overboard with those details. Our approach has to be a little broader, a little higher, but just as fervent.<sup>[3](#)</sup>

“Even without trying to calculate specific events, Fr. Seraphim said some things that later turned out to really hit the mark. He predicted that Communist regimes would collapse, having helped pave the way for a global government. Unlike Communism, the world government of the future would have a vague, pseudo-spiritual basis, as exemplified by the United Nations ‘meditation chapel.’<sup>[\[d\]](#)</sup>

“Fr. Seraphim also said some pertinent things about the land of Israel and the Jewish people in light of New Testament prophecy:

Another sign that the times of the end are approaching is the present state of the Jews in Israel, in the city of Jerusalem. According to the prophecies of the Scriptures and the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church, Jerusalem will be the world capital of Antichrist, and there he will rebuild the temple of Solomon where he will be worshipped as God.<sup>[\[e\]](#)</sup> These are the events that are to come right before the very end of the world. Of course, it is very significant that only since 1948 has Jerusalem been once more in the hands of the Jews, and only since 1967 has the place where the temple was, the Mosque of Omar, been in their hands, since this had been in the part held by the Muslims. Therefore, all that prevents them, technically, from building the temple is the Mosque of Omar. If they can destroy the mosque,

they can erect the temple on this site.[\[f\]](#)

If you were to ask anyone who is aware at all of political events in the world a question, “What would be the ideal city to have as the world capital if there was going to be a world empire?” — it’s obvious what the answer would be in most people’s minds. It can’t be New York because that’s the center of capitalism; it can’t be Moscow because that’s the center of Communism. It can’t even be Rome, because Roman Catholicism is still some kind of limited tradition. The logical place is Jerusalem, because there three religions come together, three continents come together. It’s the most logical place where there could be peace, brotherhood, harmony: all those things which look good, but unless they have a solid Christian foundation are not God-pleasing — those things which can be used by Antichrist.

Another aspect of the Jewish question is that many young Jews are becoming interested in Christianity, since among the Jews also there is religious seeking. Some of these are converting to Christianity, and some of them are coming to Orthodoxy. This is already a sign, a preparation for the fact that at the end of time the Jews will be restored to Christianity, to Christ. St Paul expresses this, saying that, if the falling away of the Jews meant “riches” for the Gentiles — because when the Jews fell away the Gentiles were invited into the Church — then the restoration of Israel will be like a rising from the dead.[\[g\]](#) And this event will come right before the end.<sup>4</sup>[\[h\]](#)

“After his lecture Fr. Seraphim was asked questions on a great many topics — the Apocalypse, UFOs, Eastern Religions, J. D. Salinger’s *Franny and Zoey*, Blessed Augustine, the issue of grace vs. free will — which he answered with the same balance and sobriety.

“Fr. Seraphim happened to be sick at this time, and had been sniffing through the lecture. Obviously exhausted, he yet remained clear-headed, cheerful, and ready to answer questions at length. I saw his worn-out robe, his

matted beard, and remembered his old truck. Such poverty!—and yet he carried himself and spoke like a true gentleman, a scholar, and a philosopher. I could see that he was at least as learned and far more wise than any of my professors, and yet he was clearly a man of the wilderness, more at home in a forest than in a classroom.

“What struck me most about Fr. Seraphim, besides his sobriety, was that here was a man who was sacrificing himself totally for God, for the Truth. He was not a university professor receiving a comfortable salary for being a disseminator of knowledge, nor was he a religious leader who hankered after power, influence, or even a bowl of fruit to be placed at his feet, as did the ‘spiritual masters’ who then had followings in Santa Cruz. He was not ‘into religion’ for what he could get out of it; he was not looking for a crutch, to ‘enjoy spiritual life.’ He was just a simple monk who sought the Truth above all else. And I knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that he would die for that Truth, for I could sense that he was dying for it already.

“The following morning Fr. Seraphim was to speak to my ‘World Religions in the U.S.’ class. A word should be said here about this course, and about its professor, Noel Q. King. Professor King’s courses in religion were usually rather free-form. He encouraged young people to pursue an interest in spiritual things, but avoided saying that any one tradition was truer than another. He provided no answers, but only a forum for learning.

“The ‘World Religions in the U.S.’ class was divided into various study groups led by the students themselves. Any student could lead a study group on just about any religious path or trend he wished. Actually, it was in this free-for-all forum that I had discovered Orthodox Christianity. Earlier I had agreed to lead a study group on Zen Buddhism, but when one of the students, James Paffhausen, stood up in class and began talking about Orthodoxy one day, something in my heart moved. Soon I was studying Orthodoxy rather than Zen, and the class no longer had a Zen study group leader.

“To my fellow students Fr. Seraphim would be giving the Absolute Truth

that most university professors felt they could not give and still keep their jobs. It seems he knew exactly whom he would be addressing. My generation was one of gross spiritual insensitivity, and that was why so many people needed supernatural phenomena, some sensual but seemingly spiritual experiences, to awaken any response in them. It was why so many young seekers followed ‘holy men’ or religious groups on the basis of the miracles they performed or the results they promised, as well as why hallucinogenic drugs, occult practices, and ‘charismatic’ experiences had become so popular.

“Fr. Seraphim wished to tell the students that the desire to have a ‘spiritual high’ was not the right reason to undertake the spiritual quest. One must seek, as he himself had done so many years before, the ‘Truth above all else.’

“Fr. Seraphim knew he would see most of the students in my class only once in his life. In the hour allotted to him, he had to cut through all secondary concerns and go to the very core of all Christian life: the conversion of the heart of man, which causes it to burn with love for Christ and transforms one into a new being.

“Fr. Seraphim’s lecture was entitled ‘God’s Revelation to the Human Heart.’ He began by telling the ‘World Religions’ students that, if a person is really in earnest, there is only one reason why he will study religion: to come into contact with reality, to find a reality deeper than the temporal everyday reality. ‘I would like to say a few words today about how Orthodox Christianity tries to do this,’ he said, ‘to open up spiritual reality to the religious seeker.’

“Fr. Seraphim warned of the dangers involved in the search for reality, telling of a friend he had had during his own days of searching who had burned out his mind with drugs. Similar examples, he said, could be found among people who seek other forms of psychic or occult experience. But such examples are not at all unique to our times; many can be found in the Orthodox literature of the past two thousand years. Fr. Seraphim told the tale of the tenth-century St. Nicetas of the Kiev Caves in Russia, who by going into reclusion to receive the gift of miracle-working was deluded by a demon. Nicetas began to ‘prophesy’



and talk much from the Old Testament (but not the New), becoming famous even in the Grand-Prince's court, until the fathers of the Kiev Caves realized what was happening and drove the devil out of him. 'This story,' Fr. Seraphim said, 'raises a question for us today. How can a religious seeker avoid the traps and deceptions which he encounters in his search? There is only one answer to this question: a person must be in the religious search not for the sake of religious *experiences*, which can deceive, but for the sake of *Truth*. Anyone who studies religion seriously comes up against this question: it is a question literally of life and death.'

"Fr. Seraphim observed that, in the New Testament story of the Apostle Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, the eunuch was converted not by the miracle of Philip suddenly disappearing, but by something that changed his heart when Philip explained the words of Scripture to him. Likewise, in the story of Christ and the disciples on the road to Emmaus, after Christ had left they remembered that, all the time He had been with them, they had had a burning in their hearts, even though they had not recognized Him. As Fr. Seraphim pointed out:

What made them recognize Christ in the end was this "burning heart," and not just the fact that He vanished out of their sight, because magicians can do that also.... Here we see how what is called "revelation" comes about: the heart is moved and changed by the presence of God, or by someone who is filled with His Spirit, or by just hearing the truth about Him preached....

Is there a special organ for receiving revelation from God? Yes, in a certain sense there is such an organ, though usually we close it and do not let it open up: God's revelation is given to something called a loving heart. We know from the Scriptures that God is love; Christianity is the religion of love. (You may look at the failures, see people who call themselves Christians and are not, and say there is no love there; but Christianity is indeed the religion of love when it is successful and practiced in the right

way.) Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself says that it is above all by their *love* that His true disciples are to be distinguished....

It is in accepting given situations, which requires a loving heart, that one encounters God. This loving heart is why anyone comes to a knowledge of the Truth, even though God sometimes has to break down and humble a heart to make it receptive — as in the case of the Apostle Paul, who at one time was breathing fire against and persecuting Christians. But to God, the past, present, and future of the human heart are all present, and He sees where He can break through and communicate.

The opposite of the loving heart that receives revelation from God is cold calculation, getting what you can out of people. In religious life, this produces fakery and charlatanism of all descriptions. If you look at the religious world today, you see that a great deal of this is going on: so much fakery, posing, calculation, so much taking advantage of the winds of fashion, which bring first one religion or religious attitude into fashion, then another. To find the Truth, you have to look deeper.<sup>5</sup>

“One of Fr. Seraphim’s intentions in speaking to the students was to show that spiritual life was not something to be ‘enjoyed,’ but was rather a battleground where the soul becomes purified through suffering. To many of the students this was a novel concept; for who of the modern-day religious figures, wishing to gain a popular following, would have called people to a way of ceaseless suffering and struggle? Such, however, was the way that Christ Himself went and beckoned men to follow. Fr. Seraphim continued:

A year or so ago, I had a long talk on a train ride with a young American.<sup>[i]</sup> He met me seemingly by chance (of course, there is no chance in life) and told me that he was learning Russian. He was a religious seeker who had been to all kinds of so-called Christian groups, had found nothing but hypocrisy and fakery everywhere and had been ready to give up on religion

altogether. But then he heard that in Russia people were suffering for their Faith. Where there is suffering, he thought, there will probably be something real, and there will not be such fakery as we have in America. And so he was studying Russian with the purpose of going to Russia and meeting people who were real Christians. As a Russian Orthodox priest, I was astonished to hear this, for he had never before seen an Orthodox pastor nor attended any Orthodox service. We had a long discussion about religion, and I saw that his idea was quite sound: the idea that *suffering* might produce something genuine, while our indulgent life easily produces fakery.<sup>6</sup>

“Could the Santa Cruz students, living in a society that might be called a fool’s paradise, translate the essential experience of suffering Russia into a form that they could even begin to understand? Fr. Seraphim hoped so, for without a knowledge of Golgotha and the Cross, they could never come to a real knowledge of Christ, the Incarnate God.

“‘In suffering,’ Fr. Seraphim said, ‘something goes on which helps the heart to receive God’s revelation.’ He began to speak about how God was at that time revealing Himself to suffering Christians in Russia. First he discussed someone with whom all the students were familiar — Alexander Solzhenitsyn — describing the profound realizations about human nature that Solzhenitsyn had come to during his years in the Gulag. Then he went on to tell the story of a simpler man, Yuri Mashkov, an idealistic youth who found Christ while undergoing a profound spiritual crisis in a Soviet concentration camp. Fr. Seraphim quoted Mashkov as saying:

A tragic end (suicide or madness) would have been my lot too if, to my good fortune, there had not occurred on September 1, 1962, the greatest miracle in my life. No event occurred on that day, there were no suggestions from outside; in solitude I was reflecting on my problem: “To

be or not to be?” At this time I already realized that to believe in God is a saving thing. I very much wanted to believe in Him; but I could not deceive myself: I had no faith.... And suddenly there came a second, when somehow for the first time I saw (as if a door had opened from a dark room into a sunny street), and in the next second I already knew for sure that God exists and that God is the Jesus Christ of Orthodoxy, and not some other God. I call this moment the greatest miracle because this precise knowledge came to me not through reason (I know this for sure) but by some other way, and I am unable to explain this moment rationally... And so by such a miracle my new spiritual life began, which has helped me to endure another thirteen years of life in concentration camps and prisons.<sup>7</sup>

“Fr. Seraphim himself, as I later learned, had experienced a similar miracle in his own life, when as a young man he too had been in a spiritual crisis, desperate for God. He had learned and done so much since that time, and yet now, as he strove to reach my generation, he returned back to what really mattered: the heart as it is mystically set on fire with the love of Jesus Christ.

“Fr. Seraphim’s missionary trip to our campus had a great impact. As fellowship member James Corazza wrote to him: ‘Many, many seeds were planted during those days; indeed, several of our friends seemed inwardly set on fire and glowing.’<sup>8</sup>

“For myself, I can say my meeting Fr. Seraphim in Santa Cruz was a turning point in my life: it was from that time that I knew for sure I would dedicate my life to God as an Orthodox Christian.”

**A**FTER Fr. Seraphim’s visit, the Santa Cruz university fellowship continued to grow, bringing in more converts to the Orthodox Faith. Five members of the fellowship were eventually tonsured as monastics, and six of them were ordained as clergymen (including two abbots). Three of these joined the St. Herman Brotherhood, and after Fr. Seraphim’s repose they compiled a book out of the

“God’s Revelation to the Human Heart” lecture, which has since helped many more seekers come to Orthodox faith in Christ. The book has now been published in Russian, Greek, Romanian, Bulgarian, and Georgian.

Fr. Seraphim’s visit to Santa Cruz was followed by a trip south to visit his mother Esther, who was then living once more in the vicinity of San Diego. Whenever he would make such visits, she would become excited and call up all her friends and relatives beforehand. “It was a big thing for her,” recalls Fr. Seraphim’s niece, Cathy Scott. “She read all his books and *Orthodox Words* from cover to cover.”

This was the last time Fr. Seraphim was to see his mother on earth. Although she had never quite understood what he had dedicated his life to, she could not help noticing how inwardly fulfilled he looked. She asked him if he had found his special “niche” and purpose in life. “But definitely,” he said.



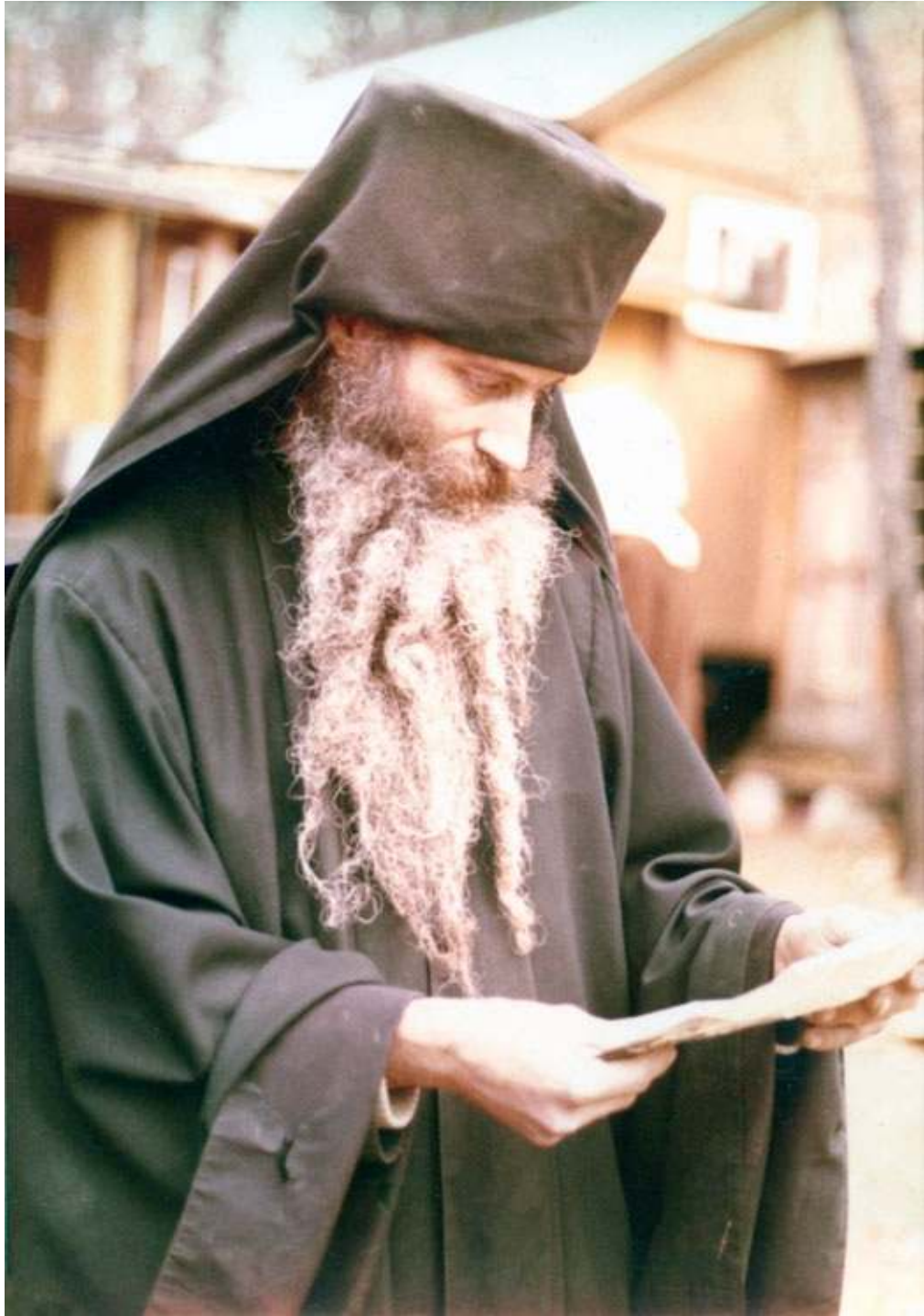
Fr. Seraphim on a visit to his family in 1978. Left to right: his mother, his brother, his sister, and himself. On the back of this photograph his mother has written: “Last snap with family.”

Esther recalls another incident: “When he was here last, I told him that

some of his comments on Communism were pretty strong, and they would get him one of these days. He turned his head and said, 'I'm ready.' You should have seen his eyes glistening."

During Fr. Seraphim's years in the monastery, Esther had sent him letters which reflected her tremendous concern for financial matters, both his and her own. And yet, after her "Gene" died, she realized that he had found far greater happiness than her materially successful son Franklin, now caught in the whirlwind of the business world. When she was in her last years and often alone, time slowed down for her, and she was able to reflect on what really mattered in life. The memory of Eugene helped her in this. "He lived every day," she wrote, "doing just what he wanted to do, and was best suited for."

The "secret" of Fr. Seraphim's happiness was simple: ever since the time that God had lit the sacred flame in his suffering heart, he had diligently labored to keep it burning, so that the winds of time and this world could never blow it out. What he had told the Santa Cruz students about "God's revelation to the human heart" actually marked but the beginning of the true Christian's tireless and glorious task: the "following hard after God"<sup>[1]</sup> that ends neither in this life nor in the life to come.



Fr. Seraphim at the St. Herman Monastery.



## *Forming Young Souls*

*No source of instruction can be overlooked in the preparation for the great battle of life, and there is a certain advantage to be derived from the right use of the heathen writers. The illustrious Moses is described as training his intellect in the science of the Egyptians, and so arriving at the contemplation of Him Who is. So in later days Daniel at Babylon was wise in the Chaldean philosophy, and ultimately apprehended the Divine instruction... [But] we must not take everything indiscriminately, but only what is profitable. It would be shameful for us in the case of food to reject the injurious, and at the same time, in the case of lessons, to take no account of what keeps the soul alive, but, like mountain streams, to sweep in everything that happens to be in our way.*

—St. Basil the Great (†379)<sup>1</sup>

**N**OT too many years ago, a young monastic aspirant went to Mount Athos. In talking with the venerable Abbot of the monastery where he wished to stay, he told him, “Holy Father! My heart burns for the spiritual life, for asceticism, for unceasing communion with God, for obedience to an Elder. Instruct me, please, holy Father, that I may attain to spiritual advancement.” Going to the bookshelf, the Abbot pulled down a copy of *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens. “Read this, son,” he said. “But Father!” objected the disturbed aspirant. “This is heterodox Victorian sentimentality, a product of the Western captivity! This isn’t spiritual; it’s not even Orthodox! I need writings that will



teach me *spirituality!*” The Abbot smiled, saying, “Unless you first develop normal, human, Christian feelings and learn to view life as little Davey did — with simplicity, kindness, warmth, and forgiveness — then all the Orthodox spiritual writings will be of little benefit to you.”<sup>2</sup>

Fr. Herman liked to tell this story, based upon a true occurrence, as he sat with his brothers around the refectory table. He himself had experienced something similar when, as a nineteen-year-old boy, he had been told by Fr. Adrian to read classic Russian novels. While he had longed to discuss “spirituality,” Fr. Adrian had instead turned the topic of conversation to some character or idea in the works of Dostoyevsky, Goncharev, etc.

Fr. Seraphim, from his own experience in dealing with young people, saw the wisdom behind the approach of Fr. Adrian and the Athonite Abbot mentioned above. In an essay entitled “Forming the Soul,” he carefully articulated the Orthodox philosophy behind it:

“The education of youth today, especially in America, is notoriously deficient in developing responsiveness to the best expressions of human art, literature, and music. As a result, young people are formed haphazardly under the influence of television, rock music, and other manifestations of today’s culture (or rather, anti-culture); and, both as a cause and as a result of this — but most of all because of the absence on the part of the parents and teachers of any conscious idea of what Christian life is and how a young person should be brought up in it — the soul of a person who has survived the years of youth is often an emotional wasteland, and at best reveals deficiencies in the basic attitudes towards life that were once considered normal and indispensable.

“Few are those today who can clearly express their emotions and ideas and face them in a mature way; many do not even know what is going on inside themselves. Life is artificially divided into work (and very few can put the best part of themselves, their heart, into it because it is ‘just for money’), play (in which many see the ‘real meaning’ of their life), religion (usually no more than an hour or two a week), and the like, without an underlying unity that gives

meaning to the whole of one's life. Many, finding daily life unsatisfying, try to live in a fantasy world of their own creation (into which they also try to fit religion). And underlying the whole of modern culture is the common denominator of the worship of oneself and one's own comfort, which is deadly to any idea of spiritual life.

“Such is something of the background, the ‘cultural baggage,’ which a person brings with him today when he becomes Orthodox. Many, of course, survive as Orthodox despite their background; some come to some spiritual disaster because of it; but a good number remain crippled or at least spiritually underdeveloped because they are simply unprepared for and unaware of the real demands of spiritual life.

“As a beginning to the facing of this question (and hopefully, helping some of those troubled by it), let us look here briefly at the Orthodox teaching on human nature as set forth by a profound Orthodox writer of the nineteenth century, a true Holy Father of these latter times — Bishop Theophan the Recluse (†1894). In his book *What the Spiritual Life Is and How to Attune Oneself to It*, he writes:

Human life is complex and many-sided.... Each side has its own faculties and needs, its own methods and their exercise and satisfaction. Only when all our faculties are in movement and all our needs are satisfied does a man live. But when only one little part of these faculties is in motion and one little part of our needs is satisfied — such a life is not life.... A man does not live in a human way unless everything in him is in motion... One must live as God created us, and when one does not live thus one can boldly say he is not living at all...<sup>3</sup>

“From these words of Bishop Theophan one can already spot a common fault of today's seekers after spiritual life: Not all sides of their nature are in movement; they are trying to satisfy religious needs... without having come to

terms with some of their other (more specifically, psychological and emotional) needs, or worse: they use religion illegitimately to satisfy these psychological needs. In such people religion is an artificial thing that has not yet touched the deepest part of them, and often some upsetting event in their life, or just the natural attraction of the world, is enough to destroy their plastic universe and turn them away from religion. Sometimes such people, after bitter experience in life, return to religion; but too often they are lost, or at best crippled and unfruitful.”<sup>4</sup>

Fr. Seraphim saw this “plastic” approach to religion most graphically when a young pilgrim, having spent time at another monastery in America, came to Platina talking all about elders, hesychasm, Jesus Prayer, true monasticism, and the ascetic wisdom of the Holy Fathers. One day Fr. Seraphim saw him walking around the monastery singing rock songs, snapping his fingers and bouncing with the rhythm. Surprised, Fr. Seraphim asked him if he didn’t think this might go against all his interest in spirituality, but the young man just shrugged his shoulders and replied: “No, there’s no contradiction. Whenever I want spirituality, I just switch on the Elder” — meaning that he could take out his rock tape and put in a tape of his Elder giving a spiritual discourse.

The fact that this young man could compartmentalize his life like this, Fr. Seraphim understood, showed that something was missing in the basic formation of his soul. To explain what is meant by this formation, he again referred in his article to a passage from St. Theophan the Recluse:

A man’s needs are not all of equal value, but some are higher and others lower; and the balanced satisfaction of them gives a man peace. Spiritual needs are the highest of all, and when they are satisfied, then there is peace even if the others are not satisfied; but when spiritual needs are not satisfied, then even if the others are satisfied abundantly, there is no peace. Therefore, the satisfaction of them is called *the one thing needful*.



St. Theophan the Recluse (1815–94), Bishop of Tambov and Vladimir. Icon printed in Russia after his canonization in 1988.

When spiritual needs are satisfied, they instruct a man to put into harmony with them the satisfaction of one's other needs also, so that neither what satisfies the soul nor what satisfies the body contradicts spiritual life, but helps it; and then there is a full harmony in a man of all the movements and revelations of his life, a harmony of thoughts, feelings, desires, undertakings, relationships, pleasures. And this is paradise!<sup>5</sup>

“In our own day,” Fr. Seraphim pointed out, “the chief ingredient missing

from this ideal harmony of human life is something one might call the emotional development of the soul. It is something that is not directly spiritual, but that very often hinders spiritual development. It is the state of someone who, while he may think he thirsts for spiritual struggles and an elevated life of prayer, is poorly able to respond to normal human love and friendship; for *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God Whom he hath not seen?* (I John 4:20).

“In a few people this defect exists in an extreme form; but as a tendency it is present to some extent in all of us who have been raised in the emotional and spiritual wasteland of our times.

“This being so, it is often necessary for us to humble our seemingly spiritual impulses and struggles to be tested on our human and emotional readiness for them. Sometimes a spiritual father will deny his child the reading of some spiritual book and give him instead a novel of Dostoyevsky or Dickens, or will encourage him to become familiar with certain kinds of classical music, not with any ‘aesthetic’ purpose in mind — for one can be an ‘expert’ in such matters and even be ‘emotionally well-developed’ without the least interest in spiritual struggle, and that is also an unbalanced state — but solely to refine and form his soul and make it better disposed to understand genuine spiritual texts.”<sup>6</sup>

**W**HAT Fr. Seraphim said here of spiritual fathers is even more true of natural parents, for the “formation of the soul” should begin in early childhood. During a lecture at the 1982 St. Herman Pilgrimage, Fr. Seraphim gave parents some practical advice on how to use whatever is positive in the world for their children’s benefit:

“The child who has been exposed from his earliest years to good classical music, and has seen his soul being developed by it, will not be nearly as tempted by the crude rhythm and message of rock and other contemporary forms of pseudo-music as someone who has grown up without a musical education. Such a musical education, as several of the Optina Elders have said, refines the soul



and prepares it for the reception of spiritual impressions.[\[a\]](#)

“The child who has been educated in good literature, drama, and poetry and has felt their effect on his soul — that is, has really enjoyed them — will not easily become an addict of the contemporary movies and television programs and cheap novels that devastate the soul and take it away from the Christian path.

“The child who has learned to see beauty in classical painting and sculpture will not easily be drawn into the perversity of contemporary art or be attracted by the garish products of modern advertising and pornography.

“The child who knows something of the history of the world, especially in Christian times, and how other people have lived and thought, what mistakes and pitfalls people have fallen into by departing from God and His commandments, and what glorious and influential lives they have lived when they were faithful to Him — will be discerning about the life and philosophy of our own times and will not be inclined to follow the first new philosophy or way of life he encounters. One of the basic problems facing the education of children today is that in the schools they are no longer given a sense of history. It is a dangerous and fatal thing to deprive a child of a sense of history. It means that he has no ability to take examples from the people who lived in the past. And actually, history constantly repeats itself. Once you see that, it becomes interesting how people have answered problems, how there have been people who have gone against God and what results came from that, and how people changed their lives and became exceptions and gave an example which is lived down to our own times. This sense of history is a very important thing which should be communicated to children.

“In general, the person who is well acquainted with the best products of secular culture — which in the West almost always have definite religious and Christian overtones — has a much better chance of leading a normal, fruitful Orthodox life than someone who knows only the popular culture of today. One who is converted to Orthodoxy straight from ‘rock’ culture, and in general

anyone who thinks he can combine Orthodoxy with that kind of culture — has much suffering to go through and a difficult road in life before he can become a truly serious Orthodox Christian who is capable of handing on his faith to others. Without this suffering, without this awareness, Orthodox parents will raise their children to be devoured by the contemporary world. The world's best culture, properly received, refines and develops the soul; today's popular culture cripples and deforms the soul and hinders it from having a full and normal response to the message of Orthodoxy.

“Therefore, in our battle against the spirit of this world, we can use the best things the world has to offer in order to go beyond them; everything good in the world, if we are only wise enough to see it, points to God, and to Orthodoxy, and we have to make use of it.”<sup>7</sup>

**Y**EARS earlier, when he first gave his “Orthodox Survival Course” in 1975, Fr. Seraphim spoke specifically about how the best products of culture can help children to grow up with proper sexual morality:

“In our present society, boys by the time they are fourteen or fifteen years old know all about sexual sins, much more than even married people used to know. They know exactly what is going on in the movies, they see it, and the whole atmosphere in which they live is one of indulgence. ‘Why fight against this sort of thing?’ it is said. ‘It’s natural.’ Obviously, they are being prepared for a life of indulgence in sin.

“Such a boy may be given the standard of truth, which is chastity, virginity; but this is a very high and difficult standard if all he has in his mind is the abstract idea of chastity in order to fight against this all-pervading atmosphere of sensuality which attacks not only the mind but also the heart — and the body directly. He sees everywhere billboards which lead to temptation, and the magazines which he can now look at are frightful; and all this is much stronger than the single idea of being pure. In fact, everybody will laugh at that idea, and the poor boy will have a very difficult time not just in resisting, but even in

seeing that he *should* resist temptation, because all the evidence is against it except for that one little abstract truth that he should be pure. In this respect he can be helped by literature....

“The boy can read something like *David Copperfield*, which describes a boy growing up: not some kind of monk or ascetic hero, but just an ordinary boy growing up in a different time.... It’s true that this is a worldly book about people living in the world — but that world is quite different [from today’s world]. Already you get a different perspective on things: that the world has not always been the way it is now; that the standard which is now in the air is one kind of world and there are other kinds; and that this is a different, normal world in which, although the element of sex is present, it has a definite role. You get strength from seeing what was normal in that time, from the way Dickens describes this young boy growing up and falling in love. He is embarrassed to be around the girl and never thinks about dirty things because nothing like that ever comes up; whereas if you read any contemporary novel that’s all you get. This book shows a much higher view of love, which is of course for the sake of marriage, which is for the sake of children. The whole of one’s life is bound up with this, and the thought never comes up in this book that one can have some kind of momentary satisfaction and then pass on to the next girl. *David Copperfield* is full of dreams of this woman, how he is going to live with her and be a big man of the world. It is assumed that he has sexual relations after he is married, but this is involved with what one is going to do with one’s whole life.

“Again, this gives strength to a boy who is himself occupied with precisely these temptations. When he asks questions like, ‘How do I behave towards a girl?’—an abstract sort of standard doesn’t help much. But if he sees how this fictional person, who is very true to life at a different age, was so embarrassed, so concerned, so polite, so idealistic and tender, this inspires him to behave himself more normally, according to past standards. And in such a novel we see how many sides there are to the whole question of love and sex, how complicated it is in our whole human nature. Although no Orthodoxy is



preached, the whole atmosphere is filled with at least a large remnant of Christian values, and this gives a definite help to the boy on his own level, not on a spiritual level, but on the level of his leading an everyday life in the world.

“Also, Dickens communicates an extremely warm feeling about life, about human relationships, which is not given in school today. And this very feeling of warmth about human relationships might have more effect on keeping a boy pure than giving him the abstract standard of Orthodoxy....

“The warmth of Dickens can help break through one-sided rationalism better than years of arguments, because even if you accept the truth you can still be cold and rationalistic and insensitive. Simply reading Dickens can already produce in one tears of gratitude for having the true religion of love. The earnestness and compassion of Dostoyevsky can help break through one’s self-love and complacency. Even someone like Thomas Mann, who doesn’t have the qualities of great warmth and compassion, can give one a deeper insight into the wrongness of the path of Western life.”

**I**N the same lecture Fr. Seraphim recalled an incident from his youth in which his own soul was formed according to a standard of truth:

“In college, before I had much sensitivity about architecture, my German professor [\[b\]](#) gave a talk one day as we were walking between two buildings built about thirty years apart in much the same Spanish stucco style. He asked, ‘Can you tell me the difference between those two buildings? Look closely: one has bricks, it has lines; the other is of cement, it’s flat, nothing. One is warm, the other cold; one has some kind of human feeling to it, the other has nothing, it’s just abstract; one is suitable for a person to live in...’ This gave me a very deep lesson, that even a small thing like the presence of lines or the small ornaments on Victorian architecture which are in no way utilitarian — all this gives some kind of quality. Today the feeling for anything more than what is absolutely necessary has been lost. This utilitarianism, this practicality, is very deadening. Of course it is cheaper to make things purely utilitarian and therefore all this is

logical; still, we have lost a great deal. When parents can at least show a child that ‘This building is good; that one is not, it’s rather dead,’ such a basic education will help him so that he will not simply think that whatever is modern or most up-to-date is the best. This is not simply a course in art, but a course in life, part of growing up which parents and teachers can give between the lines of a formal education. All this involves a sense of art. By contrast, the contemporary upbringing in schools emphasizes crudity, coldness, and inability to judge what is better and what is worse — total relativity, which only confuses a person and helps fit him into the world of apostasy. There must at least be a minimum of a conscious battle to help raise a child with different influences.”

**F**ROM all that has been said, one can get a sense of the seriousness with which Fr. Seraphim regarded the education of the boys and young men whom God had placed under his charge.

By the school year of 1981–82, Theophil was in his “Twelfth-Year Course,” in which Fr. Seraphim strove to teach him English grammar, Russian grammar, world literature, music appreciation, history, Church music, and Typicon.

During the same year, Fr. Seraphim taught a course on the “Orthodox Worldview.” An extended version of his “Survival Course” of 1975, it required tests and term papers. His first incentive to teach it had come in August of 1981, when an eighteen-year-old Jordanville seminarian had visited the monastery with his parents. The parents, who were long-time friends of the Brotherhood, were worried about their son’s future. Like so many people his age who had been raised in our modern fragmented society, the seminarian was unable to express or face his emotions and ideas, and was unsure of what was going on inside himself. As Fr. Seraphim noted: “He does not want to do anything else but prepare himself for service in the Church, but he is also very much afraid of the depression which came over him last year in Jordanville (and lasted for months), based upon idleness, inability to apply what he reads in spiritual books to the

reality of his life, etc. He is presently in a ‘bored’ state, and without close supervision he is afraid (and we agree) that he will lose all interest in serving the Church.”<sup>8</sup>

Learning all this from the seminarian and his parents, the Platina fathers came up with an idea: to let him stay at the monastery and do his course work there, under Fr. Seraphim’s guidance and instruction. After praying about it and receiving Holy Communion the next day, the young man accepted the proposal. Fr. Seraphim wrote to Bishop Laurus in Jordanville asking if he could still receive his seminary degree under this arrangement. “From what we know of him over the past several years,” Fr. Seraphim wrote, “he seems to be a highly gifted and motivated boy who could easily perform the necessary work; and under close supervision we believe his emotional problem (which seems to be bound up with immaturity) can also be handled.”<sup>9</sup> After some discussion, the Jordanville faculty accepted Fr. Seraphim’s proposal.

Soon another eighteen-year-old Jordanville seminarian, George, also came to do his course work at the Platina monastery. Of Protestant background, George was from Redding and had been baptized by Fr. Seraphim, his family having been introduced to Orthodoxy by the man whom Fr. Herman had met in the Redding bookstore.

During the 1981 Summer Pilgrimage, yet another young man came to stay at the monastery: a college student named Gregory from the Orthodox fellowship at the University of California, Santa Cruz. (It had been at Gregory’s apartment that Fr. Seraphim had stayed when he had gone to Santa Cruz back in May.) An earnest young man with shining blue eyes and a wild mop of red hair, Gregory had recently converted to Orthodoxy from Anglicanism and what he now called “charismania.” He had always longed for a life of self-sacrifice and closeness to nature, and upon encountering Orthodoxy he had become inspired with the idea of desert monasticism. He would carry *The Northern Thebaid* around the college with him like a textbook. When he came to the monastery in August and decided to stay, the fathers noticed that he was always looking after

and caring for others, and by this they knew that his desire for a desert *podvig* was a genuine one, not just an egotistic escape. He also had an incredibly quick mind. Clearly, here was another young soul just begging to *be filled*, to be given an Orthodox formation. Gregory was clothed as a novice, and began the next school year in Fr. Seraphim's "Orthodox Worldview" course.

Including both monastery brothers and "lay" students, seven men took part in the full course, with several more young men and women coming up to attend lectures regularly on the weekends. A tremendous amount of material was covered in a nine-month period. Fr. Seraphim devoted much time to dogmatic theology and the history of the Church, acquainting the students with the lives and thought of a great many Holy Fathers. At the same time, he taught much of what they would normally learn in universities, again according to a definite *way of seeing that* made sense of it all. Among the people covered in the course were the religious teachers Joachim of Fiore, Martin Luther, and Teilhard de Chardin; the Western philosophers Thomas Aquinas, Kant, Voltaire, Hegel, Marx, Rousseau, and Proudhon; the scientists Copernicus, Kepler, Lamarck, Lyell, Darwin, and Haeckel; the literary figures Homer, Dante, Milton, Samuel Richardson, Oliver Goldsmith, Henry Fielding, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Jane Austen, Diderot, Byron, Pushkin, Leontiev, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gogol, Poe, Dickens, and Wordsworth; and the political figures and thinkers Julian the Apostate, Oliver Cromwell, Boris Godunov, Peter I, Nicholas I (Fr. Seraphim's favorite Tsar), Weishaupt, Babeuf, Bakunin, Fourier, Burke, Pobedonostsev, Owen, Napoleon, Hitler, Donoso Cortes, Saint-Simon, Metternich, and de Maistre. Fr. Seraphim discussed the works of scores of painters and sculptors from the ancient to the ultra-modern. He taught about the music of the Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, and Romantic periods, and about the new standards of music which came after these; even the contemporary phenomenon of the "Beatles" was examined according to the Orthodox worldview.

Fr. Seraphim's students did not know then how fortunate they were. This was by far the most in-depth course he had ever taught, and he would not live to

give another one. As he himself well knew, such a broad education in world knowledge and experience based on Orthodox principles is virtually extinct in our times.

In addition to the Orthodox Worldview course, Fr. Seraphim taught a course in English grammar-poetry-composition, and Fr. Herman taught one in Church history and literature. The students spent about twelve hours per week in these classes. To this the two seminarians added another ten hours of supervised work for the second-year seminary course, the materials for which had been sent by the fathers and teachers at Jordanville.

The reading of classical literature was an important part of the curriculum. In September of 1981, Fr. Seraphim recorded: “Our two seminary students have started their ‘pre-theological’ studies. Theophil is finally seeing the value of some non-religious learning as a preparation for theology (right now he’s reading Plato), and ———, after reading two Pushkin plays, has discovered that the missing ingredient in his education up to now is precisely worldly literature! The ‘jumping suddenly into theology’ syndrome does seem to be a cause of many problems, both individual and in the Church as a whole.”<sup>[10](#)</sup>

One of the young seminarians was unable to concentrate on reading more than a page at a time or to retain what he had read. For him Fr. Seraphim extended himself by having him read interesting books such as *Crime and Punishment* out loud to him every day, with a brief discussion following. This, he recorded, “had immediate good results, both in level of understanding and interest.” Elsewhere he remarked on this course of oral reading: “The question of Orthodox ‘awakening’ seems to come down to some simple things like that.”<sup>[11](#)</sup>

Fr. Seraphim wrote an outline for the third, fourth, and fifth-year seminary courses for the two boys from Jordanville, which were to include all the main classes offered at Holy Trinity Seminary;<sup>[\[c\]](#)</sup> but he died right before the third-year course was to begin.

**W**<sub>E</sub> have mentioned how the Platina fathers had taken time out to form

the souls of the younger generation by having them listen to classical music. Nowadays, however, it is not only the youth who need such a formation: most of today's parents also have been formed on crude forms of music. At the St. Herman Pilgrimages, therefore, everyone was given a taste of refined Christian culture through the fathers' musical presentations. At the pilgrimage in 1979, when Fr. Seraphim was giving his course on the prophecies of Daniel, he played a recording of Handel's *Balshazzar's Feast*, based on the book of Daniel; and in 1981, while giving his Genesis course, he played Haydn's *Creation Oratorio*. Fr. Herman would play other pieces, especially by his favorite composer, Mozart, and would talk about them.

Even the modern art form of film was used by Fr. Seraphim as a means of forming the soul. As he once explained: "Some parents say, 'Oh, the world is so bad, I refuse to let my children go to the movies; I refuse to have anything to do with the world, I want to keep them pure.' But these children will get involved with the world no matter what, and the fact that they are deprived of any kind of *dushevni* diet — i.e., that which feeds the middle part of the soul — means that most likely they will grab what they can get when they can get it. Therefore, it is better to choose those movies which at least have no evil in them and cause no inclination to sin."<sup>[12](#)</sup>

Right after the Feast of Christmas in the years 1980 and 1981, Fathers Herman and Seraphim rented a movie-projector and carefully selected films for the young people to view: classics such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*, *A Christmas Carol*,<sup>[13](#)</sup> and *The Pickwick Papers*, as well as *Tom Brown's School Days*.

With all that Fr. Seraphim said above about Charles Dickens, it should be mentioned that, during his early years of Orthodox zealotry, he had been like the monastic aspirant on Mount Athos in dismissing Dickens' works as "Victorian sentimentality." Now, however, after years of warming his heart and regaining his innocence in Orthodoxy, he was free to appreciate *The Pickwick Papers* just as he once had as a boy, when he had stayed up late at night reading it under the

covers. When he saw the English movie of it a year before he died, he was like a child again, chuckling at Dickens' endearing humor, and weeping when Dickens drove home a Christian message.

Once Fr. Seraphim was asked about movies that portray Christian virtue. "There are a lot of them," he replied, "but they don't make them any more. Maybe they do once in a while, but it is very rare. Old movies, especially ones that are dramatizations of novels or classic plays, are often very well done and there is a point to them. Everything in Dickens is that way; it is full of Christianity. He doesn't mention Christ even, but it is full of love. In *The Pickwick Papers*, for example, the hero Mr. Pickwick is a person who refuses to give up his innocence in trusting people. Finally he gets put in the debtors' prison because he trusted someone. There comes to him the man who put him in prison and seduced his relative, and who has now been put in prison himself. Mr. Pickwick weeps over the man and gives him money so he can buy a meal, because the man has no money to buy food in debtor's prison. One sees this man, this criminal who has been taking advantage of everyone, and one little tear forms in the man's eye. In the end Mr. Pickwick is triumphant, because he trusted men; and he wins because people's hearts are changed.

"There are lots of old movies like this which show either the passions of men, the innocence of men, or various Christian virtues. In fact, these nineteenth-century novels on which they are based are very down-to-earth and real; and they show how to live a normal Christian life, how to deal with these various passions that arise. They do not give it on a spiritual level, but by showing it in life, and by having a basic Christian understanding of life, they are very beneficial. I don't know of any movies nowadays that are that way. Maybe here and there you can find one, but they have all become so weird.... For example, Dickens is heartwarming with regard to normal, everyday life, but the recent movie *E.T.* is heartwarming with regard to some kind of freakish thing, which becomes something like a saviour.

"I think that we should seek out more of these old movies. For a group —

say, a church group — to get together and show these old movies would be very good, especially for the young people.”<sup>13</sup>

Besides showing films on special occasions, Fr. Seraphim took time out to bring the young laymen at the monastery to live performances of classical drama. Noting this and other attempts of Fr. Seraphim to form young souls, Fr. Alexey Young recalls:

“Several times Fr. Seraphim came by our house on his way to and from Ashland, Oregon, where he’d taken some of the lay brothers to see various plays at the Shakespeare Festival there. One of these times — I’m almost sure it was early in the summer he died — he took the ‘boys’ to see *Romeo and Juliet*, which they’d been reading and studying beforehand. When I expressed surprise at the young students being taken to see such a play, he said: ‘But why not? They’re human beings, and have feelings and passions like anyone else. It’s better for them to be exposed to this in a supervised and controlled way rather than just struggling alone with it.’

“This was consistent with instruction he gave me whenever Theophil came to spend the summer: ‘Let him watch TV — even soap operas!—if he wants, and take him to movies. Theophil is fascinated by the world, and it’s best that he get it out of his system now. Just be sure that you watch everything with him and *discuss* it thoroughly so that he can put it in a true spiritual context.’ This seemed very wise to me, too. He believed that a small, regulated ‘dose’ of worldliness could act like a vaccination and might ultimately result in ‘immunity’ from worldly attractions.

“On one occasion he asked me to take Theophil to see Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* at the San Francisco Opera, which we did; and another time he asked me to take him to Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* in Ashland. He knew these works very well, and even spelled out for me the specific ‘lessons’ I was to draw from these productions and share with Theophil. Always he requested a detailed ‘report’ from me afterwards as to how Theophil (or others) had reacted, whether they’d ‘got the point,’ etc.



“I also recall how he encouraged Michael Anderson<sup>[le](#)</sup> to read Plato and other philosophers, discussing all of this with him in detail as Michael laboriously made his way through these texts. Fr. Seraphim showed him how all of this was linked up with Orthodoxy and Patristics....

“Similarly with music: quite early on I’d told him that I supposed we would have to give up Mozart, etc., if we were going to be really serious about spiritual growth. His response: ‘You poor man!’ I can still hear him say it! Then he explained the place of beauty in the spiritual world, and how great art of any kind works with the totality of man’s spiritual nature. This was the first time I’d been introduced to this idea. Later on I discovered it myself in some of the Holy Fathers, and I’ve often shared it with others in the ensuing years. But until then I’d had a somewhat ‘puritanical’ view of these things....

“Years after Fr. Seraphim left us I came across this verse (II Tim. 1:7) and immediately thought of him, as it seems to summarize his own approach — anyway, as I experienced it—: ‘For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, *and of a sound mind.*’... In general I would say that anyone who really opened up to him — and unfortunately that wasn’t very many — received a veritable treasure-trove of wisdom from him. Little of this was appreciated until after he was dead.”<sup>[14](#)</sup>

**L**IKE any father, Fr. Seraphim suffered over the sons in his care. Each of the young souls he was helping to form, including those we have not mentioned, had its own secret wounds and scars. One of them had been an unwanted child, formed in a loveless environment with no father and a religiously unbalanced mother; another, although he did come from a loving home, could not seem to “find himself” as he grew into manhood and no longer had his parents to buffer him from the hard realities of life; another young man, who had come from a broken home and been moved about from father to mother, had wounds that still needed healing; and yet another brother had come to the monastery out of a dark underworld of drugs, crime, and black magic — influences that still plagued

him.

Late at night, Fr. Herman would often see Fr. Seraphim praying for these young men and for all the troubled people who had entered his life: victims of the nihilistic modern society whose essence he had identified so many years before. The boys themselves would already be sleeping soundly in their beds, while Fr. Seraphim, in the cold, dark church illuminated by a lone candle, would be prostrated before the Holy Table. Weeping, he would implore God to bless, protect, and *heal* them.

The brothers never knew of this until after his repose, when they fully realized what a true father they had had in Fr. Seraphim.

## *Heavenly Visitations*

**A**LL THE SAINTS,” wrote St. John of Kronstadt, “are our older brothers in the one House of the Heavenly Father. Having departed from earth to heaven, they are always with us in God.... They serve together with us, they sing, they speak, they instruct, they help us in various temptations and sorrows. Call upon them as living with you under a single roof; glorify them, thank them, converse with them as with living people; and you will believe in the Church.”

Over the years these “older brothers and sisters” in the heavenly Kingdom had given much help to the Platina fathers in times of temptation. One instance was the following:

In May of 1981 there came to the monastery a disturbed, possibly demonized, Russian man. An escapee from the Soviet Union, this man had even committed murder in the past. Having once been beaten and stabbed by black hoodlums, he had got the notion into his troubled mind that black people were of an evil race and that it was his duty to exterminate them. When he saw the mulatto Theophil at the monastery during the evening meal, he kept glaring at him and then made threatening statements to Fr. Herman concerning the boy. Everyone was petrified. Later, in the dark of night, the man was spotted running through the monastery with a knife. Fr. Herman stopped him and sternly told him to go to bed, and then stationed monastery brothers to lock Theophil’s door and keep watch over the boy until morning.

There was another Russian visiting the monastery then: a guileless, long-suffering, and exceedingly kindhearted man named Gregory Karat. The next morning Gregory woke up before anyone else. As he approached the church he

saw a white-bearded monk walking around and holding a switch. When Fr. Herman came down from his cell to begin the services, Gregory asked him, “Do you know you have a guest?”

“No.”



Abbot Damascene of Valaam (1795-1881), “builder of sanctity,” protector of monks, and scourge of demons. This was the portrait to which Gregory Karat pointed.

“I didn’t hear a car drive up, but you do have a guest. He’s a tall man, a dignitary, but he has no bishop’s *Panagia*<sup>[a]</sup> He was wearing a klobuk, and very solemnly walked through the gate and into the monastery, holding a staff in one hand and a switch in the other.”

“I don’t know who it could be,” Fr. Herman said.

Gregory then took Fr. Herman into the church. In the corner, where a table had been placed for the commemoration of the dead, he pointed to one of the portraits of reposed righteous ones. “This is the one who arrived this morning,

I'm sure," he said. "Who is he?"

"Why, that's Abbot Damascene," answered Fr. Herman. "But he died a hundred years ago." And indeed, that very year marked the centennial of Abbot Damascene's repose.

Abbot Damascene had been one of the most influential people in the thousand-year history of Valaam. The St. Herman Brotherhood, having been called a "reflection of Valaam" by Archbishop John, was in many ways linked to him. It was through this righteous Abbot that the first Life of the Valaammonk St. Herman had been compiled, thus leading to the Saint's veneration and ultimate canonization.

To the Platina fathers, the meaning of Abbot Damascene's visit to their monastery was clear: he had been sent by God to avert the carrying out of the crazed man's evil designs, to subdue — with his spiritual "switch" — the satanic *principalities and powers* (Col. 2:15) which had disturbed the peace and harmony of the monastery. That day the man was taken away by Fr. Herman and Gregory Karat, and with him left the danger. The fathers never forgot the favor done them by the Valaam Abbot, and within a year they printed an issue of *The Orthodox Word* with his first Life in English and his picture on the cover, in honor of his centennial.<sup>[1](#)</sup>

**A**NOTHER heavenly visitation took place a few months after this, and has been described as follows by the aforementioned Novice Gregory:

"While living at the St. Herman of Alaska Monastery, in February 1982, I accompanied Hieromonk Seraphim of blessed memory to Redding, California, where he gave a lecture at the St. Herman of Alaska Winter Pilgrimage and celebrated the Divine Liturgy the following day on the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord at the Surety of Sinners Mission Parish.

"Shortly after Liturgy on the day of the Feast, Fr. Seraphim sent me together with several brothers to buy supplies and groceries for the monastery, entrusting me with \$150. Having brought a full shopping cart to the check stand,

I suddenly realized that I didn't have the money. I was shocked, felt terrible that I had lost the money, and proceeded to blame and reproach everyone and everything else vocally and mentally. We phoned the church and Fr. Seraphim told us to return. When we had parked in the driveway, I started walking towards the church and met Fr. Seraphim alone halfway, and he said, 'You have it right there,' pointing to my chest. 'Archbishop John told me. You didn't think of praying to him, did you?' With self-assurance I felt my chest and with simultaneous joy and shame I found the money in a pocket which I thought I had certainly searched; and, startled, I replied that, indeed, I hadn't prayed to Vladika John. Fr. Seraphim then comforted me, explaining that after we had finished speaking on the phone, he had gone immediately to church, on the left side of which there is a large portrait of Archbishop John together with his mitre and several other portraits and relics associated with his life and person. There he had asked Vladika John to help us find the money. Archbishop John informed him that I had the money right in my pocket (under my very nose!). Thus, through the intercession of God's righteous ones, a sure trial and temptation were transformed into a revelation of holiness and grace."<sup>2</sup>

This visitation, of course, was a sign not only of the heavenly help that is given by the saints, but also of the close connection that Fr. Seraphim had with the other world. The following account by Valentina Harvey's son Philip<sup>[b]</sup> reveals that Fr. Seraphim, even during his earthly pilgrimage, received a foretaste of the paradisaal bliss prepared for him:

"A few years prior to Fr. Seraphim's repose I was serving in the altar with him [at the Redding church]. I do not remember the exact date, but it was a simple Saturday night Vigil. There was a very small group of people in attendance. Besides me only my mother and sister were there. Also someone from Platina was the reader. It was a quiet, peaceful service.

"During the *irmoi* [verses] being read at Matins, Fr. Seraphim was deep in prayer. At one point I was standing in the altar as Fr. Seraphim stood before the Holy Table. The flow of reading by the reader was very soothing. I felt a real

strange calm and peaceful feeling. I looked at Fr. Seraphim and there seemed to be a slight glow to his face. Nothing startling, just a glow. After the service both my mother and sister mentioned how the service was so calm, peaceful and spiritual.

“I did not realize what I had seen until I read the *Little Russian Philokalia* about St. Seraphim of Sarov.<sup>3</sup> I truly believe Fr. Seraphim was blessed by Divine Light.”<sup>4</sup>

In the Orthodox Vesper service Jesus Christ is called the “Quiet Light”; and during the Vigil service in that humble “garage chapel” in Redding, Fr. Seraphim was given to experience Him as such. While seeking nothing spectacular, he was given the sublime, inward consolation of Him Who had called him out of the world and said: *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you* (John 14:27).

**F**ATHER HERMAN relates another occasion when something extraordinary happened in the altar with Fr. Seraphim. This occurred one Sunday morning not long before Fr. Seraphim died. Fr. Seraphim was preparing to celebrate the Divine Liturgy at the monastery, when Fr. Herman came down from his Valaam cell and entered the church. The Sixth Hour service was being completed, right after which the Liturgy was to begin. The altar curtain behind the royal doors was drawn open, and Fr. Herman could see that Br. David was serving as Fr. Seraphim’s acolyte. To his amazement, he also saw the back of another server in the altar. This server was the same height as David. He had long blonde hair, and wore a white altar robe (*sticharion*) and a blue stole (*orarion*). Fr. Herman could only see the back of him, and wondered who he was. When he entered the south door of the altar, he whispered to Fr. Seraphim, “Who is the other acolyte?” But Fr. Seraphim denied that there was anyone except David.



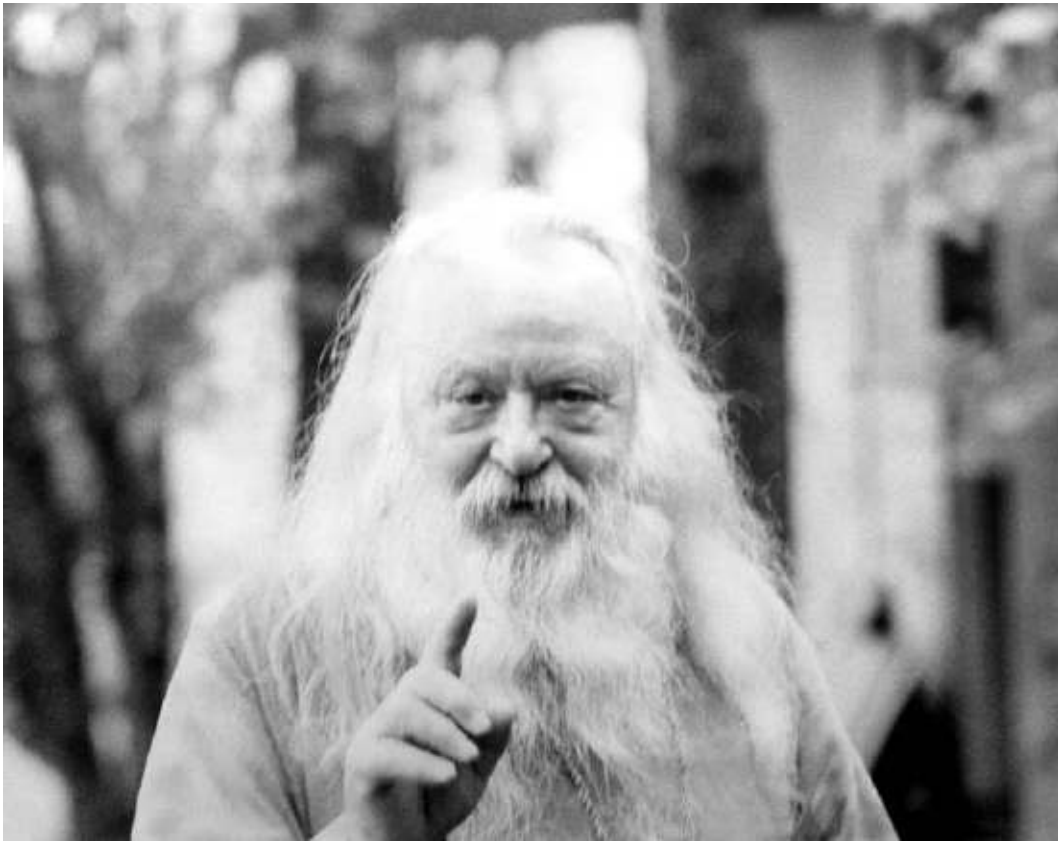
Fr. Seraphim serving in the monastery church during the Vigil service in honor of St. Herman of Alaska, 1980. *Photograph by Fr. Lawrence Williams.*

“I searched the altar with my eyes,” Fr. Herman recalls, “and saw no one. I thought that perhaps he had left through the north door of the iconostasis, but there was no trace of him. Yet I had distinctly seen a man. As I entered the altar again, my heart was suddenly filled with reverent trepidation, and my inner voice said, ‘Why could it not have been an angel?’ Never before or after did I experience such speechless awe. Wondrous are Thy works, O Lord!”



# PART XII





Bishop Nektary at the St. Herman Monastery, August 1979. *Photograph by Thomas Anderson.*

## ***“A Giant of the Older Generation”***

*In malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.*

—I Corinthians 14:20

**O**NCE when Bishop Nektary was visiting Optina as a little boy, the clairvoyant Elder Nektary had told his mother, “Take good care of him. He’ll be of use to us someday.”

Becoming a monk and then a hierarch in America, Bishop Nektary fulfilled the Elder’s saying. He did not become famous or accomplish anything spectacular, but he faithfully embodied the simplicity, humility, gentleness, kindness, and warmth of Optina spirituality. Here is how this heavy-set, white-bearded man was remembered by a Russian woman named Barbara, who knew him in her childhood in San Francisco:

“I knew Bishop Nektary ever since I was three or four years old. When I was older, I belonged to the Russian Scouts. Bishop Nektary was the head clergyman of the scouts, and would come to serve an Akathist and have tea.

“He was an innocent man; and, being like a child himself, he loved children. I remember how he bought a boat with my brother, and they sank it together. He was a fabulous swimmer, and taught my sister to swim.

“At scout camp, every day he would tell us stories. He was such a great storyteller that our eyes would become like saucers as we listened. He would become so animated. It was better than television.

“He would always entertain us. He used to make animal sounds, sounding like an owl or bear. And he loved animals.

“My girlfriend Vera used to drive him around. Once she went to pick him up, and, finding him in the kitchen, she saw a plate on the floor with all these little ants marching onto it.

“‘Vladika Nektary! What’s that plate doing on the floor?’ she asked.

“‘Verochka,’ he said, ‘I’m feeding the ants.’

“He had great wit and was very funny, but he usually kept a straight face.



Bishop Nektary serving the Divine Liturgy at the St. Herman Monastery on the day of Fr. Seraphim’s ordination to the priesthood, April 11/24, 1977. *Photograph by Thomas Anderson.*



Bishop Nektary with Fr. Seraphim right after the latter's ordination.



In the monastery trapeza, 1979. Left to right: Fr. Alexey Young, Fr. Herman, Bishop Nektary, Fr. Seraphim, Reader Vladimir Anderson.

“He was also very caring. I remember how I broke my finger once, and he came to attend to me personally. One time he hid my brother in his home after my mother had been abusing him.

“Bishop Nektary was a wonderful man. He was very sweet and very warm — a very special person who was much loved by us children.”

**T**HE fathers at Platina also recalled stories which illustrated Bishop Nektary’s gentleness and innocent wit. Once he came to visit the monastery unexpectedly, and the fathers wanted to serve him a meal. Br. David, the monastery car mechanic, happened to be cook that week, and he was right in the middle of fixing a truck. Tools and parts were everywhere, and yet he complied with Fr. Herman’s urgent request that he immediately prepare a meal for the Bishop. He decided to cook spaghetti. When it was ready to dish out, David, apparently thinking that important personages like bishops should get more food than everyone else, put a huge portion of spaghetti and chunky tomato sauce on Bishop Nektary’s plate. One brother began the customary reading during the meal while the humble Bishop bravely tried to tackle the mountain of spaghetti before him. He had been eating for some time when the fathers noticed that he was doing something strange with his mouth. The Bishop then began to slowly pull something out of his mouth. It was a large bolt with a nut on it! One of David’s car parts had somehow fallen into the spaghetti sauce.

The fathers were terribly embarrassed, but Bishop Nektary did not become upset or perturbed in the slightest. With a smile in his eyes he turned to Fr. Herman and whispered, “No wonder it’s so tasty.”

**B**ISHOP NEKTARY, as we have said, had a small house-chapel dedicated to the Kursk Icon of the Mother of God, located in the town of Alameda across the San Francisco Bay. After their ordination, Fathers Seraphim and Herman, with brothers from the monastery, would go there every year on the chapel’s feast day in November, which was also the eve of Bishop Nektary’s nameday. They would

assist their Bishop in serving a Vigil and Liturgy, which would begin in the evening and continue until around 4:00 a.m. The presence of the monastic fathers and brothers always brought consolation to Bishop Nektary, since he had once hoped to establish a monastic community in Alameda. The last of these memorable all-night services was held a few months after Fr. Seraphim's repose, but Bishop Nektary was already extremely weak then and approaching death himself. He stayed through the entire service and participated as he was able, even though he had to have an oxygen tank on hand in the altar.

Fr. Seraphim was fortunate to have died before Bishop Nektary. Toward the end of his own life, he felt that he would never again know a hierarch of Bishop Nektary's spiritual calibre, and he disrelished the thought of losing him. In June of 1976, shortly after the repose of Archbishop Averky, he wrote in a letter: "First of all, our instructors must be the giants of the older generation: Vladika John, Vladika Averky, and those like them. Vladika Nektary is the most precious of that generation remaining to us — may God preserve him yet for many years!"<sup>1</sup>

Behind Bishop Nektary's humble exterior was a man of deep spirituality. His counsels to the fathers on prayer and spiritual life had always been solidly rooted, not only in Patristic knowledge, but in the living tradition he had received. His own experience of inward stillness and Prayer of the Heart was glimpsed at the end of his life by Fr. Herman, when a heart condition required that the Bishop have a "pacemaker." "What do you think?" Bishop Nektary asked Fr. Herman then. "If they put a battery-operated device in me, its tick will have a particular, set pace. And since my Jesus Prayer also has a particular pace, the device will force me to pray not as my heart wants to."

Fr. Seraphim had counted Bishop Nektary among "the giants of the older generation"; but, as Fr. Herman was later to say, he was a "silent giant." After Bishop Nektary's repose, Fr. Herman was to recall: "I have to admit that I judged Bishop Nektary during his lifetime. I wanted a bishop who would be outspoken, fearless, courageous, like Archbishop Averky — or else a missionary

like Archbishop Andrew. Bishop Nektary had so much to give, and yet he accepted the quiet, humble position he was placed in, never wanting to push himself.



Fr. Seraphim when he served with Bishop Nektary for the last time. Chapel of the Kursk Icon of the Mother of God, Alameda, California, on the Feast of the Kursk Icon, November 27/December 10, 1981.

“All these thoughts of mine, however, were on a low level. Later I realized why he did what he did. I understood what it had been like for him, how he had seen unpleasant situations in the Church and yet had managed to keep going. To the end of his life he succeeded in preserving his innocence, just as his childlike Elder Nektary had done.”

Bishop Nektary lived with a sense that Elder Nektary was nearby. That he was not wrong in this can be seen by the manner in which he led his life. As if



Elder Nektary was guiding him every step of the way, he quietly followed the path that the monks of Optina had once trod — keeping his soul guileless and pure, befitting an inhabitant of the Kingdom of Heaven.

## Hope

*The ‘gates of hell’ will not prevail against the Church, but they have and certainly can prevail against many who consider themselves pillars of the Church, as is shown by Church history.*

—Archbishop Averky<sup>1</sup>

ORTHODOXY,” wrote Archbishop Averky, “is not merely some type of purely earthly organization which is headed by patriarchs, bishops, and priests who hold the ministry in the Church which is officially called ‘Orthodox.’ Orthodoxy is the mystical ‘Body of Christ,’ the head of which is Christ Himself....

“The Church, it is true, may not be removed completely from the world, for people enter her who are still living on the earth, and therefore the ‘earthly’ element in her composition and external organization is unavoidable; yet the less of this ‘earthly’ element there is, the better it will be for her eternal goals. In any case, this ‘earthly’ element should not obscure or suppress the purely spiritual element — the matter of the salvation of the soul unto eternal life — for the sake of which the Church both was founded and exists.”<sup>2</sup>

These words were very much along the lines of Fr. Seraphim’s thinking. Although Fr. Seraphim was a devoted member of the Orthodox Church, he knew he could place no ultimate hope in any church organization. That is why, in the letter to an Orthodox priest quoted earlier, he wrote: “Orthodox shepherds today more than ever must beware of placing their hope in the ‘organization,’ but rather must be constantly looking upward to the Chief Shepherd Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

In another letter, having described the small Orthodox community in Etna, Fr. Seraphim stated: “We ourselves have a feeling — based on nothing very definite as yet — that the best hope for preserving true Orthodoxy in the years ahead will lie in such small gatherings of believers, as much as possible ‘one in mind and soul.’ The history of the twentieth century has already shown us that we cannot expect too much from the ‘Church organization’; there, even apart from heresies, the spirit of the world has become very strong. Archbishop Averky,<sup>[a]</sup> and our own Bishop Nektary also, have warned us to prepare for catacomb times ahead, when the grace of God may even be taken away from the ‘Church organization’ and only isolated groups of believers will remain. Soviet Russia already gives us an example of what we may expect — only worse, for the times do not get better.”<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the fact that Fr. Seraphim did not place final hope in church organizations did not mean that he at any time ceased to believe in the invincibility of the *Orthodox Church*—the mystical Body of Christ against which *the gates of hell shall not prevail* (Matt. 16:18).

In Orthodox dogmatic theology, the Church has been defined not as an organization but as a *theandric* (Divine-human) *organism*. Christ is the Head of the Church, the Holy Spirit gives life to the Church, and the believers — both those still on earth in the “Church militant” and those already in Heaven in the “Church triumphant” — are included in Christ’s Body. Thus, the twentieth-century Serbian theologian Fr. Justin Popovich wrote that “the Church is... a Divine-human organism and not a human organization.”<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Fr. Michael Pomazansky stated: “The life of the Church in its essence is *mystical*; the course of its life cannot be entirely included in any ‘history.’ The Church is completely distinct from any kind whatever of organized society on earth.... As all the members of our body comprise a full and living organism which depends upon its head, so also the Church is a spiritual organism in which there is no place that the powers of Christ do not act.”<sup>6</sup>

IN viewing the Church as a Divine-human organism headed by Christ, Fr. Seraphim was able to look above and beyond the errors and sins of the Church's human members. Following the Scriptural injunction to *trust not in princes, nor in the sons of men* (Psalm 145:2), he instead put trust in Christ Who welcomes sinful men and women into His Body and offers to save them from sin. In a passage from *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* which Fr. Seraphim translated into English, Fr. Michael Pomazansky wrote: "The sanctity of the Church is not darkened by the intrusion of the world into the Church, or by the sinfulness of men. Everything sinful and worldly which intrudes into the Church's sphere remains foreign to it and is destined to be sifted out and destroyed, like weed seeds at sowing time. The opinion that the Church consists only of righteous and holy people without sin does not agree with the direct teaching of Christ and His Apostles. The Saviour compares His Church with a field in which the wheat grows together with the tares, and again, with a net which draws out of the water both good fish and bad. In the Church there are both good servants and bad ones (Matt. 18:23–35), wise virgins and foolish (Matt. 25:1–13)."<sup>7</sup>

In a letter of 1972, Fr. Seraphim expressed his faith in the organism of the Church — a faith which prevented him from getting upset even when he beheld others in the Church who treated it like a political organization. To an American convert who was angry when he saw church leaders acting like petty organizational men, Fr. Seraphim counseled:

"On the whole, our bishops are not known as poor administrators.... If anything, their great temptation lies in taking the 'organization' side of the Church too seriously and thereby sometimes 'quenching the spirit' of some members of the Church's organism. Those of us who can must simply try to keep this spirit alive — as you have written, precisely: 'to turn from trusting in the "organization" and cleave to the "organism."' Thereby we not only can be of service to the Church, but we become the bishops' best helpers — for we are working together with them in the true service of the Church's 'organism,' the

Body of Christ. If we thereby sometimes suffer misunderstandings and offenses from each other (and we are all guilty of this, not just bishops!), the Church gives us the spiritual means to forgive and overcome these.

“In particular, we are sad to see you so angry at Fr. G——... and we refuse to entertain any hard feelings about him. If he has placed himself in mistaken positions, it was doubtless from sincere motives, which were nonetheless potentially harmful because they were *political*, i.e., directed toward the ‘organizational’ side of the Church at the expense of the organism. Frankly, Vladika John during his lifetime was not understood even by many of his fellow bishops, precisely because he was always first and foremost living in the organism of the Church and never let the organization take precedence. *That is his testament to us all*, and don’t worry if you think you don’t understand it right now; it can’t really be ‘understood,’ but only experienced and suffered through as you grow in the Church and her tradition. God will send you occasions for ‘understanding’ it in your heart.

“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.”<sup>8</sup>

In a letter of 1975, addressing the problems created in the Church by the super-correct faction, Fr. Seraphim again expressed his hope in the Church which transcends human errors and passions: “Deep down we are peaceful about all this, for we know the Church is stronger than any of those who have been deceived into thinking *they* are the Church, and they always fall away, making those who remain in the Church more sober thereby.”<sup>9</sup>

During a lecture at the 1979 St. Herman Pilgrimage, Fr. Seraphim spoke about how God is leading the Church:

“The more you ‘get your own wings’ in Orthodoxy, by reading more, being exposed to more, having more contact with Orthodox people, receiving the grace

of God more, the more you begin to be able to ‘feel your way’ in the whole realm of Orthodoxy. You begin to see that there are many wise things which in the beginning you might have thought were not so wise. Even if the people involved in these things are not wise themselves, nevertheless God is guiding the Church. We know that He is with the Church until the end, and therefore there is no reason to go off the deep end, to fall into apostasy and heresy.”

In 1981, when writing an article about Fr. Michael Pomazansky, Fr. Seraphim affirmed what both Fr. Michael and Archbishop John had taught him about how the Church is preserved from extremes both on the right and on the left:

“Fortunately, the genuine Orthodox tradition has a way — with the help of God, Who looks after His Church — of preserving itself from the extremes that often try to deflect it from its course. This self-preservation and self-continuity of the Orthodox tradition is not something that requires the assistance of ‘brilliant theologians’; it is the result of the uninterrupted ‘catholic consciousness’ of the Church which has guided the Church from the very beginning of its existence. It is this catholic consciousness which preserved the wholeness of Russian Orthodoxy in the 1920s when the extreme reforms of the ‘Living Church’ seemed to have taken possession of the Church and many of its leading hierarchs and theologians;<sup>[b]</sup> this same catholic consciousness is at work today and will continue to preserve Christ’s Church through all the trials of the present day, just as it has for nearly 2000 years.”<sup>10</sup>

Finally, at the 1982 Pilgrimage, Fr. Seraphim ended what turned out to be the last talk of his life by expressing his hope that his listeners — most of them converts to Orthodoxy — would be true members of Christ’s Body, the Orthodox Church. Countering what he called “the worldly opinion... that the Church is only a set of buildings or a worldly organization,” Fr. Seraphim said we are called “to a deeper awareness of Christ’s Church and of how our ‘formal membership’ in it is not enough to save us.”<sup>11</sup> He quoted the words of the modern-day Romanian confessor Fr. George Calciu about what it means to be in

the Church:

“The Church of Christ is alive and free. In her we move and have our being, through Christ Who is her Head. In Him we have full freedom. In the Church we learn of truth, and the truth will set us free (John 8:32). You are in Christ’s Church whenever you uplift someone bent down in sorrow, or when you give alms to the poor, and visit the sick. You are in Christ’s Church when you cry out: ‘Lord, help me.’ You are in Christ’s Church when you are good and patient, when you refuse to get angry at your brother, even if he has wounded your feelings. You are in Christ’s Church when you pray: ‘Lord, forgive him.’ When you work honestly at your job, returning home weary in the evenings but with a smile upon your lips; when you repay evil with love — you are in Christ’s Church. Do you not see, therefore, young friend, how close the Church of Christ is? You are Peter and God is building His Church upon you. You are the rock of His Church against which nothing can prevail.... Let us build churches with our faith, churches which no human power can pull down, a church whose foundation is Christ.... Feel for your brother alongside you. Never ask: ‘Who is he?’ Rather say: ‘He is no stranger; he is my brother. He is the Church of Christ just as I am.’”

“With such a call in our hearts,” Fr. Seraphim concluded, “let us begin really to belong to the Church of Christ, the Orthodox Church. Outward membership is not enough; something must move within us that makes us different from the world around us, even if that world calls itself ‘Christian’ or even ‘Orthodox.’... If we truly live the Orthodox worldview, our faith will survive the shocks ahead of us and be a source of inspiration and salvation for those who will still be seeking Christ even amidst the shipwreck of humanity which has already begun today.”<sup>12</sup>

**B**ECAUSE he trusted in the power of Christ to heal His Church, Fr. Seraphim cherished hopes for the future healing of the wounds of the Orthodox Church in Russia. He found this hope especially well expressed in the writings

of his most beloved Russian New Martyr, Bishop Damascene Tsedrick of Starodub (†1935), which he translated for the book *Russia's Catacomb Saints*.

Being caught in the early years of the anti-Christian Soviet experiment, Bishop Damascene was a sign in advance for Orthodox Christians who will one day be caught in the reign of Antichrist. He stood up against Metropolitan Sergius' capitulation to the Soviet regime, and for this reason he was arrested and sent into exile. Seeing the Sergian deviation as only a wound in the Body of Christ which would one day be healed, the exiled bishop sent beautiful epistles to console and strengthen his persecuted flock. In one of them he wrote:

“Those children of God who have not fallen under the pressure of the satanic hurricane and have not been bruised by the pieces of the great shipwreck, are clearly aware of the situation and with complete calmness and confidence will undertake the building of the true Church of Christ on the foundation of it which still remains, without excessive nervousness, without unnecessary complaints; for the process of its building will comprise the whole meaning of their life....



New Martyr Bishop Damascene Tsedrick of Starodub.



“Let it be that darkness has temporarily covered the earth (from the sixth to the ninth hour), let it be that the lamps of certain Churches are hidden under bushels so as not to be put out by the satanic whirlwind.... After a short time of rest from the Lord (perhaps even the time when the darkness will imagine that its work has already been completed), the lamps will be revealed, will come together, will ignite a multitude of others which had been put out, will pour together into a great flame of faith which, when efforts are made to put it out, will burn yet brighter....

“Does one need to step back before the attack of militant atheism? May this not be! No matter how few we might be, the whole power of Christ’s promises concerning the invincibility of the Church remain with us. With us is Christ, the Conqueror of death and hell. The history of Christianity shows us that, in all the periods when temptations and heresies have agitated the Church, the bearers of Church Truth and the expressors of it were few, but these few with the fire of their faith and their zealous standing in the Truth have gradually ignited everyone.... The same thing will happen now if we few will fulfill our duty before Christ and His Church to the end.

“The fearless confession of faith and of one’s hope and a firm standing in the Church’s laws are the most convincing refutation of the Sergian deviation and are an unconquerable obstacle to the hostile powers directed against the Church. *Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom* (Luke 12:32).”<sup>[13](#)</sup>

Time has proved that Bishop Damascene’s position was the true one and that his hope was not in vain — for the Orthodox Church, as the Body of Christ, is indeed a living organism from which Christ expels all that is impure.

In 1988, the thousandth anniversary of the Baptism of Rus, the fervent prayers of believers both in Russia and abroad were answered by God, and the situation in Russia began to change. In 1991, within months after the relics of St. Seraphim of Sarov were revealed and carried in procession to Diveyevo Monastery, the totalitarian atheist regime fell, thus changing the situation that

produced the spiritual disease of Sergianism. In the decade that followed, through the heavenly intercessions of St. Seraphim and the host of Russian Saints, Russia experienced what has been called the largest religious revival in history.

In *Russia's Catacomb Saints*, Fr. Seraphim predicted that when the godless regime in Russia falls, "the Sergianist church organization and its whole philosophy of being will crumble to dust."<sup>14</sup> This is indeed happening at the present time in Russian history. For those who view the Church as an invincible *theandric organism* as did Bishop Damascene and Fr. Seraphim, it is clear that Sergianism as an organizational model and a "whole philosophy of being" is indeed being replaced by something else, as the Church organism is healed and corrected by Christ with the cooperation of its members. Clear proof of this is found in the fact that, in the year 2000, the Sobor of Bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate, responding to the fervent desire of the people who comprise the Body of Christ, canonized 1,200 New Martyrs and Confessors, including numerous bishop-martyrs who protested against Metropolitan Sergius' bowing down to the anti-Christian authorities. Among the newly canonized hierarchs was none other than Bishop Damascene.

During the same year of 2000, the Sobor of Bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate passed a historic document entitled "Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church." Without directly mentioning Metropolitan Sergius, this document repudiated the Sergianist principles of state control of the Church and of lying and committing other sins out of obedience to the state: "The state should not interfere in the life of the Church.... If the authorities force Orthodox believers to apostatize from Christ and His Church and to commit sinful and spiritually harmful actions, the Church should refuse to obey the state. The Christian, following the will of his conscience, can refuse to fulfill commands of the state which force him into a grave sin."

These considerations provide a valuable lesson in what the Orthodox Church of Christ actually is, and how "the gates of hell shall not prevail against

it” even if, for a time, some church leaders succumb to temptation and pressure from the world.

**W**ITH his hope in the future healing of the Russian Church, Fr. Seraphim hoped in the future restoration of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad to liturgical communion with the main body of the Russian Orthodox Church inside Russia, the Moscow Patriarchate. In this he was of one mind with the best tradition of the Russian Church Abroad; as will be remembered, it had been Archbishop John who had first instilled such hope in him.<sup>[c]</sup> In 1960, referring to the Russian Church inside Russia as the “suffering Mother” of the Church Abroad, Archbishop John had written: “The Russian Church Outside of Russia spiritually is not separated from her suffering Mother. She offers up prayers for her, preserves her spiritual and material wealth, and in due time she will unite with her, when the reasons for their disunity shall have vanished.”<sup>15</sup>

Together with Archbishop John, Fr. Seraphim understood that the division between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Church Abroad, though real, was only on an organizational level, and did not touch the deeper unity which existed in the Church organism. Thus, when outward circumstances changed in Russia, this unity should be affirmed outwardly. Writing as a member of the Church Abroad, Fr. Seraphim stated in a letter: “Our Church has no communion with Moscow. But our Church recognizes this as a temporary situation, which will end when the Communist regime comes to an end.”<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere, writing about Fr. Dimitry Dudko, who belonged to the Moscow Patriarchate, Fr. Seraphim affirmed that “Once the political situation in Russia that produced ‘Sergianism’ will have changed, a full unity in the faith will be possible with such courageous strugglers as Fr. Dimitry.”<sup>17</sup>

With the changes in Russia, culminating in the canonization of the New Martyrs and Confessors in Moscow, the path became open for Fr. Seraphim’s hope to be realized. On the Feast of Ascension in 2007, in the newly rebuilt Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia,

Alexey II, and the chief hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad, Metropolitan Laurus,<sup>[d]</sup> signed an Act affirming the restoration of liturgical and canonical communion between the Patriarchate and the Church Abroad. Immediately afterward, Patriarch Alexey and Metropolitan Laurus concelebrated the Divine Liturgy in the Cathedral.<sup>[e]</sup> This historic event, marking the healing of nearly eighty years of division, was a cause of great rejoicing for the Orthodox Church throughout the world.

**O**FTEN when divisions prevail in the Church, this is due to lack of faith in the Church and in Christ's power to heal its members. An understanding of the Church as a God-human organism helps us to be more patient when we notice human error in the Church, and less desirous of seeing divisions persist. We will be more accepting of God's Providence, which, as He Himself has told us, allows tares to grow alongside the wheat until the Last Judgment. In times of tribulation we will be able to remain steadfast and faithful to the traditions and teachings of the Church, without ourselves contributing to any schism or ill-will among members of the Church.

For Fr. Seraphim, this understanding of the Church as a living organism grew and deepened over time. With this deepening, Fr. Seraphim was at the same time able to rise above jurisdictional divisions in the Church, which were after all on an organizational level. By the end of his life, he distanced himself considerably from the isolationism that many wished to see prevail in his own Russian Church Abroad. Fr. Alexey Young describes well the change that occurred in Fr. Seraphim over the years:

“Fr. Seraphim was a very strict isolationist about other jurisdictions in the first several years (roughly 1966–75) I had contact with him.

“I believe that at this time his own experience of other Orthodox groups was somewhat limited and academic, and so his strict views were formed on an almost purely ideological basis. This changed rather abruptly, however, as he began to see 1) the effects of isolationism on the Synod Abroad, and 2) the

increasingly shrill fanaticism of the [super-correct] ‘party’ in the Synod. He was at first uncomfortable, and then openly appalled at the utter lack of charity on the part of the so-called ‘zealots.’ He was himself a ‘zealot,’ but not to the exclusion of charity. Near the end of his life he once said to me: ‘I regret many of the “pro-zealot” articles we published in *The Orthodox Word* in the earlier years: we helped to create a monster, and for that I repent!’ He was quite emphatic about that....

“In the last year or two of his life Fr. Seraphim often told me that he had begun to commune lay men and women from other jurisdictions who came to him. He said: ‘I know this would be frowned upon, but these people come and they are hungry for spiritual guidance and nourishment and... what can we do? Turn them away?’ When I asked if he wasn’t afraid of being ‘denounced’ by the ultra-zealots in the Synod he replied: ‘You don’t know me very well if you think I’d be worried about that. Whether I get in trouble or not, I KNOW that this is the right thing to do!’

“In general on this subject, my sense is that Fr. Seraphim, while respecting outward rules and regulations, always tried to penetrate to the inward ‘spirit.’ From the early 1970s on (as I recollect it) he saw more and more clearly that we must rise above jurisdictional differences — not in order to become innovators and betrayers — but in order to rescue as many souls as possible who were searching for the ‘fragrance of true Christianity’ (as he loved to call it). Thus, while avoiding at least the appearance of scandal, and not trying to ‘provoke’ anyone in any way, he nonetheless cast the nets far and wide. And, as we know, he caught many ‘fish.’”<sup>[18](#)</sup>

What Fr. Alexey says is borne out by Fr. Seraphim’s letters and Chronicle entries. In 1980, when people from Antiochian Orthodox churches in California began making pilgrimages to the monastery, Fr. Seraphim expressed his joy at seeing the fervency of their faith. “All are very eager young Orthodox,” he wrote, “—a real revival is taking place in America!”<sup>[19](#)</sup> Some of these pilgrims were cradle Orthodox from various ethnic backgrounds, others were converts. In

time three of the lay pilgrims from the Antiochian Church would be ordained as priests.

In December of 1981, Fr. Seraphim wrote in a letter: “Recently we were visited by another Antiochian priest (from Los Angeles),<sup>[1]</sup> and just the fact of our friendship is a source of strength which helps them to struggle more themselves. What the end will be, jurisdictionally speaking, I don’t know. But we must have the image of the Russian Church Abroad adjusted away from the ‘fanatic party line,’ which up to now has tried to take over — and whose failure is now becoming evident.”<sup>20</sup>

In another letter, Fr. Seraphim responded to the questions of one of his spiritual sons, who, being in the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, wanted to marry a woman in the “rival” Orthodox Church in America (Metropolia). The woman’s priest, being devoted to his own jurisdiction, refused to marry the couple until the young man left the Russian Church Abroad. “Boldly unite yourself to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,” the priest wrote to the young man. “A step in this direction would modify my opinion considerably.”

“Help!” wrote the young man to Fr. Seraphim. “I need your advice and prayers as to what to do. The whole situation is very confusing to me, and of course to [my fiancée] also....”

In this dilemma of nuptial happiness vs. jurisdictional divisions, Fr. Seraphim wrote to his spiritual son: “I think he [the priest] is being overly dramatic about the whole matter. The question of ‘jurisdictions’ (in the case of the O.C.A. and our Church Abroad) is not such a crucial one that it would prevent marriage, even if the partners were to belong to different jurisdictions; to be sure, oneness of mind on this question is preferable, but in practice this is worked out by the couples themselves.”<sup>21</sup> A few days later, Fr. Seraphim wrote a conciliatory letter to the priest.

Fr. Seraphim also maintained that jurisdictional divisions should not prevent one from receiving Holy Communion. In his talk at the 1979 St. Herman Pilgrimage, “Orthodox Christians Facing the 1980s,” he related an example from

Russia which he had read in the writings of Fr. Dimitry Dudko: “Fr. Dimitry says he talked to one person in the Catacomb Church. This person was totally cut off from the Sacraments because in his area the Catacomb Church was totally absent. He was sort of surviving, keeping up the faith, being loyal. He had a spiritual talk with Fr. Dimitry; and, as Fr. Dimitry says, ‘When he got finished talking to me, he received Communion from me.’ If you’re looking from the strict point of view that one must be with the Catacomb Church at all costs, you can say he shouldn’t have done that.<sup>[g]</sup> But from the pastoral, spiritual point of view, in this particular circumstance that was the best thing for him: to receive the Sacraments and God’s grace so that he would have the strength to keep struggling. And Fr. Dimitry said that, as a result, at once this man came alive. Before he was just struggling by his own will, with no access to the Sacraments. Now he had the Sacraments and suddenly he felt new life come into him, because the grace of God acts. If he had continued without Communion — who knows?—he might have finally become discouraged and fallen away from Christ altogether. In such a case we cannot judge by the letter of the law. We have to judge — and that’s what Fr. Dimitry is constantly doing — according to the spiritual needs of the moment.”<sup>22</sup>

Fr. Seraphim believed that, as the Church entered into more difficult times, it would become ever more crucial for believers to look beyond jurisdictional divisions. In a letter of 1978 he wrote:

“We feel the signs of the times point more and more to a coming ‘catacomb’ existence, whatever form it may take, and the more we can prepare for it now the better.... Every such monastery or community we look on as a part of the future catacomb ‘network’ of strugglers for true Orthodoxy; probably in those times (if they will really be as critical as they look from here) the ‘jurisdictional’ question will recede into the background.”<sup>23</sup>

**W**E have spoken earlier of how Fr. Seraphim never altered his basic stance against ecumenism and reform in the Church. In his later years, however,

when he saw people calling those of other jurisdictions “heretics” because they went to ecumenical gatherings, he took pains to define this stance more clearly. In his “Defense of Fr. Dimitry Dudko,” he wrote:

“Some would-be zealots of Orthodoxy use the term [ecumenism] in entirely too imprecise a fashion, as though the very use of the term or contact with an ‘ecumenical’ organization is itself a ‘heresy.’ Such views are clearly exaggerations. ‘Ecumenism’ is a *heresy* only if it actually involves the denial that Orthodoxy is the true Church of Christ. A few of the Orthodox leaders of the ecumenical movement have gone this far; but most Orthodox participants in the ecumenical movement have *not* said this much; and a few (such as the late Fr. Georges Florovsky) have only irritated the Protestants in the ecumenical movement by frequently stating at ecumenical gatherings that Orthodoxy is the Church of Christ. One must certainly criticize the participation of even these latter persons in the ecumenical movement, which at its best is misleading and vague about the nature of Christ’s Church; but one cannot call such people ‘heretics,’ nor can one affirm that any but a few Orthodox representatives have actually taught ecumenism as a *heresy*. The battle for true Orthodoxy in our times is not aided by such exaggerations.”<sup>24</sup> In another place Fr. Seraphim said: “The excessive reaction against the ecumenical movement has the same worldly spirit that is present in the ecumenical movement itself.”<sup>25</sup>

Likewise, while not altering his position on the Church Calendar question, Fr. Seraphim warned against exaggerating the importance of this issue and thereby causing needless fighting and division. In his talk at the 1979 St. Herman Pilgrimage, after speaking at length about inspiring developments in the Orthodox Church of Africa, Fr. Seraphim addressed the concerns of super-correct Orthodox who were put off by the fact that the African Orthodox converts were on the New Calendar:

“Now some who wish to be correct will remind us that the Orthodox Church in Africa is under the Patriarch of Alexandria, who is on the New Calendar; and they might even think that we should have no contact with them.



About this I'd like to say a word.

“To preserve the ancient traditions and canons of the Church is a good thing. And those who woefully and needlessly depart from them will be judged by God. Those who introduced the New Calendar into the Orthodox Church in the 1920s and later, and who thereby brought division and modernism into the Church, will have much to answer for.

“But the simple people of Africa understand nothing of all this, and to preach the correct Old Calendar to them could produce nothing more than a squabble over theoretical points that would only interfere with their simple reception of the Orthodox Faith. Western converts are often skilled in debating such theoretical points, even to the extent of writing whole tomes and treatises on the canons and their interpretation. But this is an Orthodoxy of the head, full of the spirit of calculation and self-justification. What is most of all needed, especially in the perilous days ahead, is the much deeper Orthodoxy of the heart, which the simple letters we receive from Africa reveal.”<sup>26</sup>

**A**T one time Fr. Seraphim had cherished hopes for a united “Orthodox Zealot” movement to counteract the deceptions of the last times. “Years ago,” he wrote in 1979, “when Fr. Herman and I were young and naive, we dreamed of a vigorous, single-minded movement of zealous Orthodoxy among young converts, Russians, Greeks, etc. Alas, we have become older and wiser and no longer expect much. All our confessors of Orthodoxy have their all-too-human side also.... In so many Orthodox zealots, it seems to me, there is an intellectual narrowness, combined with some kind of political orientation, that produces factions right and left and loses sight of the ‘common task’ which we thought (and still think) is so clear, especially when you contrast it with the crude renovationism that is going on now in the Metropolia, Greek Archdiocese, etc.”<sup>27</sup>

But if Fr. Seraphim abandoned hope in any “zealot movement,” he never lost hope in the movement of souls who come miraculously to Christ in His

Orthodox Church out of all kinds of calamities, sins, and desperate circumstances. This was how the whole of Christianity was founded: sinful people saw grace in Jesus Christ, and their souls responded; they saw that they were drowning, and He saved them; and out of them Christ built His Church, which will last till the end of time.

In his talk at the 1981 St. Herman Pilgrimage, entitled “The Search for Orthodoxy,” Fr. Seraphim shared his optimism about the fact that individuals all over the world, out of all kinds of situations, were finding the true image of Jesus Christ in Orthodoxy:

“Americans, both young and old, weary of the rootless and arbitrary teachings of contemporary Protestantism, are discovering the true and profound Christianity of Orthodoxy.

“Roman Catholics, in the midst of a disintegrating church structure, are finding that Orthodoxy is everything they once thought Roman Catholicism to be.



Archimandrite Reuben Spartas (left), one of the founders of the African Orthodox Church, with Fr. Ireneos Magimbi, parish priest in Kampala, Uganda. Photograph published in Fr. Seraphim’s article “The African Greek Orthodox Church,” *The Orthodox Word*, no. 21, 1968.

“Young Jews, both in the Soviet Union and the free world, are increasingly finding the answer to the present-day spiritual vacuum among their own people

in conversion to Orthodoxy....

“In Russia, the search for roots is obvious, and is bound up with the recovery of national awareness among the Russian people after sixty-some years of atheism and destruction of Russian religious institutions. If one tries to return to what was before the atheist regime, one comes to nothing but Orthodoxy.

“Something similar is happening on a smaller scale to the Orthodox young people of Greece who are rejecting the modern Westernism that has poisoned Greek society for the past century and more; these young people are finding their roots in the Orthodox past of Greece, and above all in the center of Orthodox life, its monasticism.”<sup>28</sup>

As we have seen, Fr. Seraphim was especially interested in the conversion of peoples in Africa to Orthodox Christianity, having corresponded with, published articles about, and helped support Orthodox African converts for many years. “What of Africa?” he asked in his lecture. “What kind of Orthodox roots can Africans find? As surprising as it may seem to us, Orthodoxy — and Christianity in general — is growing faster in Africa than anywhere else in the world, and in a matter of some years Africa will become the leading Christian continent, both in number of believers, and even more in the fervor of their faith. Tertullian, the second-century Christian writer, has said that the human soul by nature is Christian, and this is proving true in the eagerness of the once-pagan African peoples to accept Christianity, which has only been preached below the Sahara in the last one hundred years. Roman Catholicism and various Protestant sects have attracted many followers in Africa, but those who really seek for the roots of Christianity are finding Orthodoxy. Perhaps not all of you know the story of the two Anglican seminarians in Uganda in the 1920s who in their studies came to the conclusion that only Orthodoxy was the ‘true old religion’ from which all the modern sects of the West have deviated. Today the African Orthodox Churches in Uganda, Kenya, and other countries of East Africa are examples of the fruitfulness of the search for Orthodoxy today. With hardly any help from the outside Orthodox world, they have come to the fullness of

Orthodoxy, avoiding the pitfalls which many Western converts have fallen into.”<sup>29</sup>

After Fr. Seraphim’s repose, a mission on the other side of the African continent — in Zaire — saw great growth, thanks especially to the righteous Hieromonk Cosmas Aslanidis (†1989) and other missionary monks from Mount Athos.<sup>30</sup> In 1994 a Greek priest from Australia, Archimandrite (later Bishop) Nektarios Kellis (†2004), began an Orthodox mission in Madagascar, which is now flourishing.<sup>31</sup> Thousands of souls have been baptized in both these countries, worshipping Jesus Christ in humility, poverty, and truth. Fr. Seraphim would have rejoiced to see this.

The return of American Protestants to their historical Christian roots also drew Fr. Seraphim’s attention. “In America,” he said, “the need for roots is obvious: the fragmentation of Christian sects and the diverse understandings of Christian doctrine and practice — based upon personal interpretation of Scripture and of Christian life — point to the need to return to the original, undivided Christianity, which is Orthodoxy. Just in the past few years more and more Protestants have been finding their way to the Church. There is even a group, organized as the ‘Evangelical Orthodox Church,’ which has come all the way from the Billy Graham-type ‘Campus Crusade’ movement of the 1950s to a deep awareness of the need for sacraments, hierarchy, historical continuity with the ancient Church, and all the rest that Orthodoxy has to offer as the true Apostolic Christianity. This movement has still much to say in contemporary America, and there are ways we Orthodox can help it.”<sup>32</sup> In 1987, five years after Fr. Seraphim’s repose, the Evangelical Orthodox movement was received into the Orthodox Church through the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America, and since that time it has done much to reach out to disillusioned Protestants and bring them into the Church.

Bound up with the search for roots, Fr. Seraphim pointed out, is the search for *stability*: “Orthodoxy’s stability is the unchanging truth which it has received and passed on from generation to generation, from the time of Christ and His

Apostles to our own day. It is no wonder, then, that it is attracting souls that are hungry most of all for truth — the truth that comes from God and gives meaning and a point of anchor for all those tossed about on the sea of this life.

“But possibly the deepest and most attractive thing about Orthodoxy today is its message *of love*. The most discouraging thing about today’s world is that it has become so cold and heartless. In the Gospel of St. Matthew our Lord tells us that a leading characteristic of the last times will be that *the love of many will grow cold* (Matt. 24:12); and the Apostle of love, St. John the Theologian, records our Lord as saying that the chief distinguishing mark of His disciples is the love they have one for another (John 13:35). The most influential Orthodox teachers of recent times have been those most filled with love, who attract people to the riches of the Orthodox Faith by their own example of overflowing, self-sacrificing love: St. John of Kronstadt, St. Nektarios of Pentapolis, our own Archbishop John Maximovitch....

“Being filled with the Gospel teaching and trying to live by it, we should have love and compassion for the miserable humanity of our days. Probably never have people been more unhappy than the people of our days, even with all the outward conveniences and gadgets our society provides us with. People are suffering and dying for the lack of God — and we can help give God to them. The love of many has truly grown cold in our days — but let us not be cold. As long as Christ sends us His grace and warms our hearts, we do not need to be cold.”<sup>[33](#)</sup>

**F**ATHER SERAPHIM’S hope for the conversion of souls to Orthodoxy was rooted in his belief that the Orthodox Church, being truly the Church that Christ founded, possesses the fullness of Christ’s grace and all the means He has given mankind to prepare for His Kingdom. In a letter to Alison written in 1963, not long after his own conversion, Fr. Seraphim had affirmed that “Orthodoxy is the preparation of souls for this Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven. The schismatic Churches have, in lesser or greater measure, forgotten this truth and

compromised with the world; Orthodoxy alone has remained otherworldly. The aim of the Orthodox life (of which we all fall miserably short) is to live in this life in constant remembrance of the next life, in fact to see even in this life, through the grace of our Lord, the beginning of that life.”<sup>34</sup>

Fr. Seraphim’s hope in the Church was ultimately a hope in that other life, for it is by believing in Christ and participating in the life of His Body on earth that we can live forever in His Body in heaven. This — eternal life in Christ, in the Kingdom of Heaven — was Fr. Seraphim’s final hope.

## *The Death Knell*

*Music appeared at the Grand Beginning of all things.... It is an echo of the harmony between heaven and earth.*

—Gi-ming Shien<sup>1</sup>

**I**T has been related earlier how Fr. Seraphim, during his monastic years, did not seek to listen to classical music. As a monk, he had given up the enjoyment of it, and only listened to it when playing it for pilgrims — especially the younger ones — to aid in the formation of their souls.

Since both the Platina fathers had to some degree been converted through the music of great Christian composers, Fr. Herman was intrigued by the “excessive ascetic caution,” as he called it, with which Fr. Seraphim had come to approach classical music. One incident stands out in his memory.

It was a warm summer evening, with a pink haze on the horizon; and the fathers were returning in their truck from a visit to San Francisco. Fr. Herman asked Fr. Seraphim to listen to a cassette tape of a clarinet quintet by Mozart. Fr. Seraphim was reluctant, but gave in to Fr. Herman’s insistence. As the quintet was played, he listened with close attention. Afterwards Fr. Herman waited for some comments from him, but there were none. There was a long silence.

“Well?” Fr. Herman finally asked.

Fr. Seraphim looked serious. All he said was “I’d rather hear it in Paradise.”

This statement intrigued Fr. Herman all the more. “I never would have thought of it in that way,” he later recalled. “That music touched some deep, harmonious part of him, which bound him to Divinity. He felt unworthy before

the grandeur and the sublime beauty of heaven, which he felt reflected in the most seraphic passages of Mozart, and in the lofty, dignified sounds of Bach and Handel. He felt that it was not right — almost sinful — to enjoy such beautiful sounds while yet on earth.”

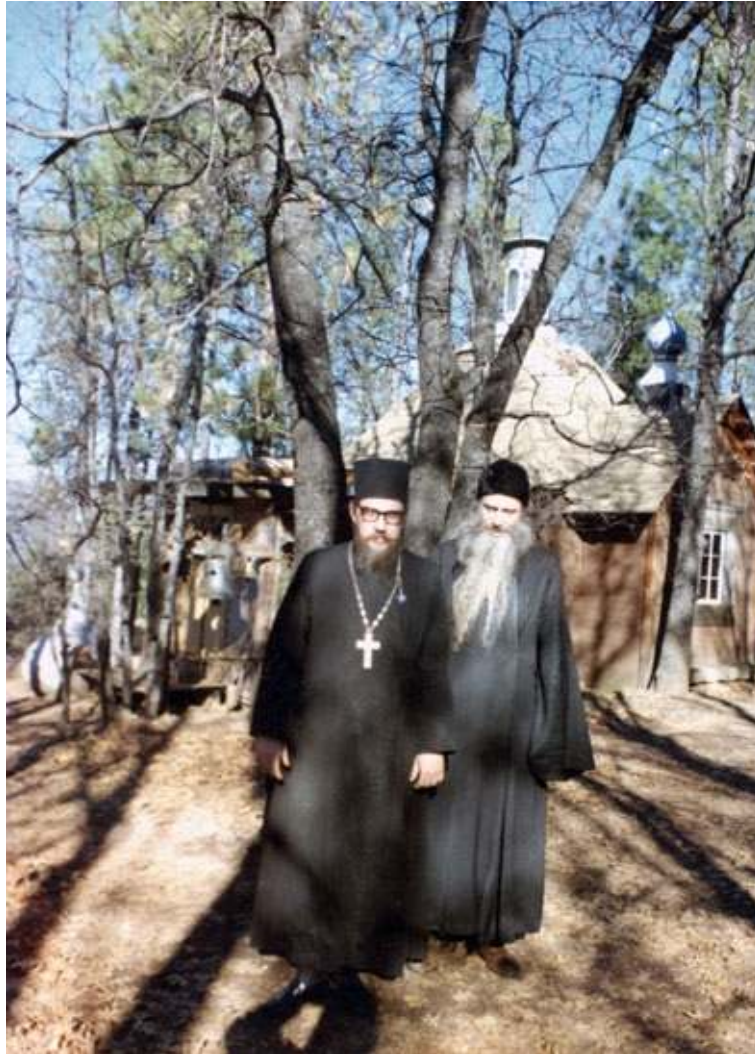
The music itself, though pointing to heaven, was still of the earth, and could thus only be apprehended as a half-taste of celestial sweetness, enough to whet the appetite but not to satisfy the hunger. Perhaps this was painful for Fr. Seraphim. Perhaps he was wary that, in giving himself over to delighting in this music, he would be trying to content himself with a state of incompleteness, with the bittersweet longing for something rather than the thing itself. He had found the Kingdom of God within himself,<sup>[a]</sup> and no longer needed exquisite music to lead him to it. In the words of Elder Barsanuphius of Optina (†1913), who himself had played and listened to much classical music before becoming a monk: “When a valve of the heart closes to the receptivity of worldly enjoyments, another valve opens for the reception of spiritual joys.”<sup>2</sup>

**F**ATHER HERMAN noticed that Fr. Seraphim’s reservation toward music was especially pronounced when it came to Bach. Fr. Herman himself found it spiritually beneficial to listen to the whole of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* just before Passion Week, when in Orthodox monasteries the complete four Gospels are read in church. Fr. Seraphim, however, would not listen to the music with him, saying, “I’m through with it.”

When classical music would be played for the monastery’s pilgrims, Fr. Herman noticed that Fr. Seraphim felt most at home with the compositions of Bach’s contemporary, G. F. Handel. As Fr. Herman described it, Fr. Seraphim was at peace in the company of Handel’s measured, flowing strains, which evoked an atmosphere of gentility and high culture. They did not touch that deep, painful longing that the music of Bach, or that passage of Mozart, stirred in him. It was probably for this reason that Fr. Seraphim once confessed: “I know Bach is the greatest, but my favorite is Handel.”<sup>3</sup>



In 1982 Fr. Herman got a tape of the Bach cantata *Ich Habe Genug*, having no idea of the significance that this particular work had for Fr. Seraphim. He was listening to it in his Valaam cell and was profoundly moved by it, when Fr. Seraphim came in. "I just received this stunning cantata," Fr. Herman said. "I'd never heard it before. You must listen to it!" Fr. Seraphim declined, but Fr. Herman again pressured him until he agreed. As the cantata was being played, Fr. Seraphim sat with his eyes closed, not moving in the slightest. He was like a statue, but Fr. Herman sensed that some kind of fear had come upon him. Finally, when it was finished, Fr. Seraphim merely said, "I know that cantata; I've listened to it many times," and with this he left the cell in silence. Fr. Herman remained there feeling that he had done something wrong, but not knowing why.



Fathers Herman and Seraphim in front of the monastery church, 1981.

Later that year, during the 1982 Summer Pilgrimage, the cantata was played again at the monastery. One of the monastery's brothers relates:

“At the conclusion of the Pilgrimage, when a feeling of relief as of a job well done had settled over all, there came a moment of restful hesitation before the leave-taking of the pilgrims. The day was still young, the weather cool, windy, with a touch of autumn already in the air. The bright sunbeams moved rhythmically through the forest idyll of roaming herds of deer, gray squirrels, and peacocks, who paraded in the natural surroundings before the resting pilgrims, involuntarily bringing them into a state of tranquil contemplation. Here Fr. Seraphim gathered everyone and had them sit down to listen to a piece of

music. Before he played it, he spoke a few sobering words: What is the purpose of theology and of Christian life itself upon this beautifully adorned earth of ours? Is it not the sweetness of the life beyond death, which crowns our earthly endeavors?

“At this moment there resounded the soul-touching strains of J. S. Bach’s Cantata #82, *Ich Habe Genug*, describing the state of the Righteous Symeon the God-Receiver as he holds in his arms Incarnate Life Itself, foretasting the happiness of a righteous man who is dying:

*I have enough. I have received the Saviour....*

*I have seen Him... I already see the joy of that other life....*

*Slumber now, weary eyes.... World, I renounce thee,*

*That my spirit may thrive... I rejoice in my death....*

“When the sounds echoed through the forest and died away in the deep gorge below, Fr. Seraphim concluded by saying what joy the human soul experiences in growing in the *Orthodox Christ*, and how Christian culture, so debased by the subhumanity of our times, can form and elevate the soul, bringing it to the threshold of Paradise. He did not tell, however, that in his formative years it was precisely *this* cantata that used to enchant and mystify him so intensely and hence led him to the idea of dying to the world.”<sup>4</sup>

Fr. Herman was to discover this only after Fr. Seraphim’s death, when Alison told him of it. It was then that he realized why Fr. Seraphim had looked petrified when listening to the cantata in the Valaam cell.

“When Fr. Seraphim was young,” Fr. Herman reflects, “deep down, he wanted to die. He felt there was some defect in him, and he had ‘had enough’ of the world. Death to him would be a sweetness, and he associated this sweetness with that cantata.

“When he became Orthodox, he was given life. Now he did not ‘have enough’ of life. Now he was needed to do such important work. He wanted to

bring Orthodoxy to others, and so he no longer wanted to die. He was hoping he would last.

“When I played that cantata for him, however, he was reminded of death once more. It was like meeting an old friend. In hearing that music, he heard his death knell. The first toll had been struck, and somehow his soul had felt it.”

*Ich Habe Genug* was the last piece of classical music Fr. Seraphim heard on this earth. Within three weeks the final knell would sound.

## *Ad Astera!*

*The true Christian is a warrior fighting his way through the regiments of the unseen enemy to his heavenly homeland.*

—St. Herman of Alaska<sup>1</sup>

**B**y the end of Fr. Seraphim’s life, the St. Herman Monastery had earned much respect in church circles. As an indication of this, on Forgiveness Sunday in 1978 Archbishop Anthony had awarded Fr. Herman with a gold cross and Fr. Seraphim with an *epigonation*;<sup>[a]</sup> and on January 18, 1981, he had elevated Fr. Herman to the rank of abbot, handing him Archbishop John’s staff, and had awarded Fr. Seraphim with a gold cross as well.

At the same time, the monastery had become, in Valentina Harvey’s words, “extremely popular.” “Everyone loved to go there,” Valentina recalls, “as hard as it was, as rugged as the conditions were.” Fr. Alexey Young, speaking for his generation of Orthodox converts, says that “The monastery was the ‘mother lode’ for us. This was ‘Camelot.’”<sup>2</sup> In some church circles, one could hear the phrase repeated: “Platina is a miracle!”

Toward the end of 1981, less than a year before he died, Fr. Seraphim wrote to his godmother Svetlana: “After all these years, it looks as if our roots are going down deeply here.”<sup>3</sup> In 1980 and 1981 three new brothers had joined the monastery. Whereas Fr. Seraphim had previously written that the sisters were “much more ‘one in soul’ with us than our brothers have been,”<sup>4</sup> he now noted that among the brothers there were “some serious [monastic] candidates who may stay permanently.”<sup>5</sup> “Our monastic brothers are all basically simple,” he

recorded, “which is a great relief after some of the ‘complicated’ ones we’ve had in the past.”<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, the Brotherhood’s activities had expanded far beyond what had been envisioned at its inception, and new possibilities were still presenting themselves. New books were being published, and there seemed to be no dearth of people who were willing to contribute their energies to the publishing work of the monastery. With the increasing number of serious-minded young pilgrims coming to the monastery, especially during the St. Herman Pilgrimages, Fr. Seraphim noted that “there is a real ‘revival’ going on among young people, both Americans and Russians, and everyone is eager to learn and become more deeply Orthodox.”<sup>7</sup>



Archbishop Anthony awarding Fr. Seraphim with a gold cross. St. Herman Monastery church, January 18, 1981. *Photograph by Fr. Lawrence Williams.*

As Fr. Alexey Young recalls, during the last year of his life Fr. Seraphim seemed more deeply happy and contented than at any other time he had known him. Undoubtedly the growth of the Brotherhood's activity and influence pleased Fr. Seraphim, but it was clear that his deepening peace and joy was coming first of all from an inward source, not contingent on outward circumstances. Fr. Alexey remembers a day in late July of 1982, less than two months before Fr. Seraphim's repose, when he sensed this peace in Fr. Seraphim most strongly. As it turned out, this would be the last time that Fr. Alexey would be able to spend any length of time talking with Fr. Seraphim.

"My two sisters, Justina and Anna (both Orthodox converts), came to visit from Arizona," writes Fr. Alexey. "They had never been to the skete, so we drove down. Fr. Herman was on a missionary trip somewhere, and Fr. Seraphim was up at his cell, but came down to see us. We sat outside in the little forest clearing, often used in good weather as an outdoor lecture hall, drinking tea. Never had I seen Fr. Seraphim more peaceful and serene. Everything he had to say to my sisters in response to their spiritual questions was simple, to the point, and helpful; but more important, they were 'infected' by his tranquility, which they carried with them for many days."<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps this inward tranquility, together with the outward growth of the monastery's activity, was God's gift to Fr. Seraphim at the end of his life — a life that had been no stranger to suffering. As Fr. Seraphim well knew, however, ultimate peace and prosperity are not to be found in this life; all things in this world must end.

Once toward the end of his life, Fr. Seraphim told Fr. Herman that he felt God had given him a reprieve of twenty more years of life since his near-fatal illness in 1961—a reprieve in which to do the work of God. Now the reprieve was over, although Fr. Seraphim never said so and probably never admitted so consciously. God was already preparing him to go home to the heavenly realm.

**W**HILE Fr. Seraphim's works had always had an eschatological character,



this was especially true of his last works. The last book he wrote, which undoubtedly served to prepare him for the life beyond, was *The Soul After Death*. And the last *Orthodox Word* he worked on extensively, the special double-length hundredth issue, was dedicated to the theme of the Apocalypse. Fr. Seraphim wrote and translated the entire issue himself. It included his talk “The Future of Russia and the End of the World,” his introduction to the interpretation of the book of Apocalypse, and his article on the life and significance of the modern prophet Archbishop Averky. This was followed by the first installment of Archbishop Averky’s Patristic commentary on the Apocalypse, which for years Fr. Seraphim had wanted to see appear in English. Fr. Seraphim finished translating the entire work from Russian right before he died, and later the Brotherhood brought it out in book form.<sup>9</sup>



Brothers of St. Herman Monastery and sisters of St. Xenia Skete in 1982, not long before Fr. Seraphim’s repose.





Fr. Seraphim with brothers and pilgrims in front of the monastery church, Palm Sunday, 1982.

In Fr. Seraphim's last lecture, "Living the Orthodox Worldview," which he gave at the 1982 Summer Pilgrimage only three weeks before his death, he again spoke of signs of the coming end of the world:

"—The abnormality of the world. Never have such weird and unnatural manifestations and behavior been accepted as a matter of course as in our days. Just look at the world around you: what is in the newspapers, what kind of movies are being shown, what is on television, what it is that people think is interesting and amusing, what they laugh at; it is absolutely weird. And there are people who deliberately promote this, of course, for their own financial benefit, and because that is the fashion, because there is a perverse craving for this kind of thing.

"—The wars and rumors of wars, each more cold and merciless than the preceding, and all overshadowed by the threat of the unthinkable universal nuclear war, which could be set off by the touch of a button....

"—The increasing centralization of information and power over the

individual...

“—Again, the multiplication of false Christs and false Antichrists....

“—The truly weird response to the new movie everyone in America is talking about and seeing: *E.T.*, which has caused literally millions of seemingly normal people to express their affection and love for the hero, a ‘saviour’ from outer space who is quite obviously a demon — an obvious preparation for the worship of the coming Antichrist.

“I could go on with details like this, but my purpose is not to frighten you, but to make you aware of what is happening around us. It is truly later than we think; the Apocalypse is *now*. And how tragic it is to see Christians, and above all Orthodox young people, with this incalculable tragedy hanging over their heads, who think they can continue what is called a ‘normal life’ in these terrible times, participating fully in the whims of this silly, self-worshipping generation, totally unaware that the fools’ paradise we are living in is about to crash, completely unprepared for the desperate times that lie just ahead of us. There is no longer even a question of being a ‘good’ or a ‘poor’ Orthodox Christian. The question now is: will our faith survive at all?”<sup>10</sup>

In the same lecture Fr. Seraphim spoke his final words on *Orthodoxy of the heart*, which he saw as the safeguard against modern influences and deceptions:

“Our attitude, beginning right now, must be down-to-earth and *normal*. That is, it must be applied to the real circumstances of our life, not a product of fantasy and escapism and refusal to face the often unpleasant facts of the world around us. An Orthodoxy that is too exalted and too much in the clouds belongs in a hothouse and is incapable of helping us in our daily life, let alone saying anything for the salvation of those around us. Our world is quite cruel and wounds souls with its harshness; we need to respond first of all with down-to-earth Christian love and understanding, leaving accounts of hesychasm and advanced forms of prayer to those capable of receiving them.

“So also, our attitude must be not self-centered but reaching out to those who are seeking for God and for a godly life. Nowadays, wherever there is a

good-sized Orthodox community, the temptation is to make it into a society for self-congratulation and for taking delight in our Orthodox virtues and achievements: the beauty of our church buildings and furnishings, the splendor of our services, even the purity of our doctrine. But the true Christian life, ever since the times of the Apostles, has always been inseparable from communicating it to others. An Orthodoxy that is alive by this very fact shines forth to others — and there is no need to open a ‘department of missions’ to do this; the fire of true Christianity communicates itself without this....

“Likewise, our attitude must be loving and forgiving. There is a kind of hardness that has crept into Orthodox life today: ‘That man is a heretic; don’t go near him’; ‘that one is Orthodox, supposedly, but you can’t really be sure’; ‘that one there is obviously a spy.’ No one will deny that the Church is surrounded by enemies today, or that there are some who stoop to taking advantage of our trust and confidence. But this is the way it has been since the time of the Apostles, and the Christian life has always been something of a risk in this practical way. But even if we are sometimes taken advantage of and do have to show some caution in this regard, still we cannot give up our basic attitude of love and trust, without which we lose one of the very foundations of our Christian life. The world, which has no Christ, *has* to be mistrustful and cold; but Christians, on the contrary, *have* to be loving and open, or else we will lose the salt of Christ within us and become just like the world, good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden underfoot.

“A little humility in looking at ourselves would help us to be more generous and forgiving of the faults of others. We love to judge others for the strangeness of their behavior; we call them ‘cuckoos’ or ‘crazy converts.’ It is true that we should beware of really unbalanced people who can do great harm in the Church. But what serious Orthodox Christian today is not a little ‘crazy’? We don’t fit in with the ways of this world; if we do, in *today’s* world, we aren’t serious Christians.... Therefore, let us not be afraid of being considered a little ‘crazy’ by the world, and let us continue to practice the Christian love and forgiveness

which the world can never understand, but which in its heart it needs and even craves.

“Finally, our Christian attitude must be what, for want of a better word, I would call *innocent*. Today the world places a high value on sophistication, on being worldly-wise, or being a ‘professional.’ Orthodoxy places no value on these qualities; they kill the Christian soul. And yet these qualities constantly creep into the Church and into our lives. How often one hears enthusiastic converts, especially, express their desire of going to the great Orthodox centers, the cathedrals and monasteries where sometimes thousands of the faithful come together and everywhere the talk is of church matters, and one can feel how important Orthodoxy is, after all. (Orthodoxy is a small drop in the bucket when you look at the whole society, but in these great cathedrals and monasteries there are so many people that it seems as though it is really an important thing.) And how often one sees these same people in a pitiful state after they have indulged their desire, returning from the ‘great Orthodox centers’ sour and dissatisfied, filled with worldly church gossip and criticism, anxious above all to be ‘correct’ and ‘proper’ and worldly-wise about church politics. In a word, they have lost their innocence, their unworldliness, being led astray by their fascination with the worldly side of the Church’s life.

“In various forms, this is a temptation to us all, and we must fight it by not allowing ourselves to overvalue the externals of the Church, but always returning to the ‘one thing needful’: Christ and the salvation of our souls from this wicked generation.”<sup>[11](#)</sup>

A FEW days after the lectures of the 1982 Pilgrimage had ended, it was the eve of the Feast of the Transfiguration. As usual, Fr. Seraphim was to give the sermon on this night, beneath the stars. In his last lecture he had spoken of our Christian calling here on earth; but now — in what turned out to be his last sermon — he was to remind his listeners of their ultimate destination. It is also interesting that, in his sermon on the Feast of the Transfiguration eight years

before, he had spoken of how little time is allotted to us in *this* life to prepare for our salvation; but now, in the sermon right before his early, unexpected death, he was to speak mostly of the life beyond. One of the sisters of St. Xenia Skete recorded:

“Fr. Seraphim’s last sermon during the Vigil for the Transfiguration was very special to all of us who were close to him.

“During the Litia of the Vigil for the Feast, the monks of the monastery, the nuns of St. Xenia Skete, and visitors went outside in procession through the forest bearing candles and singing the verses of the Feast — the men to the Transfiguration Skete site on the top of Mount St. Herman, the women to St. Elias Skete. They met singing at the foot of a large cross that overlooks Beegum Gorge. The night was clear and starry. Fr. Seraphim, in white vestments, went to the Cross and signaled for everyone to blow out the candles. He stood silent for a while, looking at the dark gorge and star-filled sky, and then began something like this:

“Beholding the majesty of God’s creation, we catch a glimpse, however vague and shadowy, of the beauty of God’s eternal Kingdom, for which we were all created. We must always remember that our home is in the heavens; we must shake off all the vain and petty passions and worries that keep us tied to the ground, to the fallen earthly world, that keep us from realizing the purpose of our creation. How easily we forget the very reason for our existence.... The end-times are already here; we see clearly the preparation of the world for the Antichrist. Christians will be faced with an unprecedented trial of their faith and love for God. We will have to hide in the wilderness — in land like we see before us here. Of course, in the end they will find us even there. The purpose of hiding is not just for the preservation of our earthly life, but to gain time to strengthen our souls for the final trial. And this must begin even now. Let us therefore at least begin to struggle against the fetters of petty passions, and remember that our true home is not here, but in the heavens. Let us “strive towards our heavenly homeland,” as St. Herman used to say... *Ad astern! Ad*

*astern!*'[\[b\]](#)

“He finished and continued staring into the heavenly blue of the starry grandeur, oblivious of us who beheld before us a glimpse of the mystery of a man who, having long since prepared his soul, would be going there soon.”[12](#)

## *Repose*

*Vital spark of the heav'nly flame,  
Quit, oh quit, this mortal frame!  
Trembling, hoping, ling'ring, flying,  
Oh, the pain, the bliss of dying!  
Cease, fond Nature, cease thy strife,  
And let me languish into life!*

*The world recedes; it disappears;  
Heav'n opens on my eyes; my ears  
With sounds seraphic ring  
Lend, lend your wings! I mount, I fly!  
O Grave! where is thy Victory?  
O Death! where is thy Sting?*

—From “The Dying Christian to His Soul” by Alexander Pope

**O**N the morning that followed the Transfiguration Vigil, Fr. Seraphim served what was to be his last Divine Liturgy on earth. Soon afterwards he fell ill and could not come to the monastery services. It was not unusual for him to be sick, and when he was sick he never complained, so that it was difficult to know just how bad his condition was. This particular illness caused him acute stomach pains. He remained in his secluded cabin, keeping his pain to himself. The heat, which had abated during the Summer Pilgrimage, now grew stifling and increased his discomfort. The aforementioned John from the Santa Cruz fellowship, now a catechumen, went to ask him some questions about the

Holy Scriptures. “I found him to be in so much pain that he could not think clearly,” John recalls. “As usual, he listened patiently to my questions. He tried his best to be cheerful and not show his suffering, but finally he had to say that he just couldn’t answer right then.”

After Fr. Seraphim had been in pain for a few days, it became clear to everyone that this was no ordinary stomach problem. As usual he was unwilling to see a doctor. He repeatedly refused to go to the hospital, but finally at Fr. Herman’s insistence he agreed to go. By this time his pain was excruciating. As he was being driven to the hospital, he kept repeating the words that St. John Chrysostom had exclaimed when being sent into his final exile: “Glory be to God for all things!”

When Fr. Seraphim was examined at the hospital, the doctors found his condition to be quite serious. His blood had somehow clotted on the way to his intestines, and part of the intestines had already died and become gangrenous. This occurrence, the doctors said, is very rare, and when it appears much damage is usually done before one knows what is happening. The doctors expressed their amazement that Fr. Seraphim could have endured, during the last few days, the pain of what was going on inside of him. Such a condition without an anesthetic, they said, should have caused him to scream out of torment.

Fr. Seraphim was immediately taken to an operating room, where the dead part of his intestines was removed. Fr. Herman went by himself to see him after the operation, and there he beheld a terrible sight. Fr. Seraphim was tied to his bed, with a tube in his mouth, tossing and turning in unbearable agony. He cursed Fr. Herman and said other angry words to him. Fr. Herman was shocked to hear such words coming out of his mouth, but as he looked into Fr. Seraphim’s eyes he could see that they were glazed over.

Fr. Seraphim was clearly not himself, but was in a compromised state due to the pain and the residual effect of the anesthesia. Fr. Herman immediately went to tell the doctor that Fr. Seraphim was in great pain, and asked that he be given some pain-killer. He also told the doctor that Fr. Seraphim had said



shocking things, but the doctor told him to pay no attention — that people coming out of anesthesia can act as if out of their minds.

Catechumen John recalls: “I was there when Fr. Herman came out of the recovery room by himself. At our prodding, he told us a few of the things that Fr. Seraphim had said. Fr. Seraphim was my hero, and it hurt me to hear that such words had been uttered by him. Fr. Herman reassured us, telling us what the doctor had told him about how people sometimes behave when coming out of anesthesia. Later, it was suggested to me that this may have been a final deathbed temptation for Fr. Seraphim. We know how the demons can try to attack the soul before its departure from the body, and perhaps they were taking advantage of the fact that Fr. Seraphim was not in his right mind due to the drugs. It was also suggested to me that Fr. Seraphim actually harbored anger toward Fr. Herman, and that the residual effects of the anesthesia had merely served to remove any inhibitions he may have had in expressing it. I can’t say now whether either of these was the case, or whether we should just accept the purely physical explanation given by the doctor — which indeed satisfied me at the time. However, what I can say for sure is that the things Fr. Seraphim then said did not represent his thoughts and feelings at the time of his death. Later, when Fr. Seraphim was in his right mind, I was witness to the great love with which he looked at all of us, including Fr. Herman, from behind his respiratory mask, and the tremendous faith with which he prayed silently to God, shedding tears.”

Having finished the first operation, the doctors thought that Fr. Seraphim would survive. Further tests, however, showed that the problem was not over: the blood had begun to clot again. The doctors immediately operated a second time, removing even more intestines, but they were coming across a great dilemma: if they used anticoagulants to prevent the blood from clotting, he would bleed to death internally, but if they did not use such drugs more and more tissue would die. A specialist in this rare disease was called in from San Francisco, but even he was at a loss to stop the damage. At this point the doctors

could give Fr. Seraphim only a two percent chance of recovery.

Fr. Herman again went in to talk with his co-laborer alone. Fr. Seraphim was very different than he had been after the first operation: he was at peace, in his right mind, but also weaker. He made an attempt to speak to Fr. Herman from behind his respiratory mask, but he was too weak to be articulate. The only thing that Fr. Herman could make out was that Fr. Seraphim was trying to tell him about a vision he had had of Archbishop John, and that it concerned the future. Archbishop John had come to console and calm his disciple in his agony, but only that disciple would ever know what mysteries he revealed.

“The doctor said you’re going to die!” Fr. Herman said to Fr. Seraphim. “But then what about Alaska? We haven’t even fulfilled our plan — Fr. Gerasim’s wish for us. If you die, do you bless us to go there to continue St. Herman’s New Valaam?” With knowing eyes, Fr. Seraphim raised his hand and made an effort to move his fingers together in a sign of blessing. Shortly afterward, Fr. Herman made some cryptic statements to others about going to Alaska, but no one knew what he meant.<sup>[a]</sup>

**W**HEN Fr. Seraphim’s practically hopeless condition was made known to his spiritual children, it was, in the words of one of them, “as though a great cataclysmic event had taken place. The nightmarish intensity of the days that followed — the feelings of shock, of helplessness, bewilderment, anxiety, loneliness, despair — is hard to describe.”<sup>1</sup>

The commemoration of the Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the Mother of God was only a few days away, and many thought that the Mother of God would take Fr. Seraphim on her Feast. This seemed especially likely to Fr. Herman, who had noticed in the last few months Fr. Seraphim’s particularly strong devotion to the Mother of God, expressed in the most contrite reading of prayers and Canons to her.

On Friday, August 27, the eve of the Dormition Feast, many people gathered at the Redding mission chapel to celebrate a midnight Liturgy and pray

for Fr. Seraphim's recovery. Fr. Alexey Young, who served the Liturgy, brought Holy Communion to Fr. Seraphim in the hospital, where Fr. Herman and others were still keeping vigil. At this time, the doctors allowed people to visit Fr. Seraphim one at a time. Those who came into the Intensive Care Unit found him moving in and out of consciousness, with eyes once again glazed from the drugs and the pain. Everyone thought that this was to be their last farewell; and yet, not ready to relinquish Fr. Seraphim to the other world, they prayed for a miracle.

Archbishop Anthony arrived at the hospital, and read prayers for the departure of the soul with Fr. Herman before returning to San Francisco. It was close to 2:00 a.m.

In an article she later wrote for *Orthodox America*, Mary Mansur recalled: "Those at Fr. Seraphim's bedside did not want to leave. And then something unprecedented happened. Perhaps it was the compassion of the Mother of God that opened the doors. People began to gather in Fr. Seraphim's room — not three or four, but at least twenty surrounded his bed, and for the next several hours they sang for Fr. Seraphim to hear, perhaps for the last time, the beautiful Dormition stichera: 'O ye apostles from afar, being now gathered together....' Then the entire Paschal Canon was sung. Fr. Seraphim was breathing through a respirator and could not speak. But he was conscious, and when he heard the singing of one of his favorite hymns, 'Noble Joseph,' he began to cry."<sup>2</sup>

Those who beheld Fr. Seraphim shared in his tears. No one could hold them back, especially at the heartrending moment when Theophil came to ask forgiveness of Fr. Seraphim. Right before Fr. Seraphim had gone to the hospital, Theophil had had an argument with him, causing him further grief in his hour of pain. Now he came to tell Fr. Seraphim that he loved him, and to thank him for being his father.

It was hard to look upon Fr. Seraphim's sufferings, but it was harder still to tear oneself away from his bedside. Finally, however, the nurses asked everyone to leave. No one knew that this was only the beginning of a vigil that was to last another five days and nights.

Catechumen John had planned to be baptized by Fr. Seraphim on the Feast of the Dormition, and Fr. Seraphim had planned to be his godfather. Fr. Herman, hoping that the spiritual strength from the grace of this sacrament would also strengthen Fr. Seraphim, decided to proceed with the baptism himself. In the company of four others, he left for the monastery, having promised Fr. Seraphim that he would serve Liturgy for him there that day. The creek below Noble Ridge sparkled in the sun. As the young catechumen came out of the waters of baptism, a beam of joy pierced the cloud of grief which hung over everyone's hearts.

Exhausted by the vigil in the hospital and the long service, people at the monastery tried to rest. But anxiety overcame sleep. Was Fr. Seraphim still alive? That afternoon at the monastery there were tearful entreaties before the icon of the Mother of God, "Quick-Hearer." On Mount Athos the monks were also praying before this icon for Fr. Seraphim's recovery. Before leaving for Redding, a phone call to the hospital — always made with a pounding heart — relieved everyone with the news that Fr. Seraphim's condition had slightly improved.<sup>3</sup>

The visitors were moved to see Fr. Seraphim, during sporadic moments of consciousness, struggle to greet them with a loving smile. When the newly illumined John, wearing his white baptismal robe, came in to see Fr. Seraphim, the latter's face became radiant as he squeezed the young man's hand. How spiritually beautiful this looked on a body that was literally shaking with pain!

"That evening," Mary Mansur continues, "there were still more people at the hospital. And a greater feeling of hope, even though Fr. Seraphim was still given only a ten percent chance of recovery.

"During the very early hours of the morning, the night-shift nurses kindly permitted prolonged visits. Those who had the opportunity to spend several hours at this time praying or reading the Gospel at Fr. Seraphim's bedside will never forget this intense and very sobering experience. It was a time to think about death which was hovering very close, and about the meaning of suffering, suffering for Christ. Utterly helpless, tied to the bed to avoid danger from

possible seizures, wires from monitoring devices crossing his chest, his arms punctured with tubes and breathing with the help of a respirator — Fr. Seraphim looked like the image of one crucified. Truly, we were witnessing a martyrdom. So often he had spoken about suffering and the benefit it had upon the Christian soul. He had such compassion and admiration for the suffering Orthodox behind the Iron Curtain. Perhaps God was allowing him to co-suffer with them.”<sup>4</sup>

A spiritual son of Fr. Seraphim later made these observations about his suffering: “To Fr. Seraphim, the modern obsession with comfort through technology was as dangerous to the soul as any heresy. It seemed to many of us who were present at his final illness and death that the demonic forces themselves were attempting to revenge on him for his exposing the truth, by literally crucifying him with modern technology. He was stripped, connected to all manner of tubes and machines, and forced to endure a week of medical torture.”

**T**HE Sunday Liturgy in Redding was followed that evening by a service of Holy Unction. As Mary Mansur recorded: “Each one felt as though his or her sins were at least partially responsible for Fr. Seraphim’s illness. Everyone therefore took part in the service of Unction, being anointed unto the healing of soul and body, repenting and fervently praying during the service, ‘Hear us, O God!’ Afterwards, Fr. Herman went to the hospital to anoint Fr. Seraphim.

“For all those close to Fr. Seraphim, it was a very intense and exhausting experience — emotionally, physically, and spiritually. The phone in the ICU waiting room began to ring constantly with calls from people all over the country asking about Fr. Seraphim — and praying. Here, and even abroad, fervent petitions were directed to the throne of God, imploring Him to spare Fr. Seraphim, not for his sake, for he had long since prepared himself for this hour, but for those of us who needed his guidance for the salvation of our souls. A man of such rare spiritual stature, a lamp of true wisdom in this age of spiritual darkness and confusion.... Surely God would not deprive us so soon of such a

brightly shining light?

“The hours passed slowly. With each telephone call, each visit from the doctors or nurses — one hoped for the best, and feared the worst. The waiting room became a prayer room, with one Akathist or Canon following another. The Gospel was read by turns, all four books, and again. It was such a time of intense and prolonged prayer that few of us had ever experienced before.”<sup>5</sup>

By Tuesday morning Fr. Seraphim’s condition had again become very critical; phone calls were made to ask for increased prayer. Bishop Nektary arrived to keep watch over his spiritual son. Over the next several days he continued to keep vigil at the hospital and held many services of supplication. But to Fr. Herman he said privately: “Be prepared. Perhaps Fr. Seraphim is now ripe for the heavenly Kingdom.”

That night a midnight Liturgy was served in the hospital chapel, close to the Intensive Care Unit. The chapel room had a low ceiling and no windows, giving it a catacomb feeling. It was completely filled with people, most of them American converts, who were able to sing the entire Liturgy by heart. There was an overwhelming feeling of spiritual power, coming from the urgency of the prayers and a unity of spirit and purpose. With his co-laborer on the threshold of death, Fr. Herman said that “it was as if the ceiling of the hospital had been opened and we were standing in the presence of heaven.”

On one occasion Fr. Herman was able to receive the confession of his co-laborer. Since Fr. Seraphim was unable to speak, Fr. Herman mentioned some sins and asked if he repented of all sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. With a look of earnestness Fr. Seraphim managed a nod of assent.

While Fr. Herman had been in the midst of all the activity, keeping long vigils and holding services, he had for the most part kept his emotional pain at bay. There were some, however, who bore witness to the fact that he was being broken up inside. “He was shattered,” Sylvia Anderson said later. “At one point I saw him weeping at Fr. Seraphim’s bedside, begging Fr. Seraphim not to die.” Fr. Herman had relied on Fr. Seraphim in so many ways — as a fellow struggler,

a critic, a monk to whom he was in obedience and who at the same time was in obedience to him, a man who shared his dreams, who two decades earlier had said those fateful words, “I trust you.” Fr. Seraphim was both the anchor and the rudder in Fr. Herman’s life — the one who, through his daily example of stability, his unswerving monastic focus, and his strict adherence to the practice of “mutual obedience” — kept Fr. Herman on course. Once Fr. Seraphim had told Fr. Herman that he hoped he himself would die first, because he felt incapable of keeping everything going without Fr. Herman. Now, however, Fr. Herman was wondering how or if the Brotherhood could exist without Fr. Seraphim.

During Fr. Seraphim’s week-long agony, it was manifest to Fr. Herman and others that he had been purified, conquering his will and offering it as a burnt sacrifice to God. There was not a trace of anger or rebellion in him now, only devotion, love, contrition, and repentance. Once before administering Holy Communion to him, Fr. Herman read the Gospel. Fr. Seraphim looked at him with hope, as if expecting something from him. Holding the book over the dying man, Fr. Herman began to bless him with it. Suddenly Fr. Seraphim, exerting every last bit of strength in his dying, convulsing frame, raised himself up to kiss that sublime Book that had given him life. As he fell back on the bed, his eyes were filled with tears. The people there wept with him. Among them was a catechumen named Martin who, having before been hesitant to take the final step into the Church, later said that this heroic effort by Fr. Seraphim was the “clincher” for him, erasing all doubts from his mind. At that moment he saw that the power of Jesus Christ was invincible even in the face of death, that Fr. Seraphim’s faith was more real and enduring than any mere physical reality.

It can only be speculated what inward blessing God, His Holy Mother, and His Saints bestowed on Fr. Seraphim during his last days. One needed only to look into his eyes to know that pain had not kept him from continuous prayer.

On Tuesday night a young boy had been brought to the Intensive Care Unit, near death after a terrible motorcycle accident. His mother was weeping

inconsolably in the same waiting room as Fr. Seraphim's close ones. When Fr. Herman approached her the next morning to comfort her, he asked if she would want her son baptized. She said yes, and Fr. Herman lost no time in baptizing the boy, Christopher. Within several hours after this, it pleased the Lord to take his soul, cleansed by the baptismal waters. All felt that this was already a fruit of Fr. Seraphim's sufferings.<sup>6</sup>

On Wednesday afternoon the miracle-working icon of the Mother of God, "Unexpected Joy," was brought from San Francisco and was immediately carried in to Fr. Seraphim.<sup>[b]</sup> Throughout the day people prayed before it, and sensed that truly the Mother of God was keeping a close watch over Fr. Seraphim. Liturgy was again served at midnight in the hospital chapel, and Fr. Seraphim received Holy Communion at 3:00 a.m. Fr. Herman and some monastery brothers and pilgrims then went to Valentina Harvey's home to sleep for a few hours. Others remained at the hospital, periodically bringing the icon to Fr. Seraphim whenever visitors were permitted.

**I**N the early hours of Thursday morning, Helen Kontzevitch, who was still living in Berkeley, had a dream. "I was in the company of a priest unknown to me," she later recalled, "who was reprimanding me for my sins. He told me I must never take offense at anyone. Together we entered a large, palatial hall. At the end of this hall a man was standing on a raised platform and singing. It was difficult to see him well because of the distance. In a most beautiful voice he was singing the magnification hymn [to the Mother of God], 'My soul doth magnify the Lord...' I said, 'I don't hear well.' The priest urged me to go closer, and I took several steps forward. Then I began very clearly to hear the singing. The singer was a tenor with a voice like Fr. Seraphim's, whose singing I had heard years ago in the San Francisco Cathedral. That had been in the early 1960s when, standing in the kliros, he alone had sung the Matins service from beginning to end. Never in my life had I heard more prayerful singing. My soul had been uplifted to the heights.... Now in my dream, I heard that same



incomparable singing. It was the same voice, but it sounded like that of an angel, a dweller of Paradise. This was heavenly, unearthly singing.

“Waking up, I understood that there was no hope for Fr. Seraphim’s recovery.”<sup>7</sup>

Alison, now a widow living in Kansas, was also given a mysterious indication of Fr. Seraphim’s impending death. Unlike Helen Kontzevitch, she had not been contacted about Fr. Seraphim’s illness. Over the years, living nearly two thousand miles away, she had continued to feel an empathetic bond with him. Although she received letters from him only a few times a year, she prayed for him every day, and could feel that he was praying for her. Right before receiving a letter from him she would usually sense that he was thinking of her and would know that it was coming. And now again, in his final hours, his spirit somehow reached her. In a dream she saw him tied to a bed and saw terrible physical agony in his eyes, such that it was painful even for her, a nurse, to behold. She saw that he was unable to speak. Immediately she wrote to the monastery to find out if something was in fact wrong.

In the meantime Fr. Herman, who had been told years before by Fr. Seraphim to contact Alison should anything ever happen to him, had found her address and written to her. She received the news only after Fr. Seraphim’s death, confirming the truth of what she had seen in her dream — especially of the fact that Fr. Seraphim had been unable to speak while in the hospital. In later years she was consoled by the thought that, in the last moments of his life, Fr. Seraphim had been trying to reach her.

**A**T about 10:30 on Thursday morning the doctors announced that there was nothing more they could do. Fr. Seraphim, weakened beyond recovery during a week of suffering, had begun to have multiple organ failures. Within minutes, the watch over the dying had ended, and a new life had begun for him.

Fr. Herman arrived at the hospital shortly after Fr. Seraphim’s repose, and, in spite of the fact that he had never abandoned hope for Fr. Seraphim’s

recovery, showed that he had prepared himself for the news. The last person to have seen Fr. Seraphim, it was learned, was one of the sisters from St. Xenia Skete. “Be strong,” were the final words he had heard before fully passing over into the spiritual realm.

Fr. Seraphim reposed on August 20/September 2, 1982. He was only forty-eight years old. As it is written in the Wisdom of Solomon: *He, being made perfect in a short time, fulfilled a long time: for his soul pleased the Lord: therefore hastened He to take him away from among the wicked* (Wisdom 4:13).

Fr. Seraphim’s repose occurred during the “Afterfeast” of the Dormition, a sign to many that the Mother of God had indeed granted Fr. Seraphim a special protection at the hour of his death. His suffering, intense but brief in the face of eternity, marked the last chapter in his spiritual development, leading him to the threshold of Paradise. *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory* (II Cor. 4:17).

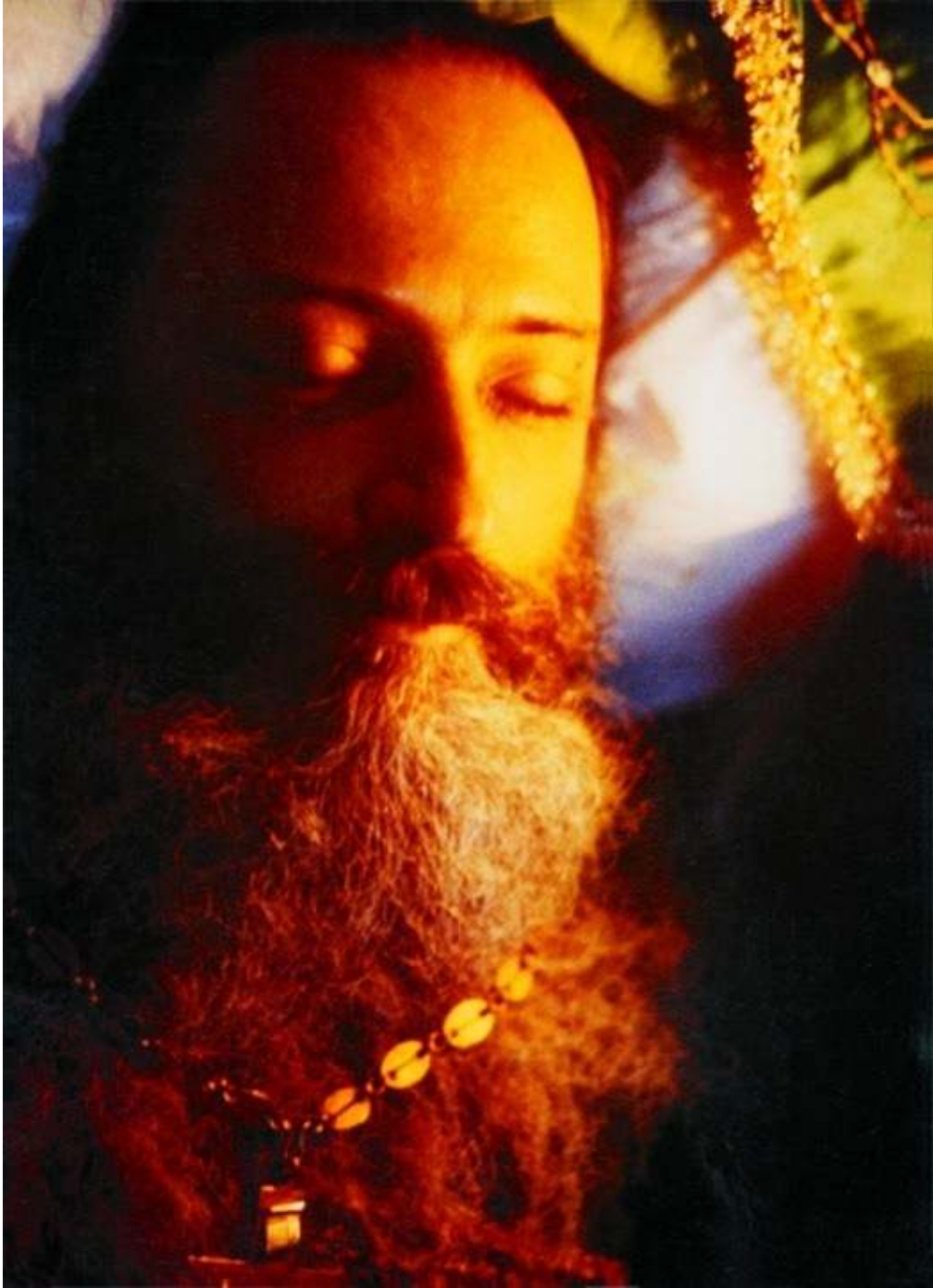
Fr. Herman and a few others went into the hospital room to dress Fr. Seraphim’s body. Despite efforts to bind his jaw, Fr. Seraphim’s mouth naturally fell into a gentle smile of unmistakable heavenly joy. In accordance with Orthodox tradition, Fr. Seraphim was dressed first in a baptismal robe, then in his monastic robes, and then in his priestly vestments. The baptismal robe was provided by newly illumined John, who had been baptized only four days before.

Soon a coroner named David De Mars, who was a friend and neighbor of the monastery, came in his truck to take Fr. Seraphim back to Noble Ridge. A procession of cars climbed the winding mountain road leading to the monastery, and within each was heard the unceasing singing of hymns.

Fr. Seraphim’s body was placed in the middle of the monastery church, in a simple wooden coffin that had been built by Fr. Vladimir Anderson’s son, Basil. There it was to remain until the burial. The Psalter began to be read around the clock in the church. The vigil had now become a vigil of prayer for the repose of Fr. Seraphim’s soul.

Fr. Alexey Young arrived at the monastery from Etna in the late afternoon.

“I stayed with Fr. Seraphim in the church that whole night,” he recalls. “Others were coming and going. There was, of course, no electricity, just candlelight. Periodically I would rouse myself and serve another Pannikhida. I remember looking at him and thinking, ‘He’s not gone. This is impossible!’ And I remember especially looking at his right hand, and thinking that that hand would never be raised to bless me again. So I lifted his hand and blessed myself with it one last time.”<sup>8</sup>



Fr. Seraphim in blessed repose. *Photograph by Mary Mansur.*

## *The Forty Days*

*Virtue does not perish, even when one dies, for it is not corporeal.*

—Euripides

**I**N the three days between his death and his burial, Fr. Seraphim's unembalmed body never stiffened, nor did decay of any kind set in, even in the summer heat. There was no deathly pallor about him whatsoever; in fact, his coloring was literally golden. The skin remained soft and the body seemed to be, in the words of one monastery pilgrim, "one of a sleeping child." Another pilgrim, Dr. Eugene Zavarin, who was a professor of biochemistry at Fr. Seraphim's former university in Berkeley, commented that "he looks precisely like a relic." Since incorruption has from ancient times been viewed as a sign of sanctity in the Orthodox Church, all those present felt that they were witness to a manifestation of God's grace.

As he lay in his simple wooden coffin in the church, Fr. Seraphim's face became radiant. So comforting was his gentle expression of peace and happiness that the people could not bear to cover it in the traditional monastic way. He looked as if alive — younger than he had before his illness. The sight of him testified to a triumph over death, and numerous people were moved to spend long periods of prayer by his coffin. Little children could hardly be drawn away from the coffin, such was the atmosphere of love and tranquility surrounding his body. Beholding that blessed expression on his face, Fr. Herman was reminded of the words from *Ich Habe Genug*: "Close now, weary eyes." The mystery of death, which Fr. Seraphim had pondered for most of his intellectual life, was

now mystery to him no more.

The above-mentioned pilgrim, Dr. Eugene Zavarin, had known Fr. Seraphim in San Francisco since the early 1960s, when he and his brother Alexey had invited Fr. Seraphim and Ivan Kontzevitch to give talks at meetings of the *Umolyubtsy* (Lovers of Wisdom).<sup>[a]</sup> Now, less than twenty years later, he found himself beside the coffin of his younger contemporary. “I was on vacation with my wife,” he recalls, “when we received by telephone the news that Fr. Seraphim had died. We jumped into the car and drove to Platina. When we arrived, Fr. Seraphim was not yet buried, and a service was being held over his body. Everybody, including my wife and me, was just crying and crying and crying. My wife was telling me, ‘I don’t understand why we’re crying so much. We didn’t cry so much when our relatives were dying... Why is it so?’ Then I remembered what Ivan Kontzevitch (he was a theologian) once said to my brother. My brother had asked him, ‘How can you recognize a saint?’ and Professor Kontzevitch said, ‘You feel as if this person, who is a saint, is closer to you than any relative of yours.’ And I think this explains somewhat why people were crying so much.



Fr. Seraphim in blessed repose. *Photograph by Fr. Lawrence Williams.*



Fr. Seraphim's brothers and sisters weeping over his coffin in the monastery church.

“Fr. Herman had taken Fr. Seraphim’s body from the hospital and had brought it to the monastery. No embalming was done. Only people who loved him were allowed to touch his body.

“As the services were being held, I decided to confess. The confessions were being conducted over Fr. Seraphim’s casket. The people who were confessing would lower themselves over Fr. Seraphim; Fr. Herman would cover them with his epitachelion, and they would confess their sins. So, as I was confessing, my face was right next to that of Fr. Seraphim. I can remember his closed eyes and the color of his skin, which was just about like the color of beeswax. And I can testify that there was not even a little bit of any kind of a scent of decomposition — absolutely nothing! And I was so close, and covered with the epitachelion.”<sup>[1](#)</sup>

**O**N September 4, the day of Fr. Seraphim's burial, the services began in the morning with a hierarchical Divine Liturgy, celebrated by Archbishop Anthony and Bishop Nektary. The monastery church was filled to overflowing. During the Liturgy, Archbishop Anthony ordained Deacon Vladimir Anderson to the priesthood, and Laurence Williams from the Etna mission to the diaconate. Looking out the altar window during the singing of the Creed in the Liturgy, the bishops and priests saw a touching sight: a family of deer had gathered around Fr. Seraphim's grave site.

The Liturgy was followed by Fr. Seraphim's funeral, also presided over by both hierarchs. During the funeral, people continued to come up to the coffin, kissing Fr. Seraphim's forehead and those blessed hands which had written so many soul-profitting books, articles, and Church services. In the kliros were sung the beautiful yet sobering verses of the burial service for priests, written in the eighth century by St. John Damascene: "What earthly sweetness remaineth unmixed with grief? What glory standeth immutable on earth? All things are but shadows most feeble, but most deluding dreams: yet one moment only, and death shall supplant them all. But in the light of Thy countenance, O Christ, and in the sweetness of Thy beauty, give rest to him whom Thou hast chosen, because Thou lovest mankind."





Fr. Seraphim in blessed repose.

According to the teaching known to the Church by the revelation of angels, for the course of two days after death the soul enjoys relative freedom and can visit places on earth that were dear to it. “This description of the first two days,” wrote Fr. Seraphim in *The Soul after Death*, “is by no means any kind of dogma; it is merely a ‘model’ which indeed sets forth the most common order of the soul’s experiences after death. The many cases, both in Orthodox literature and in accounts of modern experiences, where the dead have momentarily appeared to the living within the first day or two after death (sometimes in dreams) are examples of the truth that the soul does indeed usually remain close to earth for some short period.”<sup>2</sup>

It appears that this was also the case with Fr. Seraphim himself. One of his spiritual daughters, Ellie Anderson, was standing before his coffin in the church, weeping and asking what she would do without him. “Without knowing how or being conscious of moving,” she recorded afterwards, “I was looking at the large icon of Christ. I could smell a bad odor and heard Fr. Seraphim tell me, ‘I’m rotting, I’m rotting — it was always Christ, not me.’ Then I turned my glance back to Fr. Seraphim, and the odor was decisively sweet, like that of roses; and I

had total peace.

“When everyone was saying goodbye to Fr. Seraphim, all of a sudden I could see him standing above the coffin, facing the altar. It is hard to describe; he was very bright, clean, dressed as a monk. All the while hymns were being sung; he was censing, always facing the altar.”<sup>3</sup>

The church was so crowded that many people had to listen to the service from outside. One of these was Mother Brigid, the former Barbara McCarthy. She must have looked downcast, because Bishop Nektary went up to her to console her. “Don’t pray for Fr. Seraphim,” he said, “pray to him.”

Fr. Seraphim’s funeral produced yet more spiritual fruits of his repose. Over his coffin Archbishop Anthony tonsured two of the monastery’s novices as ryassaphore monks. One of these was the aforementioned Novice Gregory, who, eighteen years later, became the new Abbot of the St. Herman Monastery.

After tonsuring the monks, Archbishop Anthony gave a sermon to the assembled faithful in which he said:

“It is with special feeling that I recall that autumn day — such a cold one — when this church still had no roof, and instead of a cupola there was the open sky. It was here that Fr. Herman and Fr. Seraphim received the tonsure. Even earlier, in San Francisco, we felt that Fr. Seraphim was a man of God. We felt this when he sang with us there on the kliros as a humble *Psalomshchik*, a church reader; when he helped Fr. Mitrophan collect funds to help the Holy Land. But here [in Platina] began his special life, and what a life! And now all those who love Fr. Seraphim — and not only those gathered here, but those who were unable to come here as well — recall his life. I will not recount his life: Fr. Herman can speak about this; and the walls of this church, of the printshop, and of his monastic cell say so much more.

“But I want to say to dear Fr. Herman that which another brother said to his brother a thousand years ago. These two brothers were the Holy Equals-to-the-Apostles Cyril and Methodius.<sup>[b]</sup> As he was dying in Rome, Cyril said to his older brother Methodius, ‘Brother, we have pulled this plow like two oxen. I

know that you love your Olympus.’ (This was not the Olympus that was in Greece, but the one in Asia Minor.) ‘But you,’ continued St. Cyril, ‘do not abandon this work by any means. If two oxen have been pulling it, then what strength will it take for the one remaining to pull now!’

“Through the prayers of Saints Cyril and Methodius, through the prayers of our holy Father Herman of Alaska, and through the prayers of our good fellow brother, our father Hieromonk Seraphim, may the Lord, Who has united us all here at his coffin, grant to everyone the desire to help Fr. Herman, who is now pulling this load alone. And let us bid farewell to Fr. Seraphim with all the love of which our small hearts are capable.”<sup>4</sup>



The procession with Fr. Seraphim's coffin from the church to the grave. In front, Fr. Herman and Fr. Roman Lukianov. *Photograph courtesy of Fr. Lawrence Williams.*

Fr. Seraphim's coffin was then carried in procession from the church to his grave, located on the site of the outdoor chapel which had been dedicated to the Meeting of the Lord. While Fr. Seraphim's coffin was being covered with earth, the grief felt by his many close ones was transformed into joy, as the victorious hymn of Pascha, "Christ is Risen!" was spontaneously sung. The words of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, which Fr. Seraphim had once cited in describing the

funeral of Archbishop John, could thus be applied to his own burial as well: “Have you ever seen the body of a righteous man whose soul has departed? There is no stench from him; one does not fear to approach him. At his burial sorrow is dissolved in a kind of incomprehensible joy... This is a sign that the deceased has obtained mercy and grace with the Lord.”<sup>5</sup>

To the many American converts at Fr. Seraphim’s funeral, the manifest grace poured out on this day had a special significance. It bore witness to the spiritual potential of all Orthodox Americans. In this connection it is interesting to contemplate the significance of the site on which Fr. Seraphim was buried. As will be remembered, this was the spot where, thirteen years previously, he and Fr. Herman had performed their first services at the skete, and where Archbishop Anthony had celebrated the first Divine Liturgy. “The wilds of Northern California,” Fr. Seraphim had written, “met Orthodoxy when the Liturgy was celebrated on this very spot.” And now, with Fr. Seraphim’s burial there, this portion of earth received one of the first offerings of native-born American sanctity, and the first fully American “link” to the Holy Fathers.



Fr. Herman bidding a last farewell at the moment when Fr. Seraphim's coffin was about to be lowered into the grave.

*Photograph courtesy of Fr. Lawrence Williams.*

It is also noteworthy that this site had been dedicated to the Meeting of the Lord — the Feast for which the cantata *Ich Habe Genug* had been written. With his body having been consigned to earth, Fr. Seraphim could now experience the ultimate fulfillment of the longing that Bach's masterpiece had once stirred in him. Like Righteous Symeon on meeting the Christ-child in the Temple, Fr. Seraphim could now rejoice in his death, for he had seen the salvation of the Lord.<sup>[\[c\]](#)</sup>

**A**CCORDING to Orthodox ascetic teaching, a departed soul, after

successfully passing through the testing of the “toll-houses” on the third day after death, visits the heavenly habitations and the abysses of hell, not knowing where it will remain; and only on the fortieth day is its place appointed until the General Resurrection. For this reason the Church prays especially fervently for the deceased during the first forty days after death. Fr. Herman served a memorial Liturgy for Fr. Seraphim every day during that period.

On the fortieth day after Fr. Seraphim’s repose, a day designated as a special time of prayer by the Church, pilgrims again arrived at Fr. Seraphim’s grave to pray for him. Many, however, had begun to do what Bishop Nektary had advised Mother Brigid; that is, to pray not *only for* Fr. Seraphim, but also *to* him, that he would continue to guide and pray for them from the other world. Bishop Nektary, who came to the monastery on the fortieth day together with several clergymen, confirmed what was already in people’s hearts. After serving Divine Liturgy and then a pontifical Pannikhida at the grave, the Bishop gave a sermon which ended with the phrase: “Fr. Seraphim was a righteous man, possibly a saint.” Bishop Nektary was well qualified to make such a statement, having been in close contact with saints both in Russia and the free world. The priest who was translating his sermon into English, however, hesitated in repeating this phrase, particularly the last word. Calculating that such a bold affirmation might be risky since other Church leaders had not yet expressed their opinion, this priest asked Bishop Nektary if he had really meant what he said. Hitting the ground with his staff, the Bishop repeated, in Russian, “A Saint!” — and the confused priest was obliged to render this word in English.

Having led a procession from the hillock of Fr. Seraphim’s grave, the Bishop was about to enter the church, still holding a censer in his hand. Abruptly he turned around and, with great feeling, loudly began to sing the glorification hymn to monk-saints: “We glorify thee, our holy Father Seraphim, and we honor thy holy memory: instructor of monks, and converser with angels.” The monks, clergy and pilgrims joined in the singing, and the sorrow of being separated from Fr. Seraphim was again transformed into joy.

Fr. Seraphim, this American convert who had once been an atheist and a Buddhist, had been assigned his place in the Kingdom of Heaven this day. Bishop Nektary had been thirty years older than he, having received his spiritual inheritance from Optina many years before Fr. Seraphim had even opened his eyes to the world; and yet Fr. Seraphim, having *fought the good fight*, had been the first *to finish the course* (II Tim. 4:7). With a smile the Bishop said to Fr. Herman, “He came and stole Paradise from us.”

Years ago, it will be remembered, Bishop Nektary had told the fathers that they should continue doing what they were doing even if only one of them remained. And now, with Fr. Seraphim buried in the earth, he said these words to the Brotherhood: “Platina is the lead violin; and now one of its strings is broken. But you must finish the melody with that broken string.”



## *With the Saints*

*With the saints give rest, O Christ, to the souls of Thy servants, where there is neither sickness, nor sorrow, nor sighing, but life everlasting.*

—Kontakion of the Pannikhida (Service for the Dead) by St. John  
Damascene

**W**ITHIN a month after Fr. Seraphim's repose, *Orthodox America* dedicated a special memorial issue to him. In it was published this weighty appraisal of him by a great Patristic "link" of the previous generation, Helen Kontzevitch:

"Having the greatest admiration for the newly reposed Fr. Seraphim, and valuing highly his achievements before God, I would like to write a few words about an attribute of his which is most dear and close to my heart. This is his faithfulness to genuine Orthodoxy. He did not have the slightest divergence from the teaching of the Church; he did not hold to any personal opinions. My late husband, Ivan M. Kontzevitch, was the same, having several university degrees and, toward the end of his life, completing theological academy. It never entered his mind to sin against the teachings of the Church.

"The teaching of the Orthodox Church is not a product of the minds or the deliberations of the great Fathers of the Church. The Holy Spirit Himself inspired them with this teaching. It is for this reason that Orthodoxy is unshakable. Every offense against the Holy Spirit is an unforgivable sin (Matt. 12:31–32). Faithfulness to Orthodoxy in our difficult and troubled times is of great value. Fr. Seraphim was a burning and illuminating lamp. He left us his



light in his writings. Glory to God for all things.”<sup>1</sup>

In the same issue was a heartfelt eulogy by Fr. Alexey Young:

“In one of the last sermons I heard him give, Hieromonk Seraphim said quietly and simply, as he had said so many times before: ‘Be kind to one another. Smile, and be cheerful. Carry one another’s burdens for the sake of Christ.’

“The death of Fr. Seraphim on August 20/September 2 has removed from the midst of this small, struggling mission of St. Herman of Alaska a faithful servant of God who, while able to grasp deep theological principles, never once strayed from the path of Gospel simplicity, fulfilling the Scriptural description of a righteous man, who *bringeth forth wisdom* (Prov. 10:31)....

“I write these words, now, with tears, for Fr. Seraphim was my co-worker and collaborator as well as my conscience. I never sat down at the typewriter without Fr. Seraphim figuratively looking over my shoulder; I knew that I would never have to trust myself. Now, my heart breaks, and only Christ can console....

“Of course, while he lived we did not fully appreciate him. We took him for granted, just as we always do with those we love. We thought that in spite of his fragile health he would nonetheless always ‘be there.’ He had only just turned forty-eight — still a young man — with so much work unfinished; his course as an Orthodox Christian only lasted just over twenty years. And then, after a brief but terrifyingly intense illness, he was gone, so that, *having been a little chastised he shall be greatly rewarded, for God proved him and found him worthy of Himself* (Wisdom 3:4).

“In the *Praktikos* there is found this passage: ‘The death of his father was announced to a certain monk. He turned to the messenger who had brought him the news and replied: ‘Stop your blasphemies. My father is immortal!’ This was how I felt when I received news of Fr. Seraphim’s repose: he is not dead; he is now truly alive, in Christ! He has gone to the next world to be with his beloved Archbishop John, St. Paisius [Velichkovsky], and the saints of Gaul and the Northern Thebaid, whose Lives he had translated and printed.

“What a man was this! Brothers and sisters — our dear readers — we shall not soon see his like again! I am filled with gratitude to God for having given him to us, even for such a brief time. And I believe with all my heart and soul that he has now heard the blessed voice of the Master speak these precious words: *Well done, thou good and faithful servant! Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!* (Matt. 25:21).”<sup>2</sup>

**I**N January of 1983, four months after Fr. Seraphim’s repose and only three weeks before his own repose, Bishop Nektary<sup>[a]</sup> sent Fr. Herman an encouraging letter in which he told him to trust “in the prayers of your heavenly patron, our holy Fr. Herman of Alaska, and of course in the prayers of your *sotainnik*, the late Hieromonk Seraphim.” “And Archbishop John,” the Bishop continued, “— does he not raise his holy prayers to the throne of God, begging help for you to strengthen your will and to give powers for further building up and making firm your holy monastery? After all, it is a child of Archbishop John!

“God is the God of the living, and not a God of the dead. Both Archbishop John and Fr. Seraphim are alive with the Lord, and doubtlessly have boldness before the throne of God. Address yourself to them. Feel and believe in their prayerful protection and help.

“BE VALIANT, BE MANLY, AND MAY YOUR HEART BE FIRM.”<sup>3</sup>

In the years following Fr. Seraphim’s repose, the St. Herman Brotherhood received many confirmations that Fr. Seraphim had indeed become, together with St. Herman and St. John Maximovitch, a heavenly intercessor. Thus, just as the Brotherhood had once begun to compile a record book of the intercessions of its founding hierarch, St. John, so now it began to compile such a book about its founding member, Fr. Seraphim. Here we present, in chronological order, a sampling of the accounts from this record book of Fr. Seraphim’s intercessions.

1. In late September, 1982, just weeks after Fr. Seraphim’s repose, Fr.

Alexey Young's matushka, Susan, was diagnosed with melanoma. The insidious cancer had already metastasized, leaving Matushka Susan, according to the doctors, a twenty percent chance of living another five years. Her youngest daughter Faith was only five months old then, and for her sake Matushka Susan begged God to grant her this reprieve. Meanwhile, every night Fr. Alexey anointed the spot on her neck, from which the primary tumor had been removed, with oil from the lamp over Fr. Seraphim's grave.<sup>4</sup> On December 6, 1982, one of Fr. Alexey's parishioners, Martha Nichols, wrote to the monastery:

"I don't feel that Fr. Seraphim is very far away. I recently dreamt that I walked into a crowd of people, and there was Fr. Seraphim, dressed in his monastic garments with a black cap (*skufia*) on his head. He blessed me and said, 'Peace be with you,' and I said, 'And with thy spirit,' like in the Liturgy. He turned to a woman and put his forehead on her neck and shoulder. When he raised his head, blood was streaming on the woman's neck and shoulder, but there was no blood on Fr. Seraphim. Fr. Deacon Laurence [Williams], vested in white and gold, went over and, with the Communion cloth, wiped the blood off very calmly. I remember thinking—'It is really the blood of Christ!' Then Fr. Seraphim walked away with his arms around someone, as if to console that person. I didn't recognize who it was. When I woke up, I realized that the woman in the dream looked, from the back, just like Matushka Susan."<sup>5</sup>

Some time after this dream occurred, Matushka Susan went to the doctor for medical tests. All the tests showed that the cancer had disappeared; her neck was perfectly healthy. The doctors at the clinic specializing in melanoma acknowledged it to be a miracle. Matushka Susan lived for another fourteen years and reposed on November 29, 1996.<sup>6</sup>

2. On November 11, 1983, Fr. Alexey Young wrote the following: "About two months after the repose of Fr. Seraphim it came to my attention that a cousin (non-Orthodox) of one of my spiritual children (Barbara Murray) was in the hospital with a serious ailment. She asked to see me and asked that I pray for

her. She was suffering from a constriction of vessels in the leg, causing shortage of circulation. The immediate crisis was a gangrenous big toe. I saw this toe myself: it was green and rotting — a terrible sight. The doctors were preparing to amputate the toe within a week or so, and said that it was likely she would lose the whole foot and possibly the limb from the knee down. I anointed her toe and leg with oil from Fr. Seraphim's grave and asked his intercession on her behalf. Within a short period of time the gangrene completely disappeared. The doctors decided it was not necessary to amputate the toe or anything else and announced that they were 'amazed' at what happened. Today, more than a year later, she has had no recurrence of her affliction, to the continuing surprise of the doctors, who have no explanation for it. I'm convinced that this healing was worked through Fr. Seraphim. (By the way, I myself spoke to the doctor on more than one occasion, and so am able to personally verify the medical details as well as the initial prognosis.)

“And now I have a second miracle to report: Two weeks ago today my brother-in-law, Stefan (whom I baptized last July and then married to my sister, Anna), was in a serious auto accident here in town. He broke both legs (compound fracture in the left leg) and also shattered the left ankle and the left big toe. He was immediately taken into surgery, where the doctors worked for four and a half hours to clean the wounds (the bones had broken through the flesh in more than one place); road dirt had been ground into the flesh and bones, and the danger of life-threatening infection was very great. I saw the photos of his left leg and foot just before they took him into surgery, and it was an appalling sight: the left foot was just hanging; the ligaments and tendons had all been torn away, and the bones completely crushed.

“During that first operation we prayed in the waiting room. Remembering that Bishop Nektary had sung a Glorification [hymn] to Fr. Seraphim, I served a Moleben to Fr. Seraphim on behalf of Stefan. Starting the next day, and every day thereafter, he was anointed with oil from Fr. Seraphim's grave. Through the bandages we were even able to reach one of the mangled toes of the left foot.

“After the surgery the doctor told us there was a good chance that he would lose the foot. Also, there was a possibility that if infection set in it could become ‘life-threatening.’ But we had great confidence in the prayers of our Righteous One before the throne of God, and we waited, patiently.

“Six days later the surgeons operated again. This was a critical time, for based upon what they saw when they removed the bandages, they would have a good idea about whether or not the foot could be saved. Afterwards the surgeon himself said that it was a ‘miracle’! Not only was everything mending well, but there was no sign of infection — in itself a miracle.

“Of course Stefan now has three months in a wheelchair, and then he will have to learn to walk all over again. There are still many difficulties, and possibly more operations, in the near future. But I believe that in this, as in so many other things, Fr. Seraphim again heard our prayers, and turned on our behalf to God’s throne in order to give us help. Truly, God rests in His saints!

“Of both of the above miracles I am personally a witness. In addition, photographs exist of the second case which would quickly convince anyone — lay person or physician — that something of a truly extraordinary nature took place.”<sup>7</sup>

3. In March of 1984 Alison moved temporarily to Redding to be close to the grave of Fr. Seraphim. Before she found an apartment in the city, she stayed in a motel with her daughter. There Fr. Seraphim appeared to her one night, looking as he did when she last saw him in the flesh in 1960. Sitting at the table in the kitchen area of the motel room, he seemed to be actually present in body before her, not like a ghost; and she was not at all frightened. “Eugene,” she said to him, “I thought you were dead.” Fr. Seraphim looked at her with joy. “Don’t you know we’ll always be together?” he asked.<sup>8</sup>

These words of assurance remained with Alison for the rest of her life. With them, Fr. Seraphim confirmed posthumously what he had written to her back in 1963: “I pray and hope and believe that we shall be together when this brief life

is over.”<sup>9</sup> [\[b\]](#)

Alison reposed on February 12/25, 2002. According to God’s inscrutable Providence, this was the commemoration day of St. Eugene of Alexandria: Fr. Seraphim’s nameday in the world and the fortieth anniversary of his reception into the Church.

In fulfillment of Alison’s last request, her body was buried on the grounds of the St. Herman Monastery.

4. In 1979 Pastor Marion Cardoza, who was connected with the Evangelical Orthodox movement, began to write Fr. Seraphim heartfelt letters expressing his desire to enter more deeply into Orthodoxy. At that time his church near Santa Cruz, California — called the “hippie church” because it brought in young seekers from the counterculture — had not been received into the canonical Orthodox Church, and in fact had had practically no contact with traditional Orthodoxy and its monasticism. In August of 1980 Fr. Seraphim wrote to Pastor Cardoza in order to arrange a meeting:

I have received your second letter and am very touched by the urgency of your appeal to find the true roots of Christianity...

May God reward your search for true Orthodoxy. I myself found it twenty years ago after a fruitless wandering in Oriental religions, and I have never doubted that this is the true Church established by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The pitfalls in the way of finding and becoming one with Christ’s Church are many, as you yourself have already realized. I myself believe that if one is absolutely sincere and truthful, and will beware of trusting his own opinions and feelings, God will grant him to find His Church.

I will be in Santa Cruz over the Labor Day weekend to give a talk at a Russian-language religious conference there, and I would be very happy to meet with you then, and with members of your community if you wish....

We are sending you separately a few more Orthodox publications. Please pray to God that He might make our meeting fruitful.<sup>[10](#)</sup>

When Fr. Seraphim came to visit the church on September 5, a parishioner who saw him outside told Pastor Cardoza, “There’s a *heavy dude* out there!” The pastor, afraid it might be a member of a motorcycle gang, opened the door and saw for the first time in his life an Orthodox monk. Fr. Seraphim talked with him for two or three hours; and as he arose at the end of their talk he reached out and hugged the pastor. “God is in this place,” he said emphatically. “Stay on the path.”

Later Fr. Seraphim wrote in his Chronicle: “A good meeting — he [the pastor] has read much on Orthodoxy and seems to accept it in his heart.” Fr. Seraphim saw that the church, having come from a Protestant background, still had much to learn, but he believed that if the people continued to seek the Kingdom of God, all things would be added unto them. He especially valued their attempt to save the victims of today’s counterculture, having once been one himself.

After Fr. Seraphim’s repose, Pastor Cardoza needed a larger church for his growing community. An ideal church was available in the town of Ben Lomond for \$250,000, but his community had no money at the time. Taking some earth that had come from Fr. Seraphim’s grave in Platina, he sprinkled it over the church’s grounds and asked Fr. Seraphim for his heavenly intercession. The next day the lady who was selling the church told the pastor that he could move in right away and not worry about immediate payment. The community was subsequently received into the Orthodox Church, grew to include over three hundred families, and became widely known as one of the most fervent convert parishes in America. Its original pastor attributes the miracle of the acquisition of the Ben Lomond church to Fr. Seraphim’s prayers in heaven.<sup>[\[c\]](#)</sup> Having taken the name Seraphim out of gratitude to Fr. Seraphim, he now serves as the priest of St. Innocent’s Orthodox Church (Russian Orthodox Church Abroad) in Rogue

River, Oregon.

5. Toward the end of his earthly life Fr. Seraphim had begun to receive copies of a magazine called *Sonflowers*, produced by a “New Age Christian” society called the Holy Order of MANS.<sup>[d]</sup> The magazine was obviously put together with much love and care, and revealed a groping toward a mystical dimension of Christianity. The Holy Order of MANS was but one of hundreds of gnostic and mystical groups that had sprung up in the 1960s and early 1970s, but it was its decidedly Christian aspect that interested Fr. Seraphim.

After the death of its founder in 1974, the Order had been in a process of a searching not unlike the one in which Fr. Seraphim had been involved many years before. Its new Director General, Vincent Rossi, had inherited the leadership of nearly two thousand souls, a third of whom had taken vows of poverty and obedience. Although the Order had always placed Jesus Christ as the reason for its existence and the eucharist at the center of its worship, in its early years it had held heretical ideas such as reincarnation and Gnostic illumination: New Age teachings of the kind Fr. Seraphim had warned people about in his books. By 1983 Vincent had already thrown out many of these ideas (which caused not a few people to leave), but still he was without a solid foundation for his group. If they were to solidly adhere to basic Christianity, what sort of Christianity would it be?

Vincent was reading through piles of books in search of the fullness of Truth. Just like Fr. Seraphim, he was initially struck by the writings of René Guénon, from which he learned the necessity of ancient tradition, of *orthodoxy*. The focus of his study now became Orthodox Christianity, and of the many Orthodox writings he read he was especially moved by those of Fr. Seraphim. He formed a desire to get into contact with Fr. Seraphim himself; but then, to his great sadness, he read in an issue of *The Orthodox Word* that Fr. Seraphim had died a year before. Days passed, weeks, and he could not get the thought of Fr. Seraphim out of his mind. How strange, he thought: no other writings had



actually “followed” him like this. As he recalled later: “It was as if Fr. Seraphim were drawing me, calling me, not letting me be until I pursued Orthodox Christianity to the end.” He prayed to God that He would bring the Order into the *living tradition* of Orthodox Christianity.

As Vincent began to introduce Orthodox Christianity to members of the Order, he found that they were incredibly receptive to it, seeing it as the true, mystical Christianity for which they had so long been groping in the dark. With such a large group involved, however, one could not expect it to become fully Orthodox at once. Much struggle and soul-searching was needed along the way.

During Bright Week in May of 1984, one of the Order’s pastors, Nathaniel, made a pilgrimage to the St. Herman Monastery. The day was cold and foggy when Nathaniel, having just left the services in church, came to stand before Fr. Seraphim’s grave. His heart was heavy; he felt agitated and uncertain, as if he were trying to grasp something that remained out of reach. The beauty and depth of Orthodoxy had overwhelmed him and satisfied the yearning of his soul, but he wondered now how his community could fully enter the Church.

Since the members of the Order were renunciant and had taken lifelong vows, a unity born of spiritual struggle had grown up among them. They had dedicated their lives to service in the name of Christ, doing “street missions” to bring the light of Christ to the most dangerous neighborhoods, feeding the poor, and opening “Raphael House”<sup>[e]</sup> shelters for distressed families. Many members had been sent out on mission to new cities with no more than twenty-five dollars in their pockets. They would begin and end the day with prayer, coming to church to receive communion every morning at 6:00 a.m.



Fr. Seraphim's grave at the St. Herman Monastery, soon after his repose.

Nathaniel knew that there were many things the Order would have to change as it entered more deeply into Orthodoxy — and already this change had begun — but he feared that too sudden and drastic a change would wipe out all that they had built up over the years. Would it be possible for those in the Order to be received into the Orthodox Church with their erroneous ideas and practices removed, but without having to throw out their good ideas and their good works?

Standing before Fr. Seraphim's grave with conflicting thoughts on these matters, Nathaniel asked for Fr. Seraphim's help. He felt that Fr. Seraphim had taken his community thus far on the path to Orthodoxy, and now he asked him where to go from there. His prayer, coming as it did *from pain of heart*, was concentrated and intense, and was unexpectedly followed by a wondrous calm. Within his heart he heard Fr. Seraphim say, "Read Acts 10." Having never heard a voice in such a way before, he thought he had imagined it. But the voice came again, this time more clearly: "Read Acts 10."

At that time Nathaniel did not remember the contents of that particular chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. When he turned to it later, the meaning of the words he had heard became clear. The tenth chapter of Acts deals with the

conversion and entrance into the Church of Cornelius the Centurion, a Roman Gentile. Cornelius is at first described as *a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave alms to the people, and prayed to God always.* God, desiring his salvation, granted him a vision in which an angel told him, *Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.* Then the Apostle Peter, who had also been spoken to in a vision, came to Cornelius and his friends, saying, *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.*

Hearing and believing all that St. Peter confessed of Christ, Cornelius received the Holy Spirit. Referring to Cornelius and his friends, St. Peter said, *Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?* At this, Peter commanded them to be baptized.

In reading this story, Nathaniel understood that the description of Cornelius could be applied directly to his Order. Like Cornelius, the devout men and women of the Order had been accepted by God for their sincere prayers and almsgiving, and had thus been led to the true, Orthodox Church of Christ, to the consummation of all that God had come to earth to give. In becoming Orthodox they could continue their good works, which had attracted to them God's grace and mercy in the first place.

Nathaniel's question had thus been answered by three words from Fr. Seraphim, who was obviously continuing to look after the Order from the other world. Today many hundreds of people from the Order — now called the Christ the Saviour Brotherhood — and its communities have been received into what Fr. Seraphim called the “saving enclosure” of the Orthodox Church. Not at all abandoning their good works, they have on the contrary found new, creative outlets for their original apostolic zeal, preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in an Orthodox context. Orthodox missions and bookstores have been opened throughout America and overseas, while the Raphael House shelters continue to

provide a home and services for struggling families. Twenty-four people who came from the Order (including their children) have taken on the yoke of monastic life in the St. Herman Brotherhood and elsewhere; thirty now serve as clergymen in various Orthodox jurisdictions, and others are currently preparing for ordination.<sup>[f]</sup>

Vincent Rossi, the man who discovered Orthodoxy for the Order, attributes the miracle of its conversion to Fr. Seraphim's prayers. "It's my belief," he says, "that up in heaven Fr. Seraphim saw us struggling and searching. We might have appeared strange on the outside, but he could see behind that, that deep down we really weren't so bad after all. And he came to help us out."

6. In 1985 the Brotherhood received the following letter from a frequent pilgrim to the monastery, a twenty-five-year-old Greek-Arabic man named Paul Baba:

"Fr. Seraphim has answered my prayer! Yesterday was probably one of the worst days of my life. I was just about to fall apart!... The problem I was having was all about how I didn't want to spend most of my time serving and pleasing man in this world with the musical talent that God gave me. What I mean by pleasing man is when I write dancing tunes that are so useless to man's salvation, songs that do not take any talent whatsoever. The only reason I would write them is so I could get paid a lot of money. As you know, I've been writing [Byzantine] chants. In my heart, I feel so at ease serving God, serving the Church, and doing something useful for the salvation of man. But even though I've been writing chants, my life still feels very empty. I've been told I need a degree if I'm going to continue to write chants. If I don't have a degree, no one will recognize me as a writer.

"Well, G. B. invited me over to his house yesterday and gave me the new *Orthodox Word* on the 'Optina Elders' to read. As I was leaving for home, which was at midnight, I fell into despondency. I was so hurt because I felt as though the Church wanted neither me nor my talents. Then I remembered Fr. Seraphim

lying dead in his coffin. I remembered watching people touching him and praying to him to intercede for them. These people would cry their hearts out as though they needed help in their spiritual life....

“I was so tired of being sick at heart that I went to bed and, right before I slept, I asked Fr. Seraphim to help me.... A tear came rolling down from my eye; I guess I was just so hurt and alone.

“In my dream last night, I was in the old church at Platina, looking at Fr. Seraphim lying dead in his coffin. He looked so humble and innocent that I felt compelled to give him a layman’s blessing with the sign of the Cross. As I thought of my problems, I started to cry heavily right over his coffin. I felt so alone and in need of comfort that I got on my knees and lay my head on his shoulder. I kept crying and crying. I started pouring out my troubles about how no one accepts my talents because I don’t have a degree and how I feel so alone in the world. I went on and on and cried and cried. After I was done letting all my problems out, I felt so warm and comforted that I wanted never to leave. I had to leave, though, and as I looked at his face, he had tears rolling down from his eyes. It was so beautiful to see that he entered himself into my sorrow. And as I hugged him in parting, I heard his voice say, ‘You will get your answer.’

“Then I woke up and it was morning. For some reason, the first thing that I did was to read the whole *Orthodox Word* on the Optina Elders. When Fr. Seraphim was alive, he used to say to me, ‘You think you’ve got problems — read the Lives of Saints.’ So, with that always in my mind, I read the Optina Elders [article]. They were so beautiful, but still no answer to my problem. But there I saw on the next page, written by Eugene Rose, “The Love of Truth.”[\[g\]](#) There was my answer. It was so true and encouraging for me to do what is right. Especially when I read: ‘For the rest, it’s a matter of making money, getting a secure place in life — and using the mind as a kind of toy, doing clever tricks with it and getting paid for it, like circus clowns.’ You see, I wouldn’t last here in the world by *rearranging* the talent God gave me, to satisfy my stomach. God is glorified through His saints.”[11](#)

Fr. Seraphim gave Paul his answer in more ways than one. Since writing this letter, Paul was given unforeseen opportunities to serve Christ in His Church, in much the same way that Fr. Seraphim did. For several years he ran a popular Orthodox book and icon store in San Francisco, in a storefront right next to the one where Fathers Seraphim and Herman had theirs. Through him and his store, hundreds of people were converted to Orthodoxy. Today, Paul is married, has three children, and serves as the priest of the Virgin Mary Orthodox Church (Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese) in Sacramento, California.

7. In 1988 Paul's store was visited by a monk, Fr. Tikhon, who told him of a miracle worked through Fr. Seraphim's prayers. Paul encouraged him to inform the St. Herman Brotherhood about this, and thus on the Feast of the Dormition ("Fr. Seraphim's Feast") Fr. Tikhon wrote the following:

"I fell ill in December 1987. On Christmas Eve the doctors told me I had cancer of the pancreas. This diagnosis, of course, meant death. After the doctors left my room I began to pray the Jesus Prayer, and then it came to me to pray to Blessed Seraphim Rose, whose writings I had been reading since the 1960s. Although I never met Fr. Seraphim, I always felt he had been helping me and reaching out to me through his writings. I had the icon of Blessed Seraphim that you had sent me before I got sick.

"I prayed and slept for three days. During this time Fr. Seraphim came to me, as if out of a tunnel with light at the other end. He walked out of the light and began talking to me. He spoke of what the monastic life was supposed to be, and told me what I should be doing with my life. He had a very gentle spirit, but he told me my sins and what I had to change in myself. It was like a big brother helping a little brother. He told me it was not my time to die and that God had things for me to do....

"After I woke up on the 28th of December, Fr. David came to give me Communion and to pray with me. I told him I had been praying and had asked Blessed Fr. Seraphim to take my case before God.

“The next day my blood began to get better, and the next day it was even better; and the doctors said I could go home. They said they could do no more for me and that I would have to come back for more tests in one week.

“When I came on the day of the test, I almost at once knew something was going on. They kept doing it over and over; then they sent me to the Nuclear Medicine Department, and the same thing. I had three more CAT scans, all the same — no cancer. The young doctor told me he could not take care of me anymore. He is a Japanese man — they do not make mistakes. He had seen the malignant lump and had seen the results of the biopsy; but now the lump had suddenly disappeared, and the pancreas was back to normal. He was frightened because he had lost face by making a diagnosis of death which turned out to be wrong. I could not explain to him that he had not made a mistake. He is not Christian or Orthodox and did not understand that our blessed brother had asked God to hear my prayer.

“Blessed Fr. Seraphim Rose will always be my friend and brother. He has with his life and writings changed my life, and the lives of my brothers.”<sup>[12](#)</sup>

8. On May 2, 1989, Dr. Raphael Stephens III of Virginia Beach, Virginia, wrote of how Fr. Seraphim had helped him in his involvement with a Christian movement to stop, through nonviolent means, the legalized crime of abortion. It is not surprising that Fr. Seraphim, having been very conscious of the nihilistic disrespect for the mystery of life in our times, should have shown his care for the unborn victims of our society. Dr. Stephens’ letter reads:

“Reverend and Dear Father:

“Recently I participated in the National Day of Rescue, which was an attempt to prevent babies from being murdered by abortion. The issue of abortion to me is just as it is in Holy Orthodoxy — abortion is murder. In many respects it is similar to the Nazi holocaust of the Jews during World War II, and the Communist holocaust that is still going on in Russia today. Because I feel so

convicted of this truth, I decided to be one of those who would ‘lay down’ my life for the unborn by blocking the entrance to an abortuary this past Saturday (Holy Saturday).

“My reason for writing you all the way from Virginia Beach, Virginia, is not to share my personal convictions but to share something that directly touches St. Herman’s Brotherhood. I wrote the Brotherhood shortly after Fr. Seraphim Rose had died, inquiring about Holy Orthodoxy. I received some very informative material and later ordered the first two titles of the *Little Russian Philokalia*. I became minimally familiar with Fr. Seraphim during this time.... Recently God has begun to stir me heavily toward Holy Orthodoxy (I am a Roman Catholic), and I know God is calling me and my family into the fold. So, I wrote asking for some materials, which someone graciously sent to me. One was an issue of *The Orthodox Word* featuring Fr. Seraphim’s writings with a full-face, color cover of Fr. Seraphim. As I read the material my heart burned for the truth that Fr. Seraphim radiated.

“Now the essence of why I write. The night before the ‘Rescue’ I was very nervous and frankly scared — I am a law-abiding, conservative Christian who is a good citizen. I knew I would be arrested and that was an unpleasant prospect. I went to bed and restlessly fell asleep, only to be awakened shortly thereafter with Fr. Seraphim Rose’s face gleaming at me. I knew I was to pray to him that he would pray for my protection in ‘Operation Rescue.’ I felt him say that he and the Host of Heaven were supporting all Rescuers in heavenly prayer. I felt him say to me to trust his prayers for me. At that moment I put my trust in Jesus by turning to Fr. Seraphim. Throughout the night I would awaken only to find Fr. Seraphim there comforting me — and I never knew him and still am not sure who he is — I just know he was there like a patron saint or guardian angel. When I awoke in the morning Fr. Seraphim was still with me. I shared that with my wife, who is a strong woman of faith. I proceeded to the ‘Rescue.’ When the Rescue call was given by the leaders, I proceeded to the back door of the abortion clinic and took up my place blocking the doorway with thirty-two other



Christians — the front and side doors by another thirty brothers and sisters. I could see Fr. Seraphim looking at me and protecting me and all of the other Rescuers. Father, I am not a weirdo — I don't see visions or hear voices. But I do know that, in the Kingdom of God, at those times when it's necessary the saints and angels are sent to us, and we can see and hear what God wants us to see and hear. This was one of those saintly times. As soon as we settled in by the doorway, the leader had us begin singing a hymn whose second verse began with 'Cherubim and Seraphim....#x2019; I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Fr. Seraphim was there — right there at that Rescue in Norfolk, Virginia. We were all (sixty-two) arrested — there were six hundred other participants not involved in the 'civil disobedience' part of the Rescue. We were taken to the Police Precinct No. 2 in Norfolk. All the way there I was praying to Fr. Seraphim, and I felt a sense of gentle assurance that everything was going to be all right. The police were loving and gentle to us — not as they had been in Atlanta and Los Angeles where they were brutal and many got hurt. They reduced our charges to a class 'A' misdemeanor, which is the same as a traffic ticket, and we were all released on our own recognizance. The police Captain intentionally put us on the court docket of the only really pro-Life judge in Norfolk. Before the actual release the police allowed us to have a joint prayer and hymn service with the sixty-two who had been arrested. The police told us that they did not consider us 'common criminals,' and therefore did not lock us in jail cells, but rather took all sixty-two of us into the police precinct gymnasium, where they set up temporary processing stations so we could all go home as quickly as possible. Now that is a miracle. Norfolk is a tough, Navy port of call, with a rugged police force, and a 'no monkeyshine attitude.'

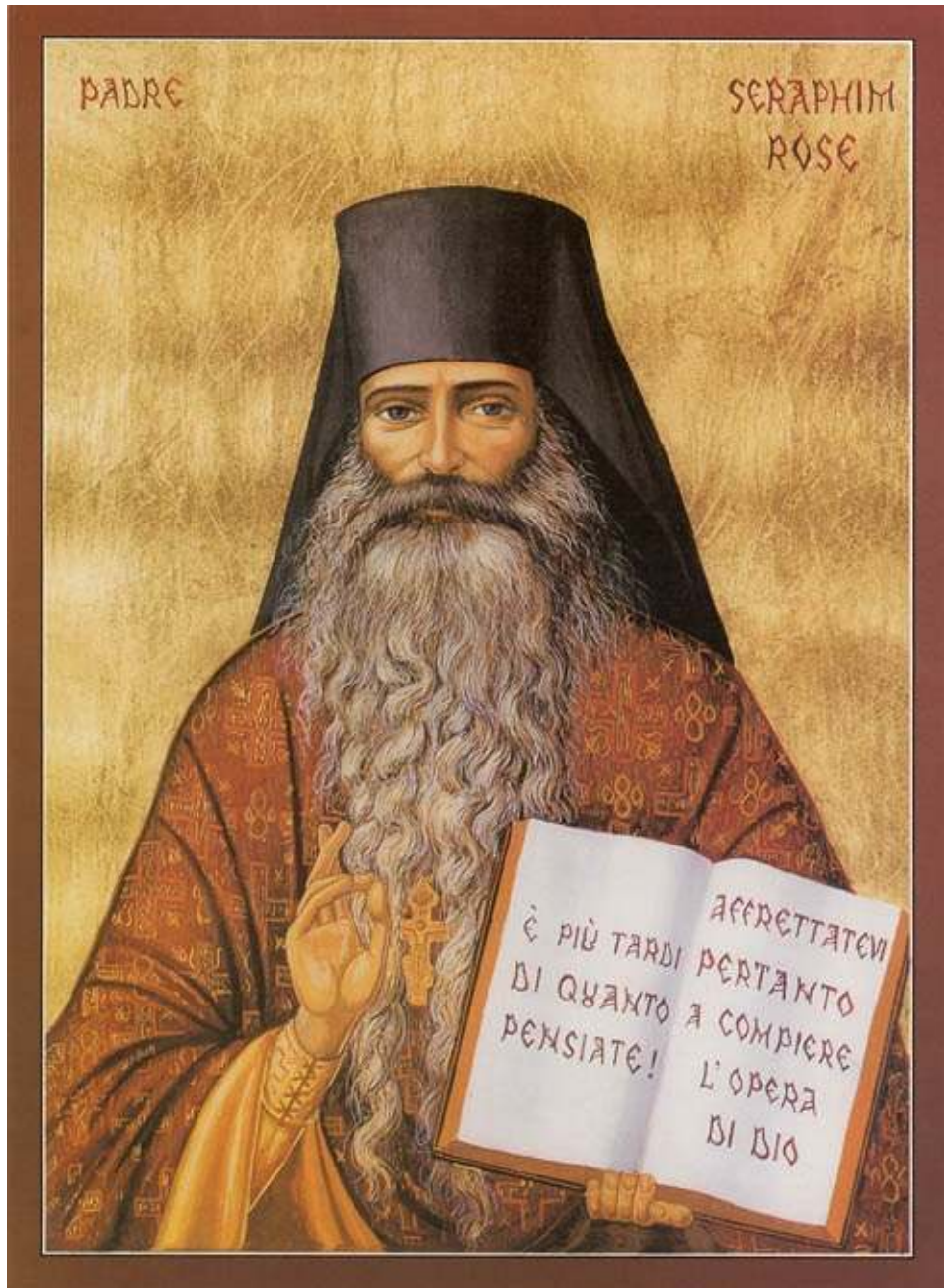
"I firmly believe we were delivered because of the prayers of this SAINT — Fr. Seraphim Rose.

"I am grateful to Fr. Seraphim and to the St. Herman Brotherhood for continuing the truth of Holy Orthodoxy. Please pray for me, my family, and all Rescuers — I really believe Fr. Seraphim has taken up the cause of the unborn in

heaven and has been assigned a ‘Patronage’ in heaven over the Rescue efforts.”<sup>13</sup>

Three months after writing this, Dr. Stephens was received into the Orthodox Church along with his family, taking the name Seraphim in gratitude to Fr. Seraphim. In 1992 he was ordained to the priesthood, and today he is the rector of the St. Ignatius Russian Orthodox Church (Russian Orthodox Church Abroad) in Virginia Beach, Virginia, which he and his wife founded.

9. In 1995 a Roman Catholic priest in Italy, Fr. Andrea Cassinasco, was so moved by reading Fr. Seraphim’s biography and works that he made the decision to convert to the Orthodox Faith. Later he became an Orthodox monk and priest, taking the name Fr. Ambrose. In gratitude to Fr. Seraphim for changing his life and leading him to the true Church, Fr. Ambrose commissioned an iconographic painting to be made of Fr. Seraphim by a Romanian iconographer, Fr. Ireneu. A fine piece of work bearing a close resemblance to Fr. Seraphim, the painting is a pre-canonization icon lacking a halo and the word “Saint”: clearly, it was made with the hope that these elements would be filled in when, God willing, Fr. Seraphim would be formally canonized. The painting shows Fr. Seraphim holding a book on which are written his now-famous words, translated into Italian: “It’s later than you think! Hasten, therefore, to do the work of God.”



Iconographic painting of Fr. Seraphim by Fr. Ireneu. The original is now located at Decani Monastery, Kosovo and Metohija.

As has been seen, local grassroots veneration of Fr. Seraphim — the first prerequisite for canonization — has occurred since the time of his death. Today, probably the most widespread veneration of him has been occurring in Russia, where the above-mentioned pre-canonization icon of him is now being sold in church bookstores of the Moscow Patriarchate. On February 19, 2001, the St.

Herman Brotherhood received the following letter from an American Orthodox missionary living in Moscow, Richard Betts, about a miracle connected with this:

“I was just contacted by Slava [Vyacheslav Marchenko] with some incredible news. As you might remember, he and Dima [Dimitry Rodionov] and I had visited a professor in Moscow at whose home drops of myrrh began appearing on a large copy of the Italian-made Fr. Seraphim icon. At the same time, we left another copy of the icon there and myrrh started appearing on it, too. The professor gave that one to Slava, who now has it in his home. Here is what Slava just wrote: ‘I have had the icon in my home for the past three days. It is in a frame, but without any glass over it. When I first received the icon, there were two drops of myrrh on Fr. Seraphim’s face, but today there are over fifty drops of myrrh. The largest drops are approximately two centimeters in diameter. The others are smaller. Incredible. The number increases and even without glass they remain and do not dry out.’”

10. On September 4, 2004, the following letter was sent to the St. Herman Monastery by Celia Yentzen, an American Orthodox convert who had been introduced to Orthodoxy through her husband David, also a convert:

“This letter is to testify to a miraculous healing that I received while visiting the St. Herman of Alaska Monastery in July 2004.

“During the summer of 1996, when I was twenty-four years old, I suffered a cumulative trauma back injury from sports, from which I never fully recovered. I was never able to run again, and had pain and stiffness when either walking or sitting for more than twenty to thirty minutes. Later that year, X rays confirmed some mild degenerative changes that were beginning to occur in my lower spine, despite how young I was. My father has Degenerative Disk Disease (DDD) of the lower spine. After many years without relief from my pain, DDD was my presumed fate as well, although at such an early stage there was no real way to confirm a diagnosis. In the past eight years, I have tried many types of

treatments, from ‘TENS’ electric stimulation treatments to physical therapy, prescription medications, ointments, and various exercise programs. None of these attempts worked for me. I went to sleep each night in pain.

“For eight years, my pain had never relented; I had grown accustomed to living with it daily. I had to give up the running that I loved so much, but I’ve always been grateful to be otherwise healthy and able to walk without too much hindrance, despite the presence of pain.

“In July 2004, my husband David and I made a pilgrimage to the St. Herman of Alaska Monastery. While there, we went to Fr. Seraphim Rose’s grave site to pray. At one point during our silent prayers, David put his hands on my back and continued to pray. I did not know what he was praying for, but knowing David, I guessed that he might be praying for my back. (I have always been embarrassed at how much I allowed back pain to interfere in David’s and my life, and had always hoped that I would be better at daily tasks without him knowing that I was in pain.) Upon thinking that David might be praying for relief of my pain, I said a very small prayer: ‘Fr. Seraphim, I know my husband loves me very much to pray for my relief, but truly, I do not deserve to have such a lofty request answered. I’m far, far too selfish.’

“David later told me, ‘What I asked Fr. Seraphim for was his intercessions not necessarily for a total cure, but that you would have at least a reduction of your chronic pain so that you could better manage daily life.’

“The next morning, July 21, as we were preparing to leave the monastery, I noticed that I had an unusually easy time carrying my bag uphill from the guest house. In the days that followed, I began to notice that I was consistently waking up each morning with no trace of pain, and that pain would not develop during the day, no matter how strenuous the day’s tasks were. Since becoming Orthodox, I had never consistently been able to do a full bow (*metanoia*) without bending my knees and bracing my back by pushing my hand against my leg. A few days after we left the monastery, while saying our morning prayers, when going to do a series of *metanoias*, I touched the ground with my knees straight

with complete ease and no pain for the first time! In shock at realizing what I had just done, I immediately looked at my husband with complete surprise! David was overjoyed. We knew then that David's prayers had indeed been answered. We sang prayers of thanksgiving to Fr. Seraphim for his intercessions, and sang an Akathist of Thanksgiving to God.

"One day, a couple of weeks later, in response to the joy I was beginning to feel at this new life, I decided to go running, as I had so loved to do before I was hurt. I walked three miles, and sprinted for half a mile! I felt no pain, and awoke the next day with no pain. I haven't experienced such freedom of movement in so many years!!

"Even as I write this, I am still with no pain; I ran a mile a few days ago. In the six weeks since I left the monastery, I have been pain-free, except for only a very brief moment as a consequence of carrying a nearly thirty-pound backpack of groceries for a mile! But as David reminded me, he didn't ask for a total cure, only that I would receive relief so that I could live normal daily life without hindrance; and that is exactly what I have received!

"Glory to God for all things, and endless thanks to Blessed Father Seraphim for his miraculous intercessions!"<sup>14</sup>

11. On September 13, 2006, Athanasius (Arum) Kone, having been received into the Orthodox Church just three months previously, sent the following account to the St. Herman Monastery:

"In 2003 I lived in Kodiak, Alaska, with my wife and two-year-old daughter. I was then very involved in a Protestant church, having spent time studying for the ministry as a youth pastor and pastoral intern. I worked with the Alaskan natives in the villages, where everyone is Orthodox, but as a Protestant I thought Orthodoxy was a broken and irrelevant religion in love with the past.

"During the summer of 2003, I was the director of the Spirit Camp for the Kodiak Area Native Association (KANA). Spirit Camp was a camp for native youth, which surrounded them with a wholesome environment and which

brought three generations of natives together to teach and learn. It was a very popular and successful program. The camp took place near Pestrikoff Beach on Spruce Island. During the camp session we took one day to walk over to Monk's Lagoon, where St. Herman of Alaska had lived. On that day we had a boat from Kodiak come and bring visitors, including my wife and daughter. My wife had grown up in Kodiak but had never been to Monk's Lagoon before.

“At Monk's Lagoon, my wife, my daughter and I were walking up the path from the graveyard<sup>[h]</sup> to see the church, when all of a sudden we smelled a very beautiful fragrance. It smelled like roses or incense, but not exactly like either one. My wife said, ‘I smell incense burning. I thought the monks lived on the other side of the island.’ I told her, ‘They do. No one is here.’ We realized that something extraordinary was occurring. The smell would come and go in its intensity. After a couple of minutes about fifty people came walking up the path from the camp. As they walked by, one of the native elders asked us what was going on and we told him and those around him. They could not smell anything, nor could any one else who walked up the path. A little while later, as we were walking around, a native lady (Judy Simeonoff from Akhiok) asked my daughter if she would like to taste the water from St. Herman's spring. Of course my daughter went running off to taste the water. I had had no intention of drinking the water, since the thought that water could have special powers was too much for my Protestant mind; but since my daughter was doing it, I did it also. My wife drank the water as well. At the time she had a very bad headache, and she said that when she drank the water she felt something in her head just ‘pop,’ and her headache immediately went away.

“After all this happened on Spruce Island, I did not know what to do with it. My wife and I both interpreted things in the only way we knew, which was as Protestants. At the time we felt that it was the Holy Spirit and that St. Herman had been a man of prayer. Nothing about our experience made us consider becoming Orthodox. It was easy to rationalize away.

“Shortly after our encounter on Spruce Island, however, I had a dream.

“In the dream, I was being prayed for by several people from St. Innocent’s Academy. (This is an Orthodox school in Kodiak, and I had met some people from there prior to the dream.) As the people from the Academy prayed for me, I started to weep very deeply with lots of tears for a long time.... When I went to grab something to wipe my tears away, there was a shelf with some folded fabric on it. I grabbed a piece of this fabric, and it looked to me at the time like a Hebrew prayer shawl. As I used it, I realized it belonged to someone who had prayed a lot and was deeply spiritual. Then this priest appeared to me. He was dressed in black, he had a long matted beard, and his face was glowing very much. I somehow felt that the cloth I had just used to wipe my tears belonged to him. He told me his name was ‘Seraphim Rose.’ He then told me many things about my life. He told me that I had a calling on my life, that I was to become Orthodox, and a priest. I started to argue with him, telling him that I did not want to become Orthodox and wear a ‘stupid black hat’! He then told me many other things, but I do not remember them now. (I do not know why I cannot remember them.)

“I awoke from this dream and realized something deeply spiritual had occurred. I wish to make it clear that, before that dream, I had never heard of anyone named ‘Seraphim Rose.’ Being a Protestant, I was not comfortable with a priest visiting me in my dreams, especially one who was dead, as I somehow assumed the priest in my dream to be.

“Regular dreams I can shake off, but what I had experienced was different from a regular dream. It had an intensity that made it impossible to forget or ignore; it kept coming back to me.

“The day after I had the dream, I went to find an Orthodox priest. I knew Fr. Paisius, the dean of St. Innocent’s Academy, so I went to talk with him. I sat down in his office and told him I might be going crazy. I asked him if he had ever heard of a priest named ‘Seraphim Rose.’ He of course got excited and said yes, and handed me a very large book about Fr. Seraphim and his life. Then I told him the story of my dream.



“I took home the book about Fr. Seraphim and began to read it over the weekend. I was amazed at the life of Fr. Seraphim. This was an Orthodoxy I knew nothing about. The main thing that amazed me was how deeply Fr. Seraphim allowed the early Church Fathers to imprint on him their thought and their way of life.

“After the dream of Fr. Seraphim, I just could not shake it. I could not rationalize this away. This dream had deeply affected my soul. I began to ask questions of anyone and everyone I could find, and to read books. I even went to St. Michael’s Skete on Spruce Island<sup>[1]</sup> for a weekend. I was deeply impressed with the spiritual atmosphere there. When I walked on the grounds of the monastery, I felt like I had walked into a ‘peace envelope.’ It deeply impressed my mind.

“After the dream happened I began to look at Orthodoxy very closely. My wife began to joke that I was ‘having an affair’ with Orthodoxy, since we were both deeply committed to our local Protestant church. Certainly the new direction that had opened up to us was not one that we had been looking for. We had thought that we had our lives figured out, but now we were taken out of our lives. It was very disruptive!

“I began to do the Orthodox Compline prayer, since a good friend told me, ‘You cannot understand Orthodoxy outside of prayer.’ About three months later I was reading a prayer by St. Basil, when I realized that this man in twenty-five lines had completely described the necessary elements of approaching God. I remember thinking, for the first time, that this man really had seen God and perhaps I have not.

“On Pentecost of 2006, after having undergone many trials in our preparation to becoming Orthodox, my wife, my daughter and I were baptized and chrismated at the St. Silouan Orthodox Church in Walla Walla, Washington.

“In recounting the visitations that started us on the path to the Church, I would like to say that I do not think these things happened to us because we are special in any way. It was simply God’s mercy. I believe He knew that we were

going to have a long and painful road to Orthodoxy, and He wanted to give us something that could anchor us during the coming tribulations and keep us trusting that the Orthodox Church was real and His Church.

“In coming to Orthodoxy we are now surrounded by a depth of spirituality that is completely amazing — the spiritual inheritance of the saints, the wealth of their teachings, the wisdom of the Church, the feasts, the Orthodox prayer — as we learn to live a life of humility within the Church. Orthodoxy is far more complete than I had ever imagined.

“I will add that I regularly ask for both St. Herman’s and Fr. Seraphim’s prayers now (how far I have come from being a Protestant!). I ask for St. Herman’s prayers especially for the people of Alaska, and Fr. Seraphim’s prayers to keep us on the ‘Royal Path.’”<sup>15</sup>

The author of the above account, Athanasius Kone, was [ordained to the holy priesthood](#) on December 19, 2012, by Metropolitan Hilarion, chief hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. He is now a priest of the St. Silouan Orthodox Church in Walla Walla, Washington.

**I**N July of 1982, less than two months before Fr. Seraphim’s repose, Archimandrite Spyridon had written to the St. Herman Monastery: “May California Americans be strengthened in Orthodoxy so that they may be able to leap across the ocean (from east to west), and, with those Russians being spiritually reborn there, work at the holy task of the resurrection of Holy Russia, which of course would be to the benefit of America.”

In the case of Fr. Seraphim, these words have proved prophetic. Having been responsible for the conversion of many of his fellow Americans to the Orthodox Faith through his writings, Fr. Seraphim has, through these same writings, indeed “leaped across the ocean” after his repose — to Russia first, and then beyond her borders.

In 2001 the St. Herman Monastery was visited by a hierarch from the ancient Orthodox land of Georgia, Archbishop Nikoloz, who told the assembled

brothers that his life had been changed through Fr. Seraphim's books. Archbishop Nikoloz had been baptized into the Orthodox Church as an infant, but because he had lived under the Communist domination of his country he had grown up without faith. It was through Fr. Seraphim's writings that he came to believe in Christ and return to the Church. Today he is one of the prime forces behind the re-evangelization of Georgia, making annual pilgrimages throughout the entire country and instructing thousands in the Orthodox Faith.

Archbishop Nikoloz is only one example of how Fr. Seraphim's writings have been a catalyst in the resurrection not only of Russia but also of other Orthodox lands that have been wounded and beaten down by decades of Communism. In Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria especially, Fr. Seraphim's works have for many years been a key factor in the restoration of whole peoples to their Orthodox roots. More recently, his life and writings have had a profound impact on Orthodox believers in Greece, as well.

On the twenty-second anniversary of Fr. Seraphim's repose, Metropolitan Joseph of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church came to the St. Herman Monastery in order to, as he said, "say 'thank you' to Fr. Seraphim, and to ask his prayers." In his talks to the monastery brothers and assembled faithful, Metropolitan Joseph spoke about how Fr. Seraphim is an inspiration to people, like himself, who have been born and raised in Orthodox lands. "I wonder," he said, "how was it possible for Fr. Seraphim to become who he was? I didn't know him personally; I've only heard and read about him. But I'm surprised and deeply, deeply touched by Fr. Seraphim.... As one who was born into an Orthodox family (all my ancestors were Orthodox), I venerate the spiritual gifts of this convert to Orthodoxy. I venerate him for having passed through all kinds of struggles and then having become an instructor to all of us. He taught us and continues to teach us how to fight the good fight. He is my teacher. He is a hero for me. He is a great challenger for me, who obliges me to follow him as a monk (it doesn't matter that I'm a bishop) and as an Orthodox Christian....

"Fr. Seraphim finished the course before us — but we are following him.

On the fortieth day after Fr. Seraphim's repose, Bishop Nektary said that Fr. Seraphim, an American convert, 'came and stole Paradise from us' who have been Orthodox all our lives. But I, as a cradle Orthodox, wish to add to this by saying that Fr. Seraphim not only 'stole' but also *shared* Paradise even with us who have been born into Holy Orthodoxy.

"O holy Father Seraphim, we hear your fatherly instruction! You gave us excellent counsel: do not cease to teach us! May your memory be eternal!"<sup>[16](#)</sup>

**W**HILE Fr. Seraphim's legacy indeed belongs to the Church throughout the world, both to cradle Orthodox and to converts, it may be said to belong first of all to his fellow American-born converts to Orthodoxy. Fr. Seraphim is America's "own" righteous one, someone whom American converts can look up to. By the grace of God, he was raised up in a particular place at a particular time, in order to be a pathfinder for the rising generations of American Orthodox converts, who are ever increasing in number.

It is through more than his literary inheritance that Fr. Seraphim is leading these converts. As the accounts related in this chapter indicate, Fr. Seraphim, being still alive in Christ, is even now *personally* drawing people into the fullness of the ancient Christian Faith. Twenty years after Fr. Seraphim's repose, Hieromonk Ambrose (formerly Fr. Alexey Young) affirmed his belief that Fr. Seraphim continues to build bridges between American spiritual seekers and the heart of ancient Christianity:

"Shortly after his repose I began to pray to Fr. Seraphim daily, asking him to continue being a 'bridge-builder' both for me and for other converts. And I absolutely believe that he has been and still is fulfilling this great need. Now, however, two decades after his death, I hope he is also building a bridge for me from this world to the Kingdom of Heaven, where he intercedes for us all; for truly we can say:

"Holy Father Seraphim, pray to God for us."<sup>[17](#)</sup>

# EPILOGUE

## *The Kingdom of God*

*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.*

—Matthew 6:33

*Let your recollection be in the Kingdom of the Heavens, and you will quickly inherit it.*

—St. Hyperechius

**D**URING his early and dark years Fr. Seraphim desperately yearned to escape this world, but through faith in Jesus Christ this yearning was transformed into a hopeful longing for the other world, where Christ would be all in all. Everything that he did after his conversion was directed toward that radiant end. He left behind the this-worldly Kingdom of Man. All his life as a Christian and a monk was aimed at preparing himself for the otherworldly Kingdom of God, and all his work as a missionary and a pastor was aimed at preparing others for it, giving them the means for this by bringing them into the saving enclosure of the Orthodox Church. He has given us a road map to the heart of that Church, and an indication on how to follow the path to salvation and sanctification — to the Kingdom that will have no end.

In a talk he gave toward the end of his life, Fr. Seraphim pointed his contemporaries toward the ultimate hope with which all true Christians must be filled. “We are looking with anticipation,” he said, “not to a kingdom in this world, not to a thousand years of paradise on earth, whether under Communism or a so-called ‘christ.’ The spiritual joys we have in the Church are our preparation for another Kingdom. And that Kingdom, as St. Paul and all the

Holy Fathers say, has such spiritual joys that *the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, nor have [they] entered into the heart of man* (I Cor. 2:9). Those people who have been lifted up out of the body and have seen this realm, when they come back they are dumbfounded because they cannot express what they have seen. Our whole Christian life is filled with the hope that we will live forever in that realm.

“Both St. Paul and St. John the Theologian talk about this very thing. For example, St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans, *Knowing the time* (that is, being aware of the times), *that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep. For now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light* (Rom. 13:11—12). That is, he says that once we have come to Christ, salvation is nearer. A great thing is coming — there is a Kingdom of Heaven which will be extended even to this renewed earth. This is what we are struggling for. It is now coming nearer, the darkness of this world is now coming to an end, and this new Kingdom is beginning to be revealed. The spread of true Christianity throughout the world is already preparing for this light to come out, that is, to affect the hearts of men and make them citizens of Christ’s Kingdom.

“St. Paul, as he himself describes, went through beatings, imprisonments and shipwreck; moreover, he endured suffering and betrayal at the hands of brothers, which is the most difficult thing of all. But after undergoing all that, he was able to preach the Gospel of joy and hope. Likewise, St. John in the Apocalypse, after describing the terrible times at the end of the world, ends with a description of the new heaven and new earth. And the conclusion is—*Come, Lord Jesus* (Apoc. 22:20). That is, he is looking for the coming of Christ. All that he sees in his vision — the Beast, the harlot, the false world church, and the false government of Antichrist — all that is secondary, it’s all passing away. There is only one thing left, which is the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

“We who are trying to acquire basic Christian knowledge and

understanding must do so by means of trials; we must be tested and thereby become sober and discerning. At the same time, in the midst of this, seeing all kinds of tragedies around us, we must be joyful, knowing that the end of the contest is the end of this whole corruptible world. If we prepare ourselves with the knowledge born of spiritual struggle, we will be able to recognize Christ when He comes. But if we do not recognize the signs of the times and the Antichrist, and if we do not have Christ dwelling in our hearts, then when Christ comes we will be with those nations which will be lamenting because they are with Antichrist. They will see Christ coming, and all their Christianity will have been proved false. This a tragic thing. Such deception is allowed, as St. Paul says, because there is a lie in the heart of man, and this lie wishes not the real thing, not the true Christianity.

“We who are given the fullness of true Christianity are obliged to be working on ourselves, to be watching these signs of the times, and to be extremely joyful, as St. Paul is constantly saying: *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say: Rejoice!* (Phil. 4:4). We rejoice because we have something which all the death and corruption of this world cannot take away, that is, the eternal Kingdom of Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

**L**ET us rejoice, too, that one from our own midst, an offspring of modern America, has reached that eternal Kingdom before us. Fr. Seraphim was a lost but searching sinner, and through the grace of Jesus Christ he was transformed into a righteous man who not only found the Way but has led a host of others on it. He endured to the end, with pain of heart, on the Orthodox path to salvation, and now he beckons us — his contemporaries — to follow him.

“Let no temptation overcome you,” he once wrote on the radiant day of Pascha. “Let no darkness cloud your path, and no trial come upon you in which you do not immediately turn to Christ our All-merciful God, Who has trampled upon death and abolished the power of the devil.

“Remain in Christ’s grace and He will guide you all to salvation.



Remember the end of our life, the never-setting day of Christ's Kingdom, and you will know why you are alive and for what you are striving. Christ is Risen!"<sup>2</sup>



Fr. Seraphim serving the Divine Liturgy on Bright Monday (the day after Pascha), April 14/27, 1981, at the outdoor chapel where he is now buried. *Photograph by Mary Mansur.*



# AUTHOR'S NOTE & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**T**HIS BOOK is a greatly revised version of the biography of Fr. Seraphim published in 1993 under the title *Not of This World*.

The fruit of several years of further research, this new version of Fr. Seraphim's Life includes much material that has never been published before. In addition to quoting more of Fr. Seraphim's teachings and counsels, we have quoted more of his words concerning his own life, substituting his narrative for ours wherever possible. We have incorporated new reminiscences by people who knew Fr. Seraphim, which provide further insights into his character and experiences. We have also updated some sections to take into consideration events that have occurred in the Orthodox Church and the world since the first version came out. Pictures have been added, the bibliography has been enlarged, and the endnotes have been expanded to include references to Fr. Seraphim's letters, journals, taped lectures, and other unpublished material.

While adding new material, we have also omitted or changed sections in the earlier edition that were less than edifying, especially regarding personal disputes within the Church. We have not glossed over the major problems that Fr. Seraphim dealt with in the Church, but we have striven to present them with more dignity and with a greater sense of responsibility before the Church as a whole. Accounts of disputes that have no direct bearing on Fr. Seraphim's life — especially those that occurred after his repose — have been removed entirely. At the same time we have weeded out explicit or implicit justifications for the untenable ecclesiastical status that the St. Herman Brotherhood entered into after Fr. Seraphim's repose: a status which, thanks be to God, has been rectified since the earlier version was published.

In seeking to be accountable to the Church, we have had this new version reviewed prior to publication by clergymen, monastics, and laypeople from the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Church in America, the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North America, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and the Romanian Orthodox Church. While we bear final responsibility for the book's content, we are deeply grateful to those who have generously assisted us by reading all or part of the book before publication, and by offering their valuable comments and suggestions. In particular, we wish to thank (in alphabetical order) Hieroschemamonk Ambrose, Thomas Anderson, Priest Vladimir and Matushka Sylvia Anderson, the monks of St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery (Florence, Arizona), Michael Berger, Stephanos Bibas, Hieromonk Dorotheus, Metropolitan Jonah, Valentina Harvey, Mary Mansur, Khouriya Frederica Mathewes-Green, Diaconissa Peggy Matthews, Solomonia Nelson, Priest Blasko Paraklis, Reader Martinian Prince, Stephen and Marie Rodier, Priest Daniel Rogich, Anna Smilanich, and Protopresbyter Miloš Vesin.



Divine Liturgy at the grave of Fr. Seraphim on the twentieth anniversary of his repose, September 2, 2002. Left to right: Hieromonk (now Hieroschemamonk) Ambrose, Priest Thomas Alessandroni, Priest Blasko Paraklis, Hieromonk (now Metropolitan) Jonah, Deacon Stephen

Dyer, Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko, Hieromonk Damascene, Priest Michael Rome, Priest John Tomasi, Priest David Lubliner, Hierodeacon Hilarion.

Working on this new version required another careful review of Fr. Seraphim's writings and public lectures. We are especially thankful to Marie Rodier, archivist of the Fr. Seraphim Rose Foundation, who made this work much more effective by typing and indexing the large amount of Fr. Seraphim's letters, journals, manuscripts, and taped lectures that the St. Herman Brotherhood has in its possession. Special thanks also go to Hieroschemamonk Ambrose (formerly Fr. Alexey Young) for his kind permission to quote from his book, *Letters from Father Seraphim*, and for his invaluable help and encouragement throughout the preparation of this new version of Fr. Seraphim's Life.

Finally, we wish to thank our previous hierarchs in the Serbian Orthodox Church, Bishops Jovan and Longin, as well as our present hierarch, Bishop Maxim. Their vision of unity and reconciliation in the Church has been our guiding light while revising our previous work.

# ENDNOTES

The following abbreviations have been used in these Notes:

ER Eugene Rose

FSR Fr. Seraphim Rose

LER Letter of Eugene Rose

LFSR Letter of Fr. Seraphim Rose

JER Philosophical Journal of Eugene Rose, 1960–62

*OW The Orthodox Word*

SHB St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, California

CSHB Chronicle of the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, written by Eugene/Fr. Seraphim Rose

Letter, Journal and Chronicle dates are according to the civil calendar, except where a Church feast day is indicated, in which case both the Church (Julian or “Old” Calendar) and civil (Gregorian or “New” Calendar) dates are given.

Most of the letters of Fr. Seraphim cited in this book were preserved in carbon copy by Fr. Seraphim himself; some were sent by their recipients to the author for publication in this book. In some of the references to letters the names of the recipients have been abbreviated, and in others the names have been omitted altogether in order to protect the privacy of living persons.

The book *Letters from Fr. Seraphim* by Fr. Alexey Young includes many letters that were not preserved by Fr. Seraphim in carbon copy. When we have quoted these letters directly from this book, references to the book have been given.

## [PREFACE](#)

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## INTRODUCTION

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[2.](#) See the Life of Frank Capra in OW, no. 137 (SHB, 1987), pp. 371–94.

[3.](#) Ved Mehta, *The Stolen Light*, p. 125.

[4.](#) [Ibid.](#), p. 383

[5.](#) [Ibid.](#)

[6.](#) [Ibid.](#), p. 395.

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[1.](#) St. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. Edward B. Pusey, D.D. (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1961), p. 79.

[2.](#) Clyde S. Kilby, *The Christian World of C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), p. 19.

[3.](#) An answer to a student’s question during Fr. Seraphim’s lecture, “Contemporary Signs of the End of the World,” given at the University of California, Santa Cruz, May 14, 1981.

[4.](#) Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Possessed*, part 2, chapter 1, section 5 (paraphrased).

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[2.](#) For part of this description we are indebted to the unpublished manuscript “The Dulcimer Is the Heart,” by Fr. Herman Podmoshensky.

[3.](#) Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Possessed*, part 3, chapter 6, section 2.



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## PART II

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[11.](#) LFSR to Fr. Panteleimon, March 26, 1971. Gleb is actually referred to as Fr. Herman, since the letter was written after his and Eugene's monastic tonsure.

[12.](#) Priest Vladimir Derugin, “*Ieromonakh Serafim: ukhod pravednika*” (*Hieromonk Seraphim: the passing away of a righteous one*), (Greenview, Calif.: Fr. Seraphim Memorial Fund, 1983), p. 13 (in Russian).

[13.](#) CSHB, Jan. 25, 1972.

[14.](#) LFSR to Alexey Young, May 1, 1972. In *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, pp. 48—49.

[15.](#) FSR, “In Step with Saints Patrick and Gregory of Tours,” OW, no. 136 (1987), pp. 271—72. Transcribed from a talk given by Fr. Seraphim on St. Patrick's day, March 4/17, 1977, at the St. Herman Monastery.

[16.](#) LFSR to Fr. Neketas Palassis, July 26, 1970.

[17.](#) CSHB, Sept. 24, 1969; LER to Fr. Photios, March 29, 1970.

[18.](#) LFSR to Alexey Young, May 1, 1972. In *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 50.

#### [Chapter 50. IN THE STEPS OF BLESSED PAISIUS](#)

[1.](#) Schemamonk Metrophanes, *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky* (SHB, 1976), p. 17.

[2.](#) [Ibid.](#), p. 13.

[3.](#) [Ibid.](#), p. 123.

[4.](#) [Ibid.](#), pp. 63-64.



5. [Ibid.](#), p. 142.

6. [Ibid.](#), p. 67.

7. [Ibid.](#), p. 68.

## [Chapter 51. NATURE](#)

1. R. Monk Gerasim Eliel, *Father Gerasim of New Valaam*, p. 62.

2. St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 7:5. Quoted in FSR, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* (SHB, 2000), p. 140.

3. LER to Fr. Neketas Palassis, July 12, 1970.

4. LER to Fr. Panteleimon and brothers, April 13, 1970.

5. LER to Fr. Photios, March 29, 1970.

6. LER to Fr. Panteleimon and brothers, April 13, 1970.

7. LFSR to Daniel Olson, Annunciation of the Mother of God, March 25/April 7, 1971.

8. LER to Fr. Neketas Palassis, July 26, 1970.

9. FSR, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, p. 140.

## [Chapter 52. ZEALOTS OF ORTHODOXY](#)

1. St. Athanasius the Great, Letter to Dracontius.

2. FSR, “The Orthodox Revival in Russia as an Inspiration for American Orthodoxy,” a talk given on Sept. 1, 1980, at the University of California, Santa Cruz. In OW, no. 138 (1988), p. 45.

[3.](#) Constantine Cavarinos, *Ecumenism Examined* (Belmont, Mass.: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1996), pp. 11, 28-30. *Akropolis*, June 29, 1963.

[4.](#) Archbishop Athenagoras Kokkinakis, *The Thyateira Confession* (Leighton Buzzard, Great Britain: The Faith Press, 1975), pp. 28, 68.

[5.](#) Address of Patriarch Athenagoras, August 1971. Published in *Orthodoxos Typos*, July 13, 1979.

[6.](#) See Archimandrite Philotheos Zervakos, “A Desperate Appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarch,” *OW*, no. 18 (1968), pp. 11-20.

[7.](#) The articles began to be published in *OW*, no. 7 (Jan.-Feb. 1966), including [ER], “Orthodoxy in the Contemporary World: The Latest Step Toward ‘Union.’”

[8.](#) Archimandrite Amvrosy Pogodin, “St. Mark of Ephesus and the False Union of Florence,” *OW*, no. 12 (1967), pp. 2-14; no. 13 (1967), pp. 45-52; no. 14 (1967), pp. 89-102; “Encyclical Letter of St. Mark of Ephesus,” *OW*, no. 13 (1967), pp. 53-59; and “Address of St. Mark of Ephesus on the Day of His Death,” *OW*, no. 14 (1967), pp. 103-6.

[9.](#) LFSR to Fr. Neketas Palassis, June 25, 1972.

[10.](#) *The Orthodox Observer*, Feb. 1969. Quoted in [ER], Translator’s Preface to “An Open Letter to His Eminence Iakovos, Greek Archbishop of North and South America,” *OW*, no. 25 (1969), p. 72.

[11.](#) LER to Fr. Michael, Sept. 12, 1970.

[12.](#) Interview with Metropolitan Sergius Stragorodsky, in *Izvestiya*, no. 188 (Aug. 19, 1927, in Russian).

[13.](#) Vladimir I. Lenin, *Sochineniya* (Works), vol. 4 (Leningrad, 1935-37), p. 70 (in Russian).

[14.](#) Joseph V. Stalin, *Sochineniya* (Works), vol. 10 (Moscow, 1946), pp. 131-33 (in Russian).

[15.](#) Archbishop John Maximovitch, "The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia," *OW*, no. 37 (1971), p. 67.

[16.](#) Interview with Metropolitan Sergius, in *Pravda and Izvestiya*, no. 46 (Feb. 16, 1930, in Russian). Quoted in John Shelton Curtiss, *The Russian Church and Soviet State, 1917-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), p. 266. Cf. I. M. Andreyev, *Russia's Catacomb Saints* (SHB, 1982), pp. 468, 471.

[17.](#) Foreword by Metropolitan Sergius Stragorodsky to *Pravda o Religii v Rossii* (The Truth about Religion in Russia) (Moscow, 1942, in Russian). Cf. I. M. Andreyev, *Russia's Catacomb Saints*, p. 471.

[18.](#) Archbishop John Maximovitch, "The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia," p. 66.

[19.](#) LER to Fr. Neketas Palassis, July 26, 1970.

[20.](#) [ER], "Whither, Metropolia?" *OW*, nos. 33-34 (1970), p. 207.

[21.](#) LER to Fr. David, July 12, 1970.

[22.](#) LER to Daniel Olson, April 7, 1971.

[23.](#) *Ibid.*

[24.](#) [FSR], "In Defense of Fr. Dimitry Dudko," *OW*, no. 92 (1980), p. 120.

[25.](#) LFS to Fr. Neketas Palassis, June 16, 1972.

[26.](#) LFSR to Alexey Young, March 3, 1975.

### [Chapter 53. THE APOGEE OF THE BROTHERHOOD](#)

[1.](#) See *Little Russian Philokalia*, vol. 3: St. Herman of Alaska (SHB, 1989), pp. 17-44.

[2.](#) See Alexandra Chichineva, “Healing from Tuberculosis, 1907,” OW, no. 12 (1967), pp. 28-29.

[3.](#) S. Nilus, *Na beregu Bozh’ei reki* (On the bank of God’s river), vol. 2 (SHB, 1969), p. 193 (in Russian). Later published in English in *Little Russian Philokalia*, vol. 1: St. Seraphim of Sarov (SHB, revised edition, 1991), p. 126.

[4.](#) See *Little Russian Philokalia*, vol. 1: St. Seraphim, pp. 151-52.

[5.](#) See Hieromonk Damascene, “Patience, Vigilance & Healing in the Church,” OW, no. 214 (2000), pp. 227, 239-40.

[6.](#) F. A. Golder, *Father Herman: Alaska’s Saint* (SHB, 1968), pp. 6-7.

[7.](#) [Gleb Podmoshensky and ER], “On the Eve of Father Herman’s Canonization,” OW, no. 31 (1970), p. 98.

[8.](#) [ER], “Whither, Metropolia?” OW, nos. 33-34 (1970), p. 205.

[9.](#) “Service to our Holy and God-bearing Father, Saint Herman, Wonderworker of Alaska,” OW, no. 31 (1970).

[10.](#) LER to Fr. Neketas Palassis, June 9, 1970, and July 12, 1970.

[11.](#) LER to Daniel Olson, Aug. 18, 1970.

[12.](#) “The Epistle of Metropolitan Philaret on the Canonization of Our Holy and God-bearing Father, Saint Herman of Alaska,” *The Orthodox Word*, no. 32 (1970), pp. 111-15.

[13.](#) LER to Daniel Olson, Aug. 18, 1970.

[14.](#) [Gleb Podmoshensky and ER], “A Second ‘Pascha in the Midst of Summer’: The Services for the Canonization of Saint Herman in San Francisco,” *OW*, nos. 33-34 (1970), p. 168.

[15.](#) LER to Daniel Olson, Aug. 18, 1970. Excerpt from Archbishop Anthony’s sermon in [Gleb Podmoshensky and ER], “A Second Pascha in the Midst of Summer,” p. 179.

[16.](#) LER to Daniel Olson, Aug. 18, 1970.

[17.](#) [Gleb Podmoshensky and ER], “A Second Pascha in the Midst of Summer,” p. 180.

[18.](#) LER to Daniel Olson, Aug. 18, 1970.

[19.](#) *Ibid.*

#### [Chapter 54. TONSURE](#)

[1.](#) *Little Russian Philokalia*, vol. 2: Abbot Nazarius of Valaam (SHB, second edition, 1996), pp. 50, 52.

[2.](#) *The Northern Thebaid* (SHB, 1975), p. 16; 3rd edition (2004), p. 20.

[3.](#) LFSR to Fr. Panteleimon, Jan. 17, 1971. In this passage, written after his tonsure, Fr. Seraphim uses Gleb’s tonsure name, Fr. Herman. We have changed the name to Gleb because the passage refers to an event that occurred before the

tonsure.

[4. Ibid.](#)

[5. Ibid.](#)

[6.](#) Letter of Archbishop Anthony to Brothers Gleb and Eugene, Sept. 21, 1970 (in Russian).

[7.](#) LFSR to Bishop Laurus, March 25, 1971.

[8.](#) LFSR to Fr. Panteleimon, Jan. 17, 1971.

[9. Ibid.](#)

[10. Ibid.](#)

[11.](#) CSHB, Oct. 27, 1970.

[12.](#) LFSR to Fr. Panteleimon, Jan. 17, 1971.

[13. Ibid.](#)

[14.](#) CSHB, Oct. 28, 1970.

[15. Ibid.](#), Oct. 27, 1970.

[16.](#) LFSR to Dimitry, Aug. 26, 1971.

[17.](#) LFSR to Fr. Panteleimon, Jan. 17, 1971.

[18.](#) CSHB, Oct. 27, 1970.

[19.](#) LFSR to Laurence Campbell, Aug. 23, 1971.

[20.](#) LFSR to Bishop Laurus, March 25, 1971.

## [Chapter 55. CONFLICT AND RECONCILIATION](#)

[1.](#) *Abbess Thaisia: An Autobiography* (SHB, 1989), p. 152.

[2.](#) Victor Afanasiev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina* (SHB, 2000), p. 310.

[3.](#) LFSR to Fr. Panteleimon, Jan. 17, 1971.

[4.](#) [Ibid.](#)

[5.](#) LFSR to Bishop Laurus, March 25, 1971; LFSR to Fr. Panteleimon, Jan. 17, 1971, etc.

[6.](#) LFSR to Bishop Laurus, March 25, 1971; LFSR to Daniel Olson, Annunciation of the Mother of God, March 25/April 7, 1971.

[7.](#) Letter of Bishop Laurus to Fathers Herman and Seraphim, April 13, 1971 (in Russian). Translated by Fr. Seraphim and quoted in his letter to Laurence Campbell, Aug. 23, 1971. The explanatory phrase in parentheses is Fr. Seraphim's.

[8.](#) LFSR to Fr. Panteleimon, March 21, 1971.

[9.](#) LFSR to Dimitry, Aug. 26, 1971. The last phrase is translated from the Russian.

[10.](#) LFSR to Nina Seco, Feb. 22/March 7, 1974. (The first part of this letter was begun on Feb. 19/March 4).

[11.](#) Letter of Archbishop Anthony to Frs. Herman and Seraphim, Feb. 21/March 6, 1974 (in Russian). The ellipsis points and parenthetical question marks are in the original.

[12.](#) Priest Paul Iwaszewicz, “My Heart Belonged to Vladika Anthony,” *Orthodox America*, vol. 19, no. 2 (166), p. 7.

[13.](#) This sentence has been added to the Chronicle entry from LFSR to Alexey Young, Dec. 25, 1974. In *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 122.

#### [Chapter 56. LOOKING UPWARD](#)

[1.](#) LFSR to ———, April 16, 1976.

[2.](#) LFSR to ———, July 17, 1976.

[3.](#) LFSR to Fr. Valery Lukianov, Feb. 14, 1975.

[4.](#) FSR, “In Step with Saints Patrick and Gregory of Tours,” *OW*, no. 136 (1987), pp. 274, 287. Transcribed from a talk given by Fr. Seraphim in 1977.



## PART VI

### Chapter 57. ARCHBISHOP JOHN'S SOTAINNIK

1. Fr. Herman and Brotherhood, "Father Spyridon: *Sotainnik* of Blessed John," OW, no. 141 (1988), pp. 197-98.

2. [Ibid.](#), p 238.

3. [Ibid.](#), p. 201.

4. LFSR to Fr. Alexey Young, July 5, 1982. In *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 238.

5. [Ibid.](#)

6. Fr. Herman and Brotherhood, "Father Spyridon: *Sotainnik* of Blessed John," pp. 198-99.

### Chapter 58. THE DESERT PARADISE

1. St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Archimandrite Lazarus Moore (London: Faber & Faber, 1959), step 4:78, p. 88.

2. St. Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian* (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), homily 71, p. 349.

3. Abbess Vera Verkhovsky, *Elder Zosima, Hesychast of Siberia* (SHB, 1990), pp. 127-28, 107.

4. See FSR, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, pp. 166-67, 328, 421, 445; and St. Gregory of Sinai, "Chapters on Commandments and Dogmas," in *The Philokalia*, vol. 4 (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), p. 213.

- [5.](#) Interview of Fr. Alexey Young by *Russkiy Pastyr'*, March 9, 1999. Archbishop John is actually referred to as St. John, since the interview was done after his canonization.
- [6.](#) “Spiritual Homilies of Saint Macarius the Great,” in Saints Barsanuphius and John, *Guidance Toward Spiritual Life*, trans. FSR (SHB, 1990), pp. 162-63; revised edition (2002), p. 167.
- [7.](#) ER, “The Prayer of the Good Thief,” written in April 1964. In FSR, *Heavenly Realm*, p. 39.
- [8.](#) FSR, “In Step with Saints Patrick and Gregory of Tours,” p. 271.
- [9.](#) *The Philokalia*, vol. 1 (London: Faber & Faber, 1979), p. 334.
- [10.](#) See “A Note on Reincarnation,” in FSR, *The Soul After Death* (SHB, 1980; revised edition, 1993), pp. 121-27.
- [11.](#) JER, April 12, 1961.
- [12.](#) FSR, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, pp. 483, 485.
- [13.](#) *The Northern Thebaid* (SHB, 1975), p. 52; 3rd edition (2004), p. 56.
- [14.](#) LFSR to Dimitry Andrault de Langeron, Jan. 29, 1972. In *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 271.
- [15.](#) CSHB, Dec. 26, 1974.
- [16.](#) LFSR to Alexey Young, Dec. 27, 1974. In *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 122.
- [17.](#) [FSR], “The Desert-Dwellers of the Jura,” *OW*, no. 74 (1977), pp. 114-15. Later published in St. Gregory of Tours, *Vita Patrum* (SHB, 1988), pp. 123-24.

[18.](#) See, for example, Saints Barsanuphius and John, *Guidance Toward Spiritual Life* (SHB, 1990), chapters 256, 535, 551; and St. Nikolai Velimirovich, *The Prologue of Ohrid* (Alhambra, Calif.: Western American Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church, 2002), “Reflection” for June 14.

[19.](#) [Gleb Podmoshensky], “Pilgrimage to Holy Places in America: Canadian Sketes,” OW, nos. 16-19 (1967, 1968).

[20.](#) FSR, “In Step with Saints Patrick and Gregory of Tours,” pp. 287—88.

#### [Chapter 59. THE MIND OF THE FATHERS](#)

[1.](#) Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Sochineniya* (Works), vol. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1865; reprinted in Jordanville, New York: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1985), p. 560 (in Russian).

[2.](#) [FSR], “The Holy Fathers of Orthodox Spirituality: Introduction, I: The Inspiration and Sure Guide to True Christianity Today,” OW, no. 58 (1974), p. 188.

[3.](#) FSR, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, p. 72.

[4.](#) [FSR], “The Holy Fathers, I,” p. 192.

[5.](#) [Ibid.](#), p. 190.

[6.](#) FSR, “In Step With Saints Patrick and Gregory of Tours,” pp. 272-73, 290.

[7.](#) [Ibid.](#), pp. 289.

[8.](#) FSR, “Raising the Mind, Warming the Heart,” OW, no. 126 (1986), pp. 29-31.

[9.](#) [FSR], “The Holy Fathers, I,” p. 195.

[10. Ibid.](#)

[11.](#) FSR, “Raising the Mind, Warming the Heart,” p. 32.

[12.](#) [FSR], “The Holy Fathers of Orthodox Spirituality: Introduction, II: How to Read the Holy Fathers,” *OW*, no. 60 (1975), pp. 38, 40; and [FSR], “The Holy Fathers of Orthodox Spirituality: Introduction, III: How *Not* to Read the Holy Fathers,” *OW*, no. 65 (1975), p. 239.

[13.](#) FSR, *God’s Revelation to the Human Heart*, p. 31.

[14. Ibid.](#), p. 38.

[15.](#) St. Mark the Ascetic, “To Those Who Think They Are Made Righteous by Works,” no. 131. In *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 136.

[16.](#) Saints Barsanuphius and John, *Guidance Toward Spiritual Life* (SHB, 1990), p. 79; revised edition (2002), p. 80.

[17.](#) LFSR to Barry, May 3, 1979.

[18.](#) See Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain* (Florence, Arizona: St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery, 1999), p. 425.

[19.](#) Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, *Epistles* (Souroti, Thessaloniki, Greece: Holy Monastery of the Evangelist John the Theologian, 2002), p. 72.

[20.](#) [FSR], “The Holy Fathers of Orthodox Spirituality: Introduction, III: How *Not* to Read the Holy Fathers,” *OW*, no. 65 (1975), p. 239.

[21.](#) Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Sochineniya* (Works), vol. 1, p. 560 (in Russian).

[22.](#) [FSR], “The Holy Fathers, I,” p. 195.

[23. Ibid.](#), p. 189.

## [Chapter 60. MODERN ACADEMIC THEOLOGY](#)

[1.](#) From a letter of Elder Paisios of Mount Athos to the Holy Monastery of the Evangelist John the Theologian, Nov. 21, 1975. In Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, *Epistles* (Souroti, Thessaloniki, Greece: Holy Monastery of the Evangelist John the Theologian, 2002), p. 129.

[2.](#) Informal talk by FSR during the New Valaam Theological Academy, which followed the St. Herman Summer Pilgrimage, August 1979.

[3.](#) LFSR to Fr. Neketas Palassis, July 12, 1970.

[4.](#) ER, *Nihilism*, pp. 32-33.

[5. Ibid.](#)

[6.](#) [FSR], “The Holy Fathers, III,” p. 235.

[7.](#) [FSR], “The Holy Fathers, I,” pp. 189-90.

[8.](#) Notes of FSR.

[9.](#) FSR, “The Theological Writings of Archbishop John, and the Question of ‘Western Influence’ in Orthodox Theology,” OW, nos. 175-76 (1994), pp. 147-48, 152.

[10.](#) René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines* (London: Luzac and Co., 1945), p. 195.

[11.](#) [FSR], “The Holy Fathers, I,” p. 190.

[12.](#) Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, “The Liturgical Theology of Fr. A. Schmemmann,” *OW*, no. 35 (1970), p. 263. Published posthumously in Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, *Selected Essays* (Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1996).

[13.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 260.

[14.](#) Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann, “A Letter to My Bishop,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 1973, no. 3, pp. 221-38.

[15.](#) [FSR], “The Typicon of the Orthodox Church’s Divine Services: Inspiration of True Orthodox Piety” (Introduction), *OW*, no. 53 (1973), p. 224.

[16.](#) Notes of FSR.

[17.](#) *Concern*, Fall 1975.

[18.](#) [FSR], “The Holy Fathers, III,” pp. 233-34.

[19.](#) [FSR], “Towards the ‘Eighth Ecumenical Council,’” *OW*, no. 71 (1976), pp. 190-91.

[20.](#) [FSR], “The Typicon,” p. 226.

[21.](#) [FSR], “The Holy Fathers, III,” p. 235.

[22.](#) [FSR], “Archbishop Averky of Jordanville,” *OW*, no. 62 (1975), p. 95.

[23.](#) [FSR], “Archpriest Nicholas Deputatov,” *OW*, no. 69 (1976), p. 100.

[24.](#) [FSR], “Archbishop Averky of Jordanville,” p. 95.

[25.](#) Archbishop Averky, “What Is Orthodoxy?” *Orthodox Life* (Jordanville, New York: Holy Trinity Monastery, May-June 1976), p. 1.

[26.](#) [FSR], “The Typicon,” p. 225.

[27.](#) [FSR], “The Holy Fathers, III,” p. 235.

[28.](#) [FSR], “The Holy Fathers, I,” p. 190.

[29.](#) [FSR], “The Holy Fathers, III,” p. 235.

[30.](#) Notes of FSR, with the heading “Future of Orthodoxy in America.”

[31.](#) Archbishop Averky, “Should the Church Be ‘In Step with the Times?’” *OW*, nos. 16-17 (1967), p. 186.

[32.](#) Cf. St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1978), step 27:10-11, p. 199; step 30:20-21, 23-24, pp. 227-28.

[33.](#) Notes of FSR.

[34.](#) *The Northern Thebaid* (SHB, 1975), pp. xi-xii; 3rd edition (2004), pp. xvii-xviii.

[35.](#) Notes of FSR.

## [Chapter 61. THE DESERT IN THE BACKYARD](#)

[1.](#) *Dobrotolyubiye* (The Philokalia), vol. 5, p. 109 (in Russian). Alternate translation in vol. 4 of *The Philokalia* in English (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 97-98.

[2.](#) [FSR], “Orthodox Monasticism in 5th and 6th Century Gaul,” *OW*, no. 73 (1977), p. 93; also in St. Gregory of Tours, *Vita Patrum* (SHB, 1988), p. 113.

[3.](#) St. Macarius the Great, “Spiritual Homilies,” trans. FSR, in *Saints*

Barsanuphius and John, *Guidance Toward Spiritual Life*, p. 144; revised edition, p. 148.

[4.](#) *The Northern Thebaid*, pp. 281-82; 3rd edition, pp. 285-86.

[5.](#) Fr. Alexey Young, *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, pp. 4—5.

[6.](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

[7.](#) LFSR to Alexey Young, Aug. 29, 1971.

[8.](#) *Ibid.*, Oct. 14, 1971.

[9.](#) *Ibid.*, Nov. 29, 1971.

[10.](#) *Ibid.*

[11.](#) Fr. Alexey Young, *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 35.

[12.](#) CSHB. Jan. 11, 1972.

[13.](#) *Ibid.*, Feb. 2, 1972.

[14.](#) *Ibid.*, Dec. 8, 1973.

[15.](#) Fr. Alexey Young, *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 104.

[16.](#) CSHB. Jan. 27, 1974; Jan. 13, 1974.

[17.](#) [FSR], “Archbishop Andrew of New Diveyevo,” OW, no. 63 (1975), p. 136. Later published in the booklet *The Restoration of the Orthodox Way of Life* by Archbishop Andrew of New Diveyevo (SHB, 1976).

[18.](#) LFSR to Dr. Alexander Kalomirov, Feb. 3, 1976.



[19. Ibid.](#) Emphasis added.

[20.](#) [FSR], “The Typicon of the Orthodox Church’s Divine Services. Chapter One: The Orthodox Christian and the Church Situation Today,” *OW*, no. 54 (1974), pp. 25-26.

[21.](#) LFSR to Alexey Young, April 23, 1974.

[22.](#) CSHB, Feb. 21, 1975, and Jan. 27, 1974.

[23. Ibid.](#), Feb. 21, 1975.

[24.](#) LFSR to Alexey Young, July 30, 1975.

[25.](#) Letter of Fr. Alexey Young to the author, Aug. 1, 1991.

[26.](#) LFSR to Dr. Alexander Kalomiros, Feb. 3, 1976.

[27.](#) LFSR to Alexey Young, Jan. 22, 1974.

[28. Ibid.](#), June 18, 1972.

[29.](#) [FSR], “Archbishop Andrew of New Diveyevo,” *OW*, no. 63 (1975), pp. 136-37.

[30.](#) CSHB, Sept. 14, 1975.

## [Chapter 62. ON THE MEANS OF OUR REDEMPTION](#)

[1.](#) LFSR to Fr. Neketas Palassis, June 16, 1972.

[2.](#) Report of Hieromonk Seraphim Rose to Bishop Nektary of Seattle on the Danger of the Resurgence among Orthodox Christians on the New “Dogma.” In Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (SHB,

second edition, 1994), p. 400.

[3.](#) See Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, pp. 208-9; third edition (2005), pp. 213-15.

[4.](#) Report of Hieromonk Seraphim Rose to Bishop Nektary, pp. 406-9.

[5.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 409.

[6.](#) St. Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1953), p. 49.

[7.](#) See FSR, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, pp. 171, 207-9, 443-45.

[8.](#) St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 3:1. In *Writings*, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 37 (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1958), p. 267.

[9.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 332.

[10.](#) St. Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation*, p. 34.

[11.](#) St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Sin of Adam and Our Redemption* (SHB, 1979), pp. 37-38. Revised ed.: *The First-Created Man* (SHB, 1994), pp. 47-48.

[12.](#) St. Gregory the Theologian, Second Oration on Pascha (Oration 45:22). Quoted in Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd. 1957), p. 153.

[13.](#) St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Sin of Adam and Our Redemption*, p. 37; *The First-Created Man*, p. 47.

[14.](#) See *Ibid.*, pp. 75-77; *The First-Created man*, pp. 102-4.

[15.](#) St. Gregory Palamas, *Homilies* (Waymart, Pa.: Mount Thabor, 2009), p. 126.

[16.](#) St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Sin of Adam and Our Redemption*, p. 54; *The First-Created Man*, p. 73.

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- [12.](#) LFSR to Phanourios Ingram, Nov. 20, 1975.
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- [14.](#) LFSR to ———, June 22, 1976.
- [15.](#) LFSR to Barry, May 25, 1979.

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[2.](#) Fr. Damascene, “Friends, Byzantines, Countrymen,” OW, no. 137 (1987), p. 316.

[3.](#) Bishop Theophan the Recluse, *Chto est' dukhovnaya zhizn' i kak na neyë nastroitsya?* (What is the spiritual life is and how does one attune oneself to it?) (Moscow: St. Panteleimon Monastery, 1914; reprinted in Jordanville, New York: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1962), pp. 7-8 (in Russian). English translation: St. Theophan the Recluse, *The Spiritual Life and How to Be Attuned to It* (SHB, 1995), pp. 38-39; third edition (Safford, Arizona: St. Paisius Serbian Orthodox Monastery, 2003), pp. 22-23.

[4.](#) FSR, "Forming the Soul," *Orthodox America*, no. 19 (May 1982), p. 9.

[5.](#) Bishop Theophan the Recluse, *Chto est' dukhovnaya zhizn' i kak na neyë nastroitsya?* p. 65 (in Russian); English translation, *The Spiritual Life*, pp. 95-96; third edition, pp. 81-82.

[6.](#) FSR, "Forming the Soul," p. 9.

[7.](#) FSR, "Living the Orthodox World-view," pp. 168-69.

[8.](#) LFSR to Bishop Laurus, Aug. 31, 1981.

[9.](#) Ibid.

[10.](#) LFSR to Fr. Alexey Young, Sept. 19, 1981 In *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 225.

[11.](#) LFSR to Fr. Alexey Young, Feb. 4, 1982 In *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 230.

[12.](#) Transcribed from Fr. Seraphim's "Orthodox Survival Course" on Western philosophy, 1975.

[13.](#) Question-and-answer session following Fr. Seraphim's talk, "Living the Orthodox Worldview," St. Herman Summer Pilgrimage, 1982.

[14.](#) Letter of Fr. Alexey Young to the author, Jan. 2, 1991.

#### [Chapter 97. HEAVENLY VISITATIONS](#)

[1.](#) [Fr. Herman Podmoshensky], “Abbot Damascene of Valaam: Builder of Orthodox Sanctity,” *OW*, no. 96 (1981), pp. 4-10.

[2.](#) Br. G[regory Eliel], “More Help from Archbishop John,” *OW*, no. Ill (1983), p. 128.

[3.](#) *Little Russian Philokalia*, vol. 1: St. Seraphim of Sarov, pp. 95-107.

[4.](#) FSR, *Heavenly Realm*, pp. 115-16.



## PART XII

### Chapter 98. “A GIANT OF THE OLDER GENERATION”

1. LFSR to Alexey Young, June 16, 1976.

### Chapter 99. HOPE

1. Archbishop Averky, *Stand Fast in the Truth* (Mt. Holy Springs, Pa.), p. 2.

2. Archbishop Averky, “What Is Orthodoxy?” *Orthodox Life* (May — June 1976), pp. 2-3.

3. LFSR to Fr. Valery Lukianov, Feb. 1, 1975.

4. LFSR to Dr. Alexander Kalomiros, Feb. 3, 1976.

5. Archimandrite Justin Popovich, *Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ* (Belmont, Mass.: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1994), p. 24.

6. Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, pp. 224, 226; third edition, pp. 230-31, 233.

7. Ibid., p. 238.

8. LFSR to A., Oct. 31, 1972.

9. LFSR to Alexey Young, Oct. 17, 1975.

10. [FSR], “Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky: Theology in the Ancient Tradition,” OW, no. 96 (1981), p. 77. Later published in Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, p. 14; third edition, p. 20.

11. FSR, “Living the Orthodox World-view,” OW, no. 105 (1982), pp. 176.

[12. Ibid.](#)

[13.](#) I. M. Andreyev, *Russia's Catacomb Saints*, pp. 226—27.

[14. Ibid.](#), p. 21.

[15.](#) Archbishop John Maximovitch, “The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia,” *OW*, no. 37 (1971), p. 79.

[16.](#) LFSR to J. H., Sept. 16, 1980.

[17.](#) [FSR], “In Defense of Fr. Dimitry Dudko.” *OW*, no. 92 (1980), p. 127.

[18.](#) Letter of Fr. Alexey Young to the author, Aug. 1, 1991.

[19.](#) CSHB, June 24, 1980.

[20.](#) LFSR to Fr. Alexey Young, Dec. 5, 1981. In *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 227.

[21.](#) LFSR to T., Feb. 22, 1979.

[22.](#) “Orthodox Christians Facing the 1980s,” a talk given at the 1979 St. Herman Pilgrimage. Transcript of oral delivery.

[23.](#) LFSR to Fr. C, June 1, 1978.

[24.](#) [FSR], “In Defense of Father Dimitry Dudko,” p. 130.

[25.](#) “Orthodox Christians Facing the 1980s.” Transcript of oral delivery.

[26. Ibid.](#)

[27.](#) LFSR to Fr. Theodore, June 6, 1979.

[28.](#) FSR, “The Search for Orthodoxy,” OW, no. 226 (2002), pp. 243-44.

[29.](#) [Ibid.](#), p. 244.

[30.](#) See “Priest-monk Cosmas of Grigoriou, Enlightener of Zaire,” OW, no. 147 (1989), pp. 232-40, 249-56; and Demetrios Alanides and Monk Damascene Grigoriatis, *Apostle to Zaire: The Life and Legacy of Blessed Father Cosmas of Grigoriou* (Thessalonica, Greece: Uncut Mountain Press, 2001).

[31.](#) See Matina Kouvousis, “Miracle in Madagascar: The Orthodox Mission Today,” OW, no. 198 (1998), pp. 17-23.

[32.](#) FSR, “The Search for Orthodoxy,” pp. 244-45.

[33.](#) [Ibid.](#), pp. 246-47, 253-54.

[34.](#) LER to Alison, July 15, 1963.

#### [Chapter 100. THE DEATH KNELL](#)

[1.](#) Notes of ER from a class by Gi-ming Shien, 1956.

[2.](#) Victor Afanasiev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina* (SHB, 2000), p. 441.

[3.](#) FSR, as told to the author, April 1982.

[4.](#) Fr. Nazarius, “The St. Herman Pilgrimage, August 1982,” OW, no. 105 (1982), pp. 158-59.

#### [Chapter 101. AD ASTERA!](#)

[1.](#) Letter of St. Herman to S. A. Yanovsky, June 20, 1820. Quoted in *Little Russian Philokalia*, vol. 3: St. Herman of Alaska (SHB, 1989), p. 169.

[2.](#) Hieromonk Ambrose (formerly Fr. Alexey Young), “Personal Reminiscences

of Fr. Seraphim,” OW, no. 226 (2002), p. 235.

[3.](#) LFSR to Svetlana Andrault de Langeron, Sept. 4, 1981. In *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 277.

[4. Ibid.](#), Feb. 6, 1980, p. 276.

[5. Ibid.](#), Sept. 4, 1981, p. 277.

[6.](#) LFSR to Fr. Alexey Young, April 26, 1980. In *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 219.

[7.](#) LFSR to Svetlana Andrault de Langeron, Sept. 4, 1981. In *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 277.

[8.](#) Fr. Alexey Young, *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 238.

[9.](#) Archbishop Averky, *The Apocalypse of St. John: An Orthodox Commentary* (SHB, 1985). Revised edition, *The Apocalypse in the Teachings of Ancient Christianity* (1995).

[10.](#) FSR, “Living the Orthodox World-view,” pp. 173-75.

[11. Ibid.](#), pp. 171-73.

[12.](#) FSR, *Heavenly Realm*, pp. 111-12.

## [Chapter 102. REPOSE](#)

[1.](#) [Mary Mansur], “With the Saints Give Rest...,” *Orthodox America*, no. 22 (Aug.-Sept. 1982), p. 6; also in Fr. Alexey Young, *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, pp. 306-11.

[2. Ibid.](#)

[3. Ibid.](#)

[4. Ibid.](#)

[5. Ibid.](#), pp. 6-7.

[6. Ibid.](#), p. 7.

[7.](#) Helen Kontzevitch, “Confessor of True Orthodoxy,” *Orthodox America*, no. 22 (Aug.-Sept. 1982), p. 9; also in Fr. Alexey Young, *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, pp. 283-84.

[8.](#) Hieromonk Ambrose (formerly Fr. Alexey Young), “Personal Reminiscences of Fr. Seraphim,” p. 235.

#### [Chapter 103. THE FORTY DAYS](#)

[1.](#) Talk by Dr. Eugene Zavarin at the St. Herman Monastery, Sept. 2, 2007. Quoted in “The Twenty-fifth Anniversary of Fr. Seraphim’s Repose,” *OW*, no. 254 (2007), pp. 125-26.

[2.](#) FSR, *The Soul After Death*, p. 183.

[3.](#) Nun Brigid, “The Last Chapter in the Short Life of Fr. Seraphim of Platina,” *OW*, nos. 108-9 (1983), pp. 12-13.

[4.](#) “Homily of Archbishop Anthony of San Francisco at the Funeral of Hieromonk Seraphim,” *Pravoslavnyaya Rus’* (Orthodox Russia), vol. 73, no. 16 (2001), p. 3 (in Russian). English translation in Fr. Alexey Young, *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, pp. 314-15.

[5.](#) FSR and Fr. Herman Podmoshensky, *Blessed John the Wonderworker*, p. 175.

#### [Chapter 104. WITH THE SAINTS](#)

- [1.](#) Helen Kontzevitch, “Confessor of True Orthodoxy,” *Orthodox America*, no. 22 (Aug.-Sept. 1982), p. 9; also in Fr. Alexey Young, *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 284.
- [2.](#) Fr. Alexey Young, “For His Soul Pleased the Lord,” *Orthodox America*, no. 22 (Aug.-Sept. 1982), pp. 1, 9; also in Fr. Alexey Young, *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, pp. 280—83.
- [3.](#) Letter of Bishop Nektary to Fr. Herman, Jan. 13, 1983.
- [4.](#) “In Memoriam — Matushka Susan Young,” *Orthodox America*, nos. 143—44 (Sept.-Dec. 1996).
- [5.](#) Nun Brigid, “The Last Chapter in the Short Life of Fr. Seraphim of Platina,” pp. 19-20.
- [6.](#) “In Memoriam — Matushka Susan Young.”
- [7.](#) Fr. Alexey Young, “Two Miracles of Fr. Seraphim,” *OW*, no. 114 (1984), pp. 44-45; also in [Fr. Damascene], “Fr. Seraphim the Philosopher,” *OW*, no. 136 (1987), pp. 298-99.
- [8.](#) Conversation of Alison with the author, Dec. 2001.
- [9.](#) LER to Alison, Sept. 12, 1963.
- [10.](#) LFSR to Rev. Marion Cardoza, Aug. 18, 1980.
- [11.](#) “Letters” section, *OW*, no. 122 (1985), pp. 136-37.
- [12.](#) Part of this account was taken from a telephone conversation with Fr. Tikhon in March 1993.
- [13.](#) Dr. Raphael Stephens, “Fr. Seraphim Rose, Patron of the Unborn,” *OW*, no.

146 (1989), pp. 157-60.

[14.](#) Celia Yentzen, “A New Miracle of Fr. Seraphim,” OW, no. 238 (2004), pp.217-19.

[15.](#) Athanasius Kone, “A Heavenly Visitation of Fr. Seraphim,” OW, no. 254 (2007), pp. 143-47.

[16.](#) Hieromonk Damascene, “The Twenty-Second Anniversary of Fr. Seraphim’s Repose,” OW, no. 238 (2004), pp. 208-16.

[17.](#) Written communication of Hieromonk Ambrose (formerly Fr. Alexey Young) to the author, Oct. 11, 2002.

#### [Epilogue: THE KINGDOM OF GOD](#)

[1.](#) FSR, “Watching for the Signs of the Times,” a talk given at the 1979 Women’s Conference, Redding, California, Jan. 21, 1979.

[2.](#) LFSR to the community of the Saints Adrian and Natalie chapel in Etna, California, Pascha of the Lord, April 1/14, 1974. In *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 112.

# FOOTNOTES

## [INTRODUCTION](#)

[\[a\]](#) Cf. I Corinthians 15:31.



# PART I

## Chapter 2. SEEDS OF REBELLION

[a] The associated colleges at that time were Scripps (a women’s college), Claremont (a men’s college), and Pomona (a co-ed college). Eugene was enrolled in the latter.

## Chapter 6. PURSUED BY GOD

[a] This and other lead quotations from Blessed Augustine were underlined by Eugene in later years, in his own copy of *The Confessions*.

[b] Nietzsche used this phrase, but it was used originally by the anti-revolutionary Roman Catholic writer Joseph de Maistre in the wake of the French Revolution.

## Chapter 7. “WORLD, GOOD NIGHT!”

[a] Commonly known in the West as the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary or Candlemas.

## Chapter 8. THE TASTE OF HELL

[a] All Psalter references in this book are according to the Septuagint numbering.

[b] An expensive restaurant overlooking the San Francisco Bay.

[c] Muir Woods National Monument and the nearby 2,571-foot Mount Tamalpais are located twelve miles north of San Francisco. Muir Woods is a forest of 1,000-year-old giant redwoods.

[d] In the original, the word “self-emptiness” has been typed over the word “self-

emphasis.”

## [Chapter 9. TRUTH ABOVE ALL ELSE](#)

[a] Cf. the book of Apocalypse (Revelation) 21:1.

[b] See René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines* and *Man and His Becoming* (published in French in 1921 and 1925, and in English in 1945). Guénon did delve into the Chinese tradition in the last work published during his lifetime, *The Great Triad* (French, 1946; English, 1991), but this study focused on only one concept within Chinese philosophy.

[c] As just one example, Lao Tzu said: “The Sage, in order to be above the people, must speak as though he were lower than the people. In order to guide them he must put himself behind them” (*Tao Teh Ching*, ch. 66). This brings to mind Christ’s words: *Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant* (Matt. 20:26–27).

## [Chapter 10. TWO TEACHERS](#)

[a] The Chinese he had learned at Pomona was the modern form.

## [Chapter 11. IN SIGHT OF HOME](#)

[a] Lovdjieff was also mentioned in Alan Watts’ autobiography, *In My Own Way*, p. 308.

[b] A saying attributed to St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

[c] The Cathedral is located on Fulton Street, near Filmore. Today, after the building of the new “Joy of All Who Sorrow” Cathedral in the city, it is commonly referred to as the “Old Cathedral.”

[d] This is undoubtedly a reference to Frithjof Schuon.

[e] In 1961 Bishop John was raised to the rank of Archbishop. He served as the ruling hierarch of San Francisco and Western America until his retirement in 1979, and he reposed in 1989.

[f] On October 9, 1950, Guénon wrote from Cairo about the Sufi *tarîqah* that Schuon had formed around himself: “I see now that I was only too right when I said that soon it would not be a *tarîqah* at all anymore, but a vaguely ‘universalist’ organization, more or less like that of the disciples of Vivekananda!” On September 18 of the same year, Guénon wrote: “I am not surprised, for, from a technical viewpoint, the ignorance of all these people, beginning with F. S. [Frithjof Schuon] himself, is truly frightening.”

## Chapter 12. DEAD END

[a] The original is in broken English, which we have corrected.

[b] The *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist who coined the term “beatnik” to describe members of the Beat Generation.

## Chapter 13. THE TRUTH AS PERSON

[a] Earlier in his “Answer to Ivan,” Eugene had defined genuine pity as “a sharing in the pain of others.”

## **PART II**

### **Chapter 14. GOOD-BYE**

[a] See [p. 98 above](#).

[b] See [p. 202 below](#).

### **Chapter 15. TRUTH OR FASHION**

[a] Compare with the lines of Alexander Pope, from *Moral Essays* (1731):

Like following Life through creatures you dissect,  
You lose it in the moment you detect.

[b] See the passages from Eugene's thesis quoted in Hieromonk Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao* (St. Herman Brotherhood, 1999; fourth edition, 2004), pp. 481–83, 485, 488.

[c] *Petya*: the Russian diminutive for “Peter.”

### **Chapter 18. THE WAY OF THE PHILOSOPHER**

[a] German for “Dear Parents.”

[b] University of California, Los Angeles.

[c] “Angry young men” was a name originally given to a group of young English writers in the 1950s who were challenging postwar social values and conventions.

[d] In 1930 Guénon left France for Egypt, leaving many of his friends in the dark as to what he was doing. He remained in Egypt for over twenty years, until the

end of his life.

## [Chapter 20. THE KINGDOM OF MAN AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD](#)

[a] Published posthumously as a separate book: *Nihilism: The Root of the Revolution of the Modern Age* (Fr. Seraphim Rose Foundation, 1994; revised edition, St. Herman Brotherhood, 2001). This book has now been published in Russian, Serbian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Latvian, Italian, and German.

[b] On Phillip E. Johnson, see below, [p. 556](#).

[c] I.e., the aforementioned book, published posthumously in 1994, which comprises the completed seventh chapter of *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*.

[d] Both former President Bill Clinton and former Vice President Al Gore have publicly accorded praise to Ken Wilber's writings. See a critique of these writings in the editor's epilogues to Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* (St. Herman Brotherhood, first ed., 2000), pp. 557–75, and *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* (St. Herman Brotherhood, fifth ed., 2004), pp. 231–34.

## [Chapter 21. CRISIS](#)

[a] This was in response to the teaching of Albert Camus, who defined absurdism as the confrontation of man's need for reason with the irrationality of the world.

[b] See the full quotation on [p. 124 above](#).

[c] “Descent into the Maelstrom”: the title of a story by Edgar Allan Poe.

[d] Eugene did not know then that it was called the “Icon of the Three Hands” and had a unique history. The Byzantine prototype for it had been made in the

eighth century by the great hymnographer and theologian St. John Damascene, who, having had his hand cut off by the caliph of Damascus at the instigation of iconoclasts, had prayed to the Mother of God and had his hand restored to him. In gratitude for this miracle, he had placed the image of a “third hand” on the icon of the Mother of God. It is significant that Eugene should have unknowingly come before this icon at such a time, when he too was in great need of healing.

## PART III

### Chapter 21. A REVELATION OF ORTHODOXY IN THE NEW WORLD

[a] The first date is according to the Orthodox Church (Julian or “Old”) Calendar, and the second according to the civil (“new”) calendar. Henceforth both dates will be listed only when a Church feast is mentioned. When only one date appears, it will refer to the civil calendar.

[b] I.e., the Mother of God “Joy of All Who Sorrow” Cathedral of the Russian Church Abroad, where Eugene had attended his first Orthodox service five years earlier.

[c] *Schemamonk*: one who has taken on the highest and strictest monastic discipline, denoted by a special cowl and stole.

### Chapter 23. HOLY RUSSIA IN AMERICA

[a] As the records showed, his father had died of malnutrition in 1943, only three years after his arrest.

[b] *Hierodeacon*: a monastic deacon.

[c] *Klobuk*: monastic hat with cowl.

[d] *Ostarbeiter*: a slave laborer brought from Eastern Europe to Germany during World War II (literally, “East Worker”).

[e] “Desert-dwelling”: in historic Christian terminology, the “desert” originally referred to the habitation of the Egyptian Desert Fathers, but later it was applied to any wilderness where monastics lived in seclusion, including the forests of Russia.

[f] Cf. I Corinthians 14:3: *He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.* See also Ephesians 4:11 and I Corinthians 12:28.

[g] *Lampada*: a vigil light, usually filled with oil.

[h] *Batiushka*: an endearing term for a priest or a monk.

[i] From the Presanctified Liturgy of the Orthodox Church.

[j] *Analogia*: icon stands or reading stands used during Church services.

[k] *Starets*: elder.

[l] *Akathist*: a special service to Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, or a saint.

[m] From the Orthodox Vesper service, in which Jesus Christ is called the “Quiet Light” of the Father.

[n] *Archimandrite*: the highest rank conferred upon a priest-monk.

[o] *Podvizhnik*: the Russian word for “ascetic.”

[p] *Prepodobny*: one of the Russian words for “saint,” commonly used for monastic saints. Literally, “in the original likeness” (of Adam).

[q] The island of Valaam in northern Russia bears some resemblance to Spruce Island, Alaska.

[r] Archbishop Ioasaph (1888–1955) also established many parishes in Canada before ending his days in Argentina. Toward the end of his life he became known as a miracle-worker. (See “Archbishop Ioasaph, Enlightener of Canada,” *The Orthodox Word*, no. 19 [1968], pp. 88–92.)

[s] Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich (1880–1956) was an outstanding evangelist,



orator, and writer of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Having spent the last ten years of his life in America, he reposed at the St. Tikhon of Zadonsk Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania. He was canonized by the Serbian Orthodox Church in May 2003.

#### [Chapter 24. ON THE THRESHOLD](#)

[a] *Pannikhida*: service for the reposed.

[b] Fr. Vladimir had been ordained to the priesthood in 1955.

[c] *Lavra*: a large monastery.

[d] Russian for “[Greetings] with the Birth of Christ!”

[e] According to the Orthodox Church (Julian or “Old”) Calendar, Christmas (the Feast of the Nativity of Christ) is celebrated thirteen days later than in the West. The Church Calendar date of December 25 coincides with January 7 on the civil (“new”) calendar.

#### [Chapter 25. INTO THE FATHER’S EMBRACE](#)

[a] St. Eugene, a monk of Alexandria, reposed in the sixth century. The St. Eugene mentioned in the above letter was evidently Martyr Eugene of Sebaste, commemorated December 13/26.

[b] At the time Eugene was received into the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, those formerly baptized into non-Orthodox Christian confessions (Protestants, Anglicans, and Catholics) were routinely received into this Church through Chrismation only, rather than through both Baptism and Chrismation. In 1971, the Sobor (Bishop’s Council) of the Church Abroad ruled that it was permissible to baptize those coming from non-Orthodox confessions. When Eugene became

a priest in the Church Abroad six years later, he baptized all the people whom he received into the Church, including those formerly baptized into non-Orthodox confessions.

[c] I.e., the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

## Chapter 27. WONDERWORKER OF THE LATTER TIMES

[a] *Kontakion*: one of the main hymns for a saint or Church feast.

[b] Not to be confused with Bishop John Shahovskoy, mentioned above (ch. 11). Bishop John Shahovskoy (raised to the rank of Archbishop in 1961) was a hierarch of the American Metropolia, while Archbishop John Maximovitch was a hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

[c] Cf. I Corinthians 4:10, 3:18–19, and 1:25–27.

[d] *Kliros*: the place, near the altar and apart from the choir loft, where prayers are read and sung.

[e] *Theotokos*: the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God; literally, “God-birthgiver.”

## Chapter 28. LINKS TO ANCIENT SANCTITY

[a] The same hierarch whom Eugene had seen upon first attending an Orthodox service. As mentioned earlier, Archbishop Tikhon was a disciple of the holy Elder Gabriel of Kazan and Pskov, who had been a monk at Optina under the spiritual direction of Elder Ambrose. Elder Gabriel was locally canonized in Russia in the early 1990s; see his Life in St. Simeon Kholmogorov, *One of the Ancients* (St. Herman Brotherhood, 1988).

[b] See [p. 176 above](#).

[c] Originally published in Russian in 1952, it was published in English by the St. Herman Brotherhood in 1988.

[d] In Russia, Fr. Mitrophan had witnessed many miracles wrought through his father-in-law's prayers before an icon of the Mother of God "Unexpected Joy." Fr. Mitrophan had his own wonderworking copy of this icon, before which he frequently held prayer services for the special needs of people. The icon is now located at Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York.

### [Chapter 30. A SAINT ON TRIAL](#)

[a] This was during the Civil War in Russia. As Archbishop John Maximovitch explained in an article: "Foreseeing the possibility that the Higher Authority of the Russian Church would be deprived of freedom and that it would be impossible for separate parts of the Russian Church to be in contact with it, Patriarch Tikhon, who was then the head of the Church, gave instruction that, in those regions which were separated from the Church Administration, temporary church administrations should be established under the leadership of the eldest hierarchs in that region." (Archbishop John, "The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia," *The Orthodox Word*, no. 37 [1971], p. 63.)

[b] The Resolution of the Council of Bishops of the Russian Church Abroad, issued in September 1927, read as follows: "The part of the All-Russian Church located abroad must cease all administrative relations with the church administration in Moscow... until restoration of normal relations with Russia and until liberation of our Church from persecutions by the godless Soviet authorities.... The part of the Russian Church that finds itself abroad considers itself an inseparable, spiritually united branch of the Great Russian Church. It does not separate itself from its Mother Church and does not consider itself autocephalous."

[c] *Vladika* (vocative: *Vladiko*) is an endearing term for a bishop.

[d] A Church of Russian exiles in Western Europe which at one time was under Metropolitan Evlogy of Paris, Exarch of the Moscow Patriarchate. In 1931 Metropolitan Evlogy placed this Church under the authority of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Its formal title is the Russian Orthodox Archdiocese in Western Europe, under the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

[e] Archbishop John recounted in detail the events surrounding his trial in a report (in Russian) which he submitted to Metropolitan Anastassy and the Archiepiscopal Sobor of the Russian Church Abroad, dated July 23, 1963. This report has been used as the major source for the present chapter.

[f] *Sobor*: council. (In other contexts, this word can refer to a cathedral.)

[g] This and other documents relating to the court case are located in the San Francisco City Hall, County Clerk's office, room 317. Case #532856, Superior Court of the State of California in and for the City and County of San Francisco. First date of filing: June 6, 1963.

[h] The "former parish council" here refers to Archbishop John's supporters who were originally on the council and raised money for the building of the Cathedral. When Archbishop Anthony of Los Angeles came and halted the building of the Cathedral, he had his own supporters instated, and these constituted the parish council that filed the complaint.

[i] Archpriest Nicholas Dombrovsky, it will be remembered, was the priest who canonically received Eugene into the Church.

[j] The documents of the Superior Court of the State of California list "MAXIMOVITCH, also known as HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP JOHN" with the other defendants, usually headed by Eugene A. Hrapoff, the newly

elected parish warden. Archbishop John himself, in his report to Metropolitan Anastassy and the Archiepiscopal Sobor, affirmed that “the former members of the parish council are involved in a lawsuit against their superior-bishop of the same church, community and diocese” (Report, p. 9).

[k] This is how Russians commonly referred to Archbishop John.

[l] This information comes from the lawyer who defended Archbishop John, Mr. James O’Gara, Jr.

### Chapter 31. THOMAS MERTON, CHILIASM, AND THE “NEW CHRISTIANITY”

[a] In his later years, Eugene explained chiliasm (also called “millenarianism”) as follows: “This teaching is a heresy that was condemned by the early Church Fathers; it has its origin in a misinterpretation of the book of the Apocalypse (Revelation). The Orthodox Church teaches that the reign of Christ with His saints, when the devil is ‘bound’ for a thousand years (Apoc. 20:3)—is the period we are now living in, the whole period (1,000 being a number symbolizing wholeness) between the first and second comings of Christ. In this period the saints do reign with Christ in His Church, but it is a mystical reign which is not to be defined in the outward, political sense that chiliasts give to it. The devil is truly bound in this period — that is, restricted in the exercise of his ill will against humanity — and believers who live the life of Christ and receive the Holy Mysteries live a blessed life, preparing them for the eternal heavenly Kingdom. The non-Orthodox, who do not have Holy Mysteries and have not tasted the true life of the Church, cannot understand this mystical reign of Christ and so look for a political and outward reign.” (*The Orthodox Word*, nos. 100–101 [1981], p. 207.).

[b] Merton had written an article entitled “Pasternak and the People with Watch Chains” (in *Jubilee*, July 1959).

[c] Eugene saved only a rough draft of his letter to Merton.

## Chapter 32. OLD TIES

[a] I.e., June 29 according the the Church Calendar: the Feast of the Holy Leaders of the Apostles, Peter and Paul.

[b] Kontzevitch taught at Jordanville for one year before moving to San Francisco.

[c] Not to be confused with the aforementioned Archbishop Vitaly Ustinov of Canada, this Archbishop Vitaly had been the Abbot of Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York, until his repose in 1960. He was commonly known as Archbishop Vitaly of Jordanville.

[d] At a meeting of the *Umolyubtsy* on February 2, 1964, Eugene gave a lecture entitled “The Philosophy and the Dialectic of Nihilism,” based on his writings for *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*.

## Chapter 34. “I TRUST YOU”

[a] Her name has been changed.

[b] Since in the Orthodox tradition one should either be married or be tonsured a monk before being ordained a priest.

[c] The above-mentioned church in Seaside, which adjoins Monterey.

[d] Fort Ross is located on the coast approximately eighty miles north of San Francisco. Established in 1812, it is the site of the first Russian colony in California and the first Orthodox church in the continental United States. In 1836 Fort Ross was visited by the Orthodox evangelizer of Alaska, St. Innocent, who was canonized in 1977.

[e] This was the same priest, Fr. Grigori Kravchina, about whom Eugene had written to Gleb in 1962 (see [ch. 24 above](#)), calling him “a very sensitive and intelligent man... genuinely humble and simple.”

## PART IV

### Chapter 35. THE BROTHERHOOD

[a] Above the fireplace, since this chapel was a converted living room.

[b] *Troparion*: the main hymn for a saint or Church feast.

[c] This date is according to the Church calendar; the civil date is September 10. On his letters Archbishop John put only the Church calendar date, without the civil date along with it.

[d] Together with another letter, Fr. Gerasim sent Gleb an old brass icon of the Mother of God, “Joy of All Who Sorrow,” which he had found on Monk’s Lagoon, Spruce Island, and which may have belonged to Blessed Herman. This, too, was treasured by the Brotherhood as a blessing from Fr. Gerasim.

[e] I.e., Gleb’s icon of him.

[f] I.e., the writings of the Holy Fathers.

### Chapter 36. THEOLOGICAL TRAINING

[a] One of the most luxurious hotels in San Francisco, located on Nob Hill.

### Chapter 37. THE BOOKSTORE

[a] *Moleben*: a supplicatory service, usually for a special intent.

[b] *Rizas*: gold and silver coverings with images in relief.

[c] *Kiots*: covered icon frames, to be kept outdoors.



[d] Cf. Matthew 11:29.

### Chapter 38. THE ORTHODOX WORD

[a] September 17 according to the Church Calendar: the Feast of Martyrs Sophia, Faith, Hope and Love.

[b] Helen used the French pronunciation, having lived many years in France.

### Chapter 39. PODVIG

[a] *Podvig*: spiritual struggle or ascetic labor. The Russian word for a righteous ascetic, *podvizhnik*, comes from this word.

### Chapter 41. THE APOSTOLIC VISION OF ARCHBISHOP JOHN

[a] In the Orthodox Church, at least two bishops are needed to perform an episcopal consecration.

[b] Cf. Matthew 24:14.

[c] A disciple of the Optina Elders, Bishop Jonah (1888–1925) was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in 1996.

[d] *Hieroschemamonk*: a schemamonk in priestly rank.

[e] Eugene had another link with Chinese Orthodoxy in Fr. Elias Wen (born 1896), a Chinese priest who had served under Archbishop John in Shanghai, and who now served under him at the San Francisco Cathedral. Eugene asked Fr. Elias about the history of the Orthodox Church in China and about Chinese Orthodox bishops and clergymen whom Fr. Elias had known in Shanghai and Beijing. He conversed with Fr. Elias in both Russian and Chinese.

[f] *Pannikhida*: service for the reposed.

[g] In light of these words, it is interesting to note that Fr. Spyridon reposed precisely on the eve of the second anniversary of Eugene's repose (August 19/September 1, 1984).

## Chapter 42. THE DEATH OF A SAINT

[a] Archbishop John's list included the names of twenty Western saints, headed by St. Ansgar, bishop of Hamburg, enlightener of Denmark and Sweden. See Fr. Seraphim Rose and Fr. Herman Podmoshensky, *Blessed John the Wonderworker* (St. Herman Brotherhood, 1987), pp. 99–102.

[b] He died on June 19, 1966, according to the Church Calendar, which he exclusively followed, paying no attention to the civil calendar. According to the civil calendar he died on July 2.

[c] Exactly five years later, on the anniversary of the repose of Archbishop John, Archbishop Leonty was also to repose in the Lord.

## Chapter 43. THE VISION OF A SKETE

[a] *Skete*: Derived from the ancient Egyptian monastic communities of Scetis, this word refers to a small monastery of usually no more than twelve monks or nuns who live as a “family” under the direction of a superior. Skete life is considered the “middle way” or “royal path” of monasticism, the mean between hermitic life and life in a large monastery or coenobium.

[b] Archbishop Vitaly of Jordanville (reposed in 1960) single-handedly founded a monastic-missionary Brotherhood in Czechoslovakia dedicated to printing Orthodox literature.

[c] I.e., Archbishop Vitaly of Jordanville.

[d] Gleb's former mentor at Jordanville.

#### Chapter 44. PREPARATION

[a] Gleb was still supporting his mother at the time.

[b] *Sobor*: cathedral. (In other contexts, this word can refer to a Church council.)

[c] This was Ivan Kontzevitch's favorite book. He would open it at random whenever he had some perplexity, and would miraculously turn to a passage that related precisely to his question. Gleb learned this practice from Kontzevitch and followed it himself.

#### Chapter 45. LAND FROM ARCHBISHOP JOHN

[a] *Genya*: the Russian diminutive for "Eugene."

[b] *Psalomshchik*: one who reads the services, largely from the Psalms, on the *kliros*.

#### Chapter 46. BREAKING GROUND

[a] The Brotherhood's bookstore was located on Geary Boulevard in San Francisco. As mentioned earlier, Gleb slept on the bookstore's balcony when he stayed the night in the city.

[b] His name has been changed.

[c] May 6/19. On St. Job's other commemoration day in August, it will be remembered, Archbishop John had blessed the foundation of the Brotherhood.

[d] Cf. Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.

[e] Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Sochineniya (Works)* in 6 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1905; reprint, Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1966) (in Russian). In 1970, some of Bishop (now Saint) Ignatius' monastic counsels were published in English under the title *The Arena: An Offering to Contemporary Monasticism*; see [pp. 471–72](#) and [815](#) below.

[f] Fr. Sergius V. Bulgakov, *Nastolnaya Kniga (Manual for Church Servers)* (Kharkov, 1900) (in Russian)—a classic work on Church feasts, Lives of Saints, and the order of Divine services. The author should not be confused with Fr. Sergius N. Bulgakov, mentioned in [chapter 60](#) below.

## **PART V**

### **Chapter 47. DELIVERANCE OUT OF THE WORLD**

[a] This was where Abbess Ariadna and her community first lived when they relocated from China to San Francisco in 1948. Later they moved to a larger building on Capp Street in San Francisco, using the building on Fell Street as their chapel and guest house.

[b] Commenting on this unexpected incident in a Chronicle entry for May 1969, Eugene wrote: “God evidently favors [the Brotherhood’s move].”

### **Chapter 48. SET IN THE WILD WEST**

[a] Several years after Eugene’s repose, his Brotherhood made friends with Native American elders from the nearby town of Cottonwood. Over the years the elders have paid visits to the Platina skete, even coming for the all-night Pascha service.

### **Chapter 49. FRONTIERSMEN**

[a] As the years went by, the brothers held more of their services in English, both because more English translations became available and because more brothers joined who knew only the English language. In a report on the activities of the Brotherhood in 1974–75, Eugene noted, “Our services are as much as possible in English.”

[b] Saints Sergius and Herman founded Valaam Monastery in the tenth century and were the monastery’s first abbots. Their main commemoration day is June 28/July 11. St. Herman of Valaam was the patron saint of Blessed Herman of Alaska.

[c] *Typicon*: the order of Divine services. Also, the rules and ordinances of a particular monastery.

#### [Chapter 50. IN THE STEPS OF BLESSED PAISIUS](#)

[a] Canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in 1982, and by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in 1988.

[b] Interestingly, Blessed Herman reposed on the same day as Blessed Paisius (November 15/28), forty-two years later. See “Finding the True Date of St. Herman’s Repose” by Michael Z. Vinokourov, an archivist of the Library of Congress and a close friend of Archimandrite Gerasim, in *The Orthodox Word*, no. 131 (1986), pp. 283–85, 294.

#### [Chapter 51. NATURE](#)

[a] In the Wintun Indian language, *yolla bolly* means “snow-covered high peak.”

#### [Chapter 52. ZEALOTS OF ORTHODOXY](#)

[a] Now venerated as a saint in Serbia, Archimandrite Justin was a friend of Archbishop John Maximovitch when the latter lived in Serbia.

[b] In a letter of 1951, former Vice President Henry A. Wallace recalled how, in 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt decided to place the Great Seal of the United States on the dollar bill: “Roosevelt, as he looked at the colored reproduction of the Seal, was first struck with the representation of the ‘All Seeing Eye,’ a Masonic representation of The Great Architect of the Universe. Next he was impressed with the idea that the foundation for the new order of the ages [*novus ordo seclorum*] had been laid in 1776 but that it would be completed only under the eye of the Great Architect. Roosevelt like myself was a 32nd degree Mason. He suggested that the Seal be put on the dollar bill... and took the

matter up with the Secretary of the Treasury.” (Richard S. Patterson and Richardson Dougall, *The Eagle and the Shield*[U.S. Dept. of State, 1976], p. 403.)

[c] In his 1967 Christmas message, Patriarch Athenagoras wrote: “In the movement for union, it is not a question of one Church moving towards the other; rather, let us all together refound the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, coexisting in the East and the West....”

[d] After his first meeting with Pope Paul VI in 1963, Patriarch Athenagoras told an Italian news agency: “I was especially impressed by the fact that the Pontiff has completely forgotten the ugly past and has made it possible for us to inaugurate a new epoch. Paul VI and I are reaping the firstfruits of this new epoch.” (*Katholiki* no. 1375, Feb. 5, 1964.)

[e] This last statement was made by the above-mentioned Fr. Patrinos in *The Orthodox Observer*.

[f] The Constantinian era began in the fourth century with the establishment of Orthodox Christian monarchy in Constantinople under Emperor Constantine; it ended in 1917 with the fall of the Orthodox monarchy of Moscow, the “Third Rome,” the successor of Constantinople.

[g] At the Second Ecumenical Council of A.D. 381 (the first Council of Constantinople), the Holy Fathers condemned the heresy of chiliasm. They deliberately inserted an article in the Nicene Creed (“and His Kingdom shall have no end”) to counteract the false teaching that Christ will have a political, earthly reign of a thousand years. In more recent times chiliasm has become widespread in Protestant churches, which have rejected the Christianity of the Constantinian era (prior to the Reformation). Their expectations put them in danger of following Antichrist, who will set up an earthly kingdom, claiming to

be Christ.

[h] In his later years Eugene commented on the similarity between Islamic and Communist totalitarianism with regard to their violent methods of coercion and repression; see [ch. 86 below](#).

[i] Two magazines, which Eugene found quite worldly in content, published by the Metropolia for children and teenagers.

### [Chapter 53. THE APOGEE OF THE BROTHERHOOD](#)

[a] Metropolitan Theophilus was elected as the head of the American Metropolia in 1934. At the invitation of Patriarch Varnava of Serbia, in 1935 he travelled to Serbia to meet with hierarchs of the Russian Church Abroad and heal the division between the two Russian Churches in America. As a result of this meeting, the two Churches agreed to come together in unity. In 1936 the Council of Bishops in North America (now including bishops from both the Metropolia and the Church Abroad) ratified the agreement made in Serbia. In 1946 the separation was renewed at the Cleveland Sobor.

[b] It will be remembered that Eugene had been very moved by Archbishop (then Bishop) John Shahovskoy when he attended the Pascha service at the Metropolia's Cathedral in San Francisco in 1957. See [ch. 11 above](#).

[c] The Cathedral was dedicated to the icon of the Mother of God, "Joy of All Who Sorrow." As will be remembered, Fr. Gerasim had sent the Brotherhood an icon of the "Joy of All Who Sorrow" at its founding — an icon which had perhaps belonged to Blessed Herman himself.

[d] Bishop Alypy Gamanovich of Cleveland (1926–), later Archbishop of Chicago and Detroit.



[e] *Litia*: a prayerful supplication, here referring to the short Office for the Dead.

[f] This prayer rule, practiced in Optina Monastery, consists of three hundred Jesus Prayers (“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”), one hundred prayers to the Mother of God (“Most Holy Mother of God, save us”), fifty to one’s Guardian Angel (“Holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, pray to God for me”), and fifty to All Saints (“All ye Saints, pray to God for us”).

[g] Metropolitan Philaret Voznesensky (1903–85) was at that time the chief hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad.

[h] Bishop Laurus Skurla of Jordanville (1928–2008) had been consecrated Bishop of Manhattan in 1967. In 1976 he succeeded Archbishop Averky as Bishop of Syracuse and Abbot of Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, and in 2001 he was elected chief hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad.

[i] In *The Orthodox Word*, no. 31 (1970), p. 107.

[j] Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow and All Russia (1865–1925) was at one time the head of the Russian Church in America and stationed in San Francisco; Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow (1797–1879) was a great apostle to Alaska and visited San Francisco. Both were later canonized by the Orthodox Church.

[k] Fr. Gerasim did not take sides in the split in the Russian Church in America which was renewed at the Cleveland Sobor in 1946. In a letter of 1965 he wrote: “I commemorate all. We are all children of one Mother Orthodox Church. We are all children of one Mother, Holy Russia. But how sad is this division in the Church.”

[l] Archimandrite Cyprian Pyzhov of Jordanville, a renowned iconographer, reposed in 2001.

[m] Bishop Andrew: formerly Fr. Adrian, Gleb's spiritual father in New York.

[n] *Stichera*: verses of a Church service.

[o] *Litia* here refers to the prayerful supplication, with a procession, that takes place at the end of Vespers on special feasts.

[p] *Protopresbyter*: the highest designation for a married priest (literally, "first- or lead-priest").

[q] See [p. 317 above](#).

[r] A few months after the canonization, the American Metropolia (now the Orthodox Church in America) also expressed its gratitude. Its Bishop of Alaska, Theodosius (later Metropolitan), sent one of his priests to the brothers with a relic of St. Herman (a piece of his left rib), thanking them for their work in making St. Herman known and in preparing the ground for his canonization.

[s] *Trapeza*: a monastic refectory; also, the communal meal in the refectory.

[t] The brothers surmised that the magazine page had been sent by Fr. Gerasim to his friend Archbishop Tikhon, and that it had fallen out of the late hierarch's service books, which had been used during the services that morning. On the cover of the next issue of *The Orthodox Word* (no. 32, 1970), the brothers featured the painting of St. Herman that was found on the page.

## [Chapter 54. TONSURE](#)

[a] Most of Eugene's recollections in this and the succeeding chapter have been taken from letters he wrote on Jan. 10, 1971; Jan. 17, 1971; and March 25, 1971.

[b] I.e., the aforementioned Deacon Nicholas Porshnikov. Ordained to the diaconate by Archbishop John in 1963, he was raised to the rank of protodeacon

(first or lead deacon) by Metropolitan Philaret in 1970. He reposed in 2004.

[c] It is interesting that at the first tonsure Gleb witnessed, at Holy Trinity Monastery in 1954, the new monk had been given the name Herman (after St. Herman of Valaam), while at the first tonsure Eugene witnessed, at Bishop Nektary's Kursk Icon Chapel in Alameda in 1964, the new monk had been given the name Seraphim.

[d] *Ektenias*: petitions read by a clergyman in church.

[e] *Starets*: the Russian word for "elder."

[f] *Hieromonks*: priest-monks.

[g] The commemoration day of Martyrs Nazarius, Gervase, Protase, and Celsius of Milan.

[h] I.e., a collection of the Lives of the Valaam Saints and Elders. The Brotherhood began this work during Fr. Seraphim's lifetime and continued it after his repose, publishing the Lives in *The Orthodox Word*.

## [Chapter 55. CONFLICT AND RECONCILIATION](#)

[a] That is, according to the Church Calendar. According to the civil calendar it was January 7, 1971.

[b] The miracle-working icon of the Mother of God before which St. Seraphim was healed.

[c] These people, which were listed by Fr. Seraphim in one of his letters, included two bishops (Laurus and Nektary), two priests, a deacon, and two lay people.

[d] On September 10/23, 2000.

[e] *Epitrachelion*: the stole of a priest.

#### Chapter 56. LOOKING UPWARD

[a] *Treby*: services for specific needs; from the *Trebnik*, the priest's book containing these services.

## PART VI

### Chapter 57. ARCHBISHOP JOHN'S SOTAINNIK

[a] Fr. Spyridon taught in the parish school in Palo Alto.

### Chapter 58. THE DESERT PARADISE

[a] Canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in 2000.

[b] See [p. 157 above](#).

### Chapter 59. THE MIND OF THE FATHERS

[a] An elderly archpriest in Australia, whose uplifting book on the inward spiritual life, *Bogosoznaniye (Awareness of God)*, was published by the St. Herman Brotherhood in the original Russian in 1975. Fr. Seraphim translated portions of this book into English and printed them in *The Orthodox Word*, no. 69 (1976), pp. 104–13.

[b] Both of these holy hierarchs were canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in 1988.

### Chapter 60. MODERN ACADEMIC THEOLOGY

[a] Fr. Georges Florovsky served as the dean of St. Vladimir's Seminary from 1949 to 1955.

[b] Fr. Alexander Schmemmann became the seminary's new dean in 1962, and was succeeded after his repose by Fr. John Meyendorff.

[c] See [p. 118 above](#).

[d] See [p. 77 above](#).

[e] Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow (1782–1867) was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in 1994.

[f] See full quote on [pp. 66–67 above](#).

[g] Dix’s book *The Shape of the Liturgy* (1945) had by this time made an enormous impact on mainline Protestant denominations.

[h] Fr. John Meyendorff writes: “It is quite clear that Fr. Alexander’s theological worldview was shaped during his Paris years. But, although the influence of some of his [Russian Orthodox] teachers was decisive, he always lived in a wider spiritual world. The forties and fifties were a period of extraordinary theological revival in French Roman Catholicism — the years of a ‘return to the sources’ and a ‘liturgical movement.’ It is from that existing milieu that Fr. Schmemmann really learned ‘liturgical theology,’ a ‘philosophy of time’ and the true meaning of the ‘paschal mystery.’ The names of Jean Daniélou, Louis Bouyer, and several others are inseparable from the shaping of Fr. Schmemmann’s mind.” (Fr. John Meyendorff, “A Life Worth Living,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1988.)

[i] “Typicon” refers here to the Rule of Church services.

## [Chapter 61. THE DESERT IN THE BACKYARD](#)

[a] Fathers Herman and Seraphim were actually still called Gleb and Eugene at this time. Their tonsure occurred a month after Alexey’s first visit to the hermitage.

[b] A married couple, martyred for Christ in Nicomedia in the fourth century.

[c] Elder Nektary of Optina, Fr. Adrian's spiritual father.

[d] *Prelest*: spiritual delusion.

## Chapter 62. ON THE MEANS OF OUR REDEMPTION

[a] For example, Metropolitan Anthony wrote: "Why did the sufferings of Christ's soul for the sinfulness of mankind bring about our redemption?" (Metropolitan Anthony, *An Experiment at an Orthodox Christian Catechism*, p. 53). Elsewhere he wrote: "The very sufferings of co-suffering love are precisely our redemption" (from an article on Kant, in Archbishop Nikon [Rklitsky], *The Biography of Blessed Anthony, Metropolitan of Kiev and Galich*, vol. 11, p. 43).

[b] Cf. Romans 5:12: *By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin.* I Corinthians 15:21–22: *For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.* Wisdom of Solomon 2:23: *God made man incorruptible.*

[c] Cf. Hebrews 2:9: *But we see Jesus, Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.* Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45: *The Son of Man came... to give His life a ransom for many.*

[d] Cf. I Corinthians 15:42, 44: *So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption... it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.*

[e] As Fr. Michael Pomazansky explains, "In Protestantism [the exaggerated Roman Catholic explanation of redemption] evoked the opposite reaction, which led the later sects to the almost complete denial of the dogma of redemption and to the acknowledgment of no more than a moral or instructive significance for Christ's life and His death on the Cross." (Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky,

*Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, pp. 208–9.)

[f] A disciple of the Optina Elders, Archbishop Seraphim Sobolev became known as a wonderworker after his repose in Bulgaria. See “Several Posthumous Miracles of Archbishop Seraphim,” *Orthodox Life*, vol. 52, no. 3 (May–June 2002), pp. 21–33.

[g] As Fr. Seraphim explained, “Metropolitan Anthony said it was ‘not worthy’ of Jesus Christ that He should be afraid of His coming sufferings, whereas as a matter of fact most of the Holy Fathers talk about precisely this point: that this proves the human nature of Jesus Christ, that He *was* afraid of the coming sufferings. So Archbishop John corrected this and also gave the best part of Metropolitan Anthony’s teaching on compassionate love.” (Fr. Seraphim Rose, “The Theological Writings of Archbishop John,” *The Orthodox Word* nos. 175–76, p. 147.)

[h] In the above-mentioned article, Archbishop John wrote that “He [Christ] now offers Himself up to death for the salvation of the world” (Archbishop John, “About What Did Christ Pray in the Garden of Gethsemane?”). In another article, written in 1947, he stated: “The Cross was sanctified by the Body of Christ which was nailed to it when He gave Himself over to torments and death for the salvation of the world.... The whole human race, by the death of Christ on the Cross, received deliverance from the authority of the devil.” (Archbishop John, “The Cross, Preserver of the Universe,” *The Orthodox Word* no. 89 [1979], p. 264.)

[i] As Fr. Seraphim noted, this occurred after the new teaching “was thoroughly discussed with the participation of Metropolitan Eleutherius and Archbishop Benjamin Fedchenkov of Western Europe, who was personally close to Metropolitan Anthony.”



[j] Archbishop Leonty Filippovich of Chile (†1971); see chapters [30](#) and [42](#) [above](#).

[k] Archbishop Nikon Rklitsky of Washington and Florida (†1976); see [p. 236](#) [above](#).

[l] Archbishop Gabriel Chepura of Chelyabinsk and Troitsa (†1933).

[m] See [pp. 233, 236](#) [above](#). He served as chief hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad from 1986 to 2001.

[n] See [p. 236](#) [above](#). In 1978 he was consecrated Bishop of Manhattan, Vicar for Eastern America. He reposed in 1995.

[o] The Russian version, which he wrote for Bishop Nektary's use, was longer and more complete.

[p] To take three examples among many: "By being crucified on Golgotha, Thou hast saved man whom Thou hast made in Thine own image and who lay dead in sin through the transgression" (Canticle Four of the Canon of Sunday Matins, Tone 3). "Thou hast redeemed us from the curse of the Law by Thy precious blood: nailed to the Cross and pierced with a spear, Thou hast poured forth immortality upon mankind. O our Saviour, glory to Thee" (Holy Friday Matins). "O Lord, on the Cross Thou hast torn up the record of our sins; numbered among the departed, Thou hast bound fast the ruler of hell, delivering all men from the chains of death by Thy Resurrection..." (Sessional Hymn, Holy Friday Matins).

[q] I.e., a report recently written by the chief hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad.

[r] Archbishop Afanassy Martos of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Paraguay (†1983); see [p. 238](#) [above](#).

[s] In the appendix to Fr. Michael Pomazansky's *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* in Russian.

[t] In the appendix to the second edition of *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* in English; also in *The Orthodox Word*, nos. 175–76 (1994).

### Chapter 63. "SUPER-CORRECTNESS"

[a] His instructor at that time had been Fr. Leonid Upshinsky, who had taught classes on the first few chapters of Genesis according to Patristic commentaries.

[b] In this and other passages from Fr. Seraphim's letters quoted subsequently in this chapter, we have removed the names of individuals.

[c] On Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, see pp. [482](#), [512–13 above](#).

[d] See [p. 513 above](#).

[e] Cf. Matthew 24:12.

### Chapter 64. GENESIS, CREATION AND EARLY MAN

[a] See [p. 397 above](#).

[b] Next to Julian Huxley, Russian-born Theodosius Dobzhansky was probably the most influential evolutionist of the twentieth century.

[c] The full text of Fr. Seraphim's reply was published posthumously in the book *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* (St. Herman Brotherhood, 2000), pp. 381–453.

[d] See [pp. 508–11 above](#).

[e] A decade after Fr. Seraphim's repose, an extensive critique of evolutionist

paleoanthropology was published: Dr. Marvin L. Lubenow, *Bones of Contention: A Creationist Assessment of Human Fossils* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1992).

[f] Fr. Seraphim read several of the books published by the Institute for Creation Research, located not far from his hometown of San Diego, California.

[g] On the “New Valaam Theological Academy,” see chapters [71](#) and [83](#) below.

[h] Such as St. Macarius the Great, St. John Chrysostom, St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Gregory of Sinai, and St. Maximos the Confessor. See Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, pp. 208–9, 410–15.

[i] In recent years it has been demonstrated that the biological mechanism allegedly responsible for evolution — chance mutation — does not increase genetic information, as molecules-to-man evolution would require. Rather, mutations result in a *loss* of information. This evidence from genetics provides perhaps the most devastating scientific argument to date against evolutionary theory. See Dr. Lee Spetner, *Not by Chance* (New York: The Judaica Press, 1998), and Dr. J. C. Sanford, *Genetic Entropy* (Waterloo, N.Y.: FMS Publications, 2008).

[j] Phillip E. Johnson was for thirty-five years a Professor of Law at the University of California, Berkeley. With his background in law and logic, he noticed that the arguments propounded in evolutionist literature were based not on fact but on rhetoric. His thoughtful and carefully researched book, *Darwin on Trial*, was published in 1991. Since that time he has become the unofficial leader of the burgeoning and influential “Intelligent Design” movement, and has become known as an incisive commentator on contemporary cultural trends.

[k] Prior to the publication of the complete Russian translation of *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* in 2004, Russian translations of Fr. Seraphim’s letter to

Dr. Kalomiros and his commentary on Genesis were published, in 1997 and 1998 respectively.

[\[1\]](#) On the work of “Shestodnev,” see *The Orthodox Word*, nos. 258–59 (2008), pp. 4–7.

## PART VII

### Chapter 65. CHILDREN

[a] Her name has been changed.

[b] His name has been changed.

[c] At the time of this writing, “Eastern Orthodox Books” in Willits still has a large number of titles available.

[d] His name has been changed.

### Chapter 66. BROTHERS

[a] These were published by the St. Herman Brotherhood in 1990, under the title *Guidance Toward Spiritual Life*.

[b] Cf. Matthew 26:41.

[c] See [pp. 356–57 above](#).

### Chapter 67. THE DESERT FOR AMERICAN WOMEN

[a] I.e., her monastic desire.

[b] The site of “St. Elias Skete”: see [ch. 69 below](#).

[c] This was in 1976. The strife was caused by the super-correct faction (see [ch. 81 below](#)).

### Chapter 69. AN ORTHODOX CORNER OF AMERICA

[a] Archbishop Andrew of New Diveyevo, formerly Fr. Adrian.

[b] St. Alexey, Metropolitan of Moscow and wonderworker of all Russia, reposed in 1378, commemorated on February 12/25.

[c] The photographs were donated by the Makushinskys, who appear later in this chapter.

[d] The sister of Fr. Seraphim's godmother. In her youth she had been a frequent pilgrim to Valaam, and the spiritual daughter of Elder Nicholas II of Valaam (†1947). Elder Nicholas lived at Konevits Skete on Valaam Island — a skete dedicated to the Konevits Icon of the Mother of God.

[e] In Russia and other Orthodox countries, Christians have traditionally prayed to St. Elias for rain in times of drought.

[f] The aforementioned western half of the original parcel. The fathers were finally able to buy it in 1981.

[g] These Royal Doors were too large to fit within the iconostasis of the monastery church. In 1988, when a larger church was built at the monastery, Archbishop John's Royal Doors were finally put in place within the iconostasis.

[h] *Apodosis*: the leave-taking (literally, "giving away") of a feast, which usually occurs eight days after the feast itself.

[i] I.e., according to the Church Calendar.

[j] On January 7/20 the Church celebrates the Synaxis of St. John the Forerunner and Baptist of the Lord.

[k] A desert-dweller of the Northern Thebaid of Russia, reposed in 1429.

[1] From Washington Irving's *Sketch Book*.

[m] In 1973 the fathers had obtained a tape of the Akathist to the Mother of God, sung in the San Francisco Cathedral with Archbishop John serving. "Hardly a word of his is understandable," Fr. Seraphim wrote at the time, "but the dear familiar voice is there!" Fr. Seraphim later told Alexey Young that when he and Fr. Herman first heard this tape, they wept, "for we had not expected to hear that voice again this side of heaven." (Fr. Alexey Young, *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 95.)

[n] In Russia, pancakes (*bliny*) are a traditional food with which to commemorate the dead.

[o] *Trisagion prayers*: prayers to the Holy Trinity, concluding with the "Our Father" prayer.

[p] In a letter Fr. Seraphim wrote concerning the hymns beginning with "Open unto me the doors of repentance," which are sung from the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee until the Fifth Sunday of Great Lent: "Russians begin to sigh or weep when they hear them again after another year has passed." (Letter to Alexey Young, January 30, 1974.)

[q] On the "Optina Five-hundred" prayer rule, see the note on [p. 415 above](#).

[r] That is, after his cell was built in 1975.

## [Chapter 70. THE NEW AMERICAN PILGRIMS](#)

[a] About a hundred miles north of the St. Herman Hermitage, Mount Shasta has for a long time been a hub for occult groups and activities.

[b] I.e., the Russian Church Abroad.

## [Chapter 71. AN ORTHODOX SURVIVAL COURSE](#)

[a] Fr. Seraphim was later to help Alexey Young write an entire book on Kireyevsky, for which he translated long passages from Kireyevsky's works. See Fr. Alexey Young, *A Man Is His Faith: Ivan Kireyevsky and Orthodox Christianity* (London: St. George Information Service, 1980).

[b] Ivan Kontzevitch wrote the Life of Kireyevsky, which was later translated into English and published in Fr. Leonid Kavelin, *Elder Macarius of Optina* (St. Herman Brotherhood, 1995).

[c] Fr. Seraphim's lectures on evolution and "Christian evolutionism" have been published in *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* (St. Herman Brotherhood, 2000).

## [Chapter 72. "SPIRITUAL" SELF-OPINION](#)

[a] Cf. Matthew 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 17:33.



## PART VIII

### Chapter 73. “IT’S LATER THAN YOU THINK!”

[a] Cf. Romans 12:2.

[b] St. John Chrysostom writes: “Before that [the fall] they lived in Paradise like angels, were not aroused by the flesh, were not inflamed by other passions either, were not weighed down by bodily needs, but being created entirely incorrupt and immortal, did not even need the covering of clothing.” (St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 15:4.)

[c] St. John Chrysostom: “Do you see whence marriage had its beginning, whence it was deemed necessary? From the disobedience, from the curse, from death. For where there is death, there is also marriage. Whereas, when the first does not exist, then neither does the other follow.” (St. John Chrysostom, “On Virginitv” 14.)

[d] A Patristic refutation of the modernist view can be found in Bishop Artemy Radosavljevic, “The Mystery of Marriage in a Dogmatic Light,” *Divine Ascent*, vol. 1, nos. 3–4 (1998), pp. 48–60.

[e] St. Maximos the Confessor: “The first man was fittingly condemned to a bodily generation that is without choice, material, and subject to death... to bear the dishonorable affinity with the irrational beasts, instead of the divine, unutterable honor of being with God.” (St. Maximos the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 42.)

[f] St. Gregory the Theologian: “It is good for one to be tied in marriage, temperately though, rendering to God more than to sexual relations. It is better to be free of these bonds, rendering everything to God and to the things above.”

(St. Gregory the Theologian, Poem 1:2.1, “In Praise of Virginité.”)

[\[g\]](#) Further thoughts of Fr. Seraphim on this subject are found on p. 808 below.

[\[h\]](#) As Fr. Seraphim noted, the Slavonic term which he translated as “familiarity of behavior” literally means “brazenness.” See Saints Barsanuphius and John, *Guidance Toward Spiritual Life* (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, revised edition, 2002), p. 78n.

[\[i\]](#) These photographs are reproduced on pp. 620 and 243 above.

[\[j\]](#) From this book, Fr. Seraphim translated the complete text of Archbishop Averky’s Commentary on the Apocalypse, and portions of his Commentary on the Gospels and Epistles.

[\[k\]](#) In addition, a Russian version of it was published for several years in Moscow.

#### [Chapter 74. SUFFERING RUSSIA](#)

[\[a\]](#) During a talk in 1979 (“Orthodox Christians Facing the 1980s”), for example, Fr. Seraphim said of certain pockets of the Catacomb Church in Russia: “There are some places where nuns run the services because there are no priests, and they’re convinced that everybody is a heretic but themselves. This is apparently the same spirit that exists in some places in Greece.”

[\[b\]](#) See [pp. 408–9 above](#).

#### [Chapter 75. TOWARD THE RESTORATION OF OPTINA](#)

[\[a\]](#) That is, the Russian alphabet used before the Bolshevik take-over of Russia, when the Communists removed four letters.

[b] This museum was set up inside the guesthouse in which Dostoyevsky had stayed during his visit to Optina.

[c] The year 1990 also marked the canonization of the Optina Elders by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. In 1996 the Optina Elders were locally canonized in Optina, and in 2000 they were universally canonized in Moscow by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).

## Chapter 76. MONASTIC BOOKS

[a] *Kalyve*: hermit's cell.

[b] The St. Herman Brotherhood published these after Fr. Seraphim's repose, in *Little Russian Philokalia, vol. 4: St. Paisius Velichkovsky* (1994).

[c] After the publication of the book, Fr. Seraphim's service was translated into Slavonic and used on Mount Athos during the local canonization of Blessed Paisius.

[d] Note that Fr. Seraphim preceded the phrase "ascend... to the heights of prayer" with a phrase on being *preserved by humility*. This is characteristic of the great caution with which Fr. Seraphim approached the spiritual ascent, since one can think one is on the heights of prayer while actually being in a state of delusion fed by vainglory.

## Chapter 77. ORTHODOXY AND THE RELIGION OF THE FUTURE

[a] Although not mentioned in *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, the twentieth-century guru Sri Aurobindo was another major proponent of modern evolutionism according to Hindu metaphysics.

[b] This "conclusion" became part of the introduction when Fr. Seraphim

compiled the book in its final form.

## [Chapter 78. WESTERN ORTHODOX ROOTS](#)

[a] Included in Fr. Seraphim's report were the following Saints: St. Cletus, Pope of Rome (April 26); St. Callistus, Pope of Rome († ca. 218–22, April 14); St. Julius, Pope of Rome (†352, April 12); St. Scholastica († ca. 543, Feb. 10); St. Eugenius, Bishop of Carthage (†505, July 13); St. Ursula (third century?, Oct. 21); and St. Eligius, Bishop of Noyon (†659, Dec. 1).

[b] Recorded in the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory the Great, Book II.

[c] After the publication of this book in 1988, some of the Saints' Lives included in it were translated into Greek and published by Xeropotamou Monastery on Mount Athos (see *Agioreitiki Martyria* [June–November 1991], pp. 205–8). A complete Romanian edition of the book was published in Bucharest in 2004, and a complete Russian edition was published in Moscow in 2005. The St. Herman Brotherhood plans to publish a new English edition of the book under the title *The Spiritual World of St. Gregory of Tours*.

## **PART IX**

### **Chapter 79. THE INHERITANCE OF THE SERBIAN BISHOP SAVA**

[a] Later Archbishop Hilarion of Australia and New Zealand. In 2008 he was elected as chief hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad.

[b] When addressed to a hierarch-saint like Archbishop John, the hymn is worded differently than it is to a monk-saint like St. Herman (see pp. [317](#), [419](#) above). In this case, the hymn would be sung as follows: “We magnify thee, our holy Hierarch John, and we honor thy holy memory: for thou dost pray for us to Christ our God.”

### **Chapter 80. A PROPHET OF SUFFERING ORTHODOXY**

[a] Ten years later, Fr. Michael Pomazansky corroborated Archbishop John’s assessment. In a letter Fr. Seraphim noted: “We just asked Fr. Michael Pomazansky: *who* is an authentic Orthodox theological guide for today, and his reply: Archbishop Averky.” (Letter to Alexey Young, November 4, 1975).

[b] Archbishop Andrew of New Diveyevo, formerly Fr. Adrian.

[c] Archimandrite Panteleimon (†1984) was the co-founder of Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville. He is not to be confused with the aforementioned Archimandrite Panteleimon of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Boston.

[d] This photograph is reproduced on [p. 732 above](#).

[e] “Psalm 67:1.

[f] The Holy Fathers have seen the “Woman clothed with the sun” who flees into the wilderness (Apocalypse, ch. 12) as a symbol of the Church of the last times.

This teaching was explicated by Archbishop Averky in his commentary on the book of the Apocalypse, which was translated into English by Fr. Seraphim and published by the St. Herman Brotherhood in 1985.

[g] In attributing a “golden mouth” to Archbishop Averky, Fr. Seraphim was likening him to St. John Chrysostom. The Greek title *chrysostomos* means “golden-mouthed.”

## Chapter 81. THE ROYAL PATH

[a] *Typica*: a service usually chanted in place of the Divine Liturgy, consisting of Psalms, the Beatitudes, the Nicene Creed, and other hymns and prayers.

[b] This text had been written by the Platina fathers themselves.

[c] *Matushka*: an endearing term for a nun or the wife of a clergyman.

[d] That is, during the above-mentioned visit of Archbishop Anthony, Bishop Nektary, and Deacon Andrew Papkov.

[e] New Diveyevo Convent in Spring Valley, New York.

[f] On Sergei Kourdakov, see [pp. 656–57 above](#).

## Chapter 82. ORDINATION

[a] See Fr. Seraphim’s discussion of this in *Vita Patrum*, pp. 125–26.

[b] This was the visit of December 4/17 described [above \(p. 443\)](#), during which a reconciliation had occurred between Archbishop Anthony and the Brotherhood.

[c] American Automobile Association.

[d] These frescoes had been painted after the Brotherhood had moved away from

San Francisco.

[e] A reference to Acts, ch. 2, in which, on the day of Pentecost, the Apostles are accused of being “full of new wine” after having been filled with the Holy Spirit.

[f] *Prosphora*: holy bread for use in the Divine Liturgy.

[g] I.e., because Barbara sang on the kliros all the parts of the Liturgy designated for the choir.

[h] In this case, a prayer service for the finding of water.

[i] Five years later, on Great Wednesday of 2007, he was tonsured into the Great Schema, becoming a hieroschemamonk. He now resides at a skete of the St. Gregory Palamas Monastery in Hayesville, Ohio.

[j] The commemoration day of St. Ambrose of Milan, December 7/20, 2002.

## **PART X**

### **Chapter 83. MISSIONS**

[a] See [pp. 458–59 above](#).

[b] *Anaphora*: the most solemn part of the Divine Liturgy, which culminates in the consecration of the Holy Gifts.

[c] Fr. Herman was at that time visiting Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville. See [p. 857 below](#).

[d] Together with the other Optina Elders, Elder Nikon was later canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).

[e] I.e., Archbishop Vitaly of Jordanville.

[f] St. John Chrysostom and other Holy Fathers considered Genesis to be a prophetic book since its author, the Prophet Moses, was a prophet of things of the past. See Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, pp. 91–94.

### **Chapter 84. PASTORAL GUIDANCE**

[a] See full quote on [p. 475 above](#).

[b] This is from the passages that Fr. Seraphim selected and translated from the book of Saints Barsanuphius and John, published after Fr. Seraphim’s repose under the title *Guidance Toward Spiritual Life*.

[c] In this article, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “Among Western converts to Orthodoxy... there is indeed a temptation to speak too freely of ‘heresy’ and ‘heretics,’ and to



make the errors of the non-Orthodox an excuse for a certain pharisaic smugness about our own ‘Orthodoxy.’ Even when it is worded in a theologically correct manner, this attitude is *spiritually wrong* and helps to drive away from the Orthodox Church many who would otherwise be attracted to it.” (“In Defense of Fr. Dimitry Dudko,” *The Orthodox Word*, no. 92 [1980], p. 131.)

#### [Chapter 85. A MAN OF THE HEART](#)

[a] *Prokimenon*: a liturgical verse, usually from the Psalms, which is to be read and then sung.

[b] It was about his second hike up the hill on that day that Fr. Seraphim wrote in his Chronicle: “Walking up the hill on Friday night, Fr. Seraphim is exhausted but deeply joyful.” See [pp. 602–3 above](#).

#### [Chapter 86. ORTHODOXY OF THE HEART](#)

[a] Cf. Matthew 24:12.

[b] This Russian woman was Fr. Herman’s mother, Nina.

[c] Fr. Seraphim later printed this letter in *The Orthodox Word*, no. 87 (1979), pp. 146, 177. At the end of the letter the address of the parish in Degeya, Uganda was printed, along with indications of how Orthodox Christians in the West could help.

[d] In the 1990s and up to today, the greatest persecution of Christians in Africa has been occurring under the totalitarian Muslim government of Sudan. For current information, see *The Voice of the Martyrs* newsletter.

#### [Chapter 88. CONVERTS](#)

[a] Here Fr. Seraphim was thinking of priests like Fr. Grigori Kravchina of the

Church of St. Seraphim in Seaside, the first Orthodox priest he had talked to.

## [Chapter 89. ACROSS THE COUNTRY](#)

[a] Having lived in a wilderness monastery for many years, St. Sergius was sent for by St. Alexey, Metropolitan of Moscow, who tried to persuade him to be consecrated bishop and become his successor. Despite much urging by the Metropolitan, St. Sergius continued to refuse the elevation, and St. Alexey, fearing that St. Sergius might disappear entirely into the wilderness, gave up his entreaty and allowed him to return to his monastery. When Metropolitan Alexey died shortly thereafter, the local princes once more tried to persuade St. Sergius to accept the rank of bishop, but he was adamant in his refusal.

[b] On June 29/July 12, 1978.

[c] Ayatollah Khomeini, an Iranian Muslim leader with a long gray beard, was at that time very much in the news.

[d] The Cathedral of the Orthodox Church in America (formerly the American Metropolia) in Cleveland, Ohio.

[e] A society founded by Archbishop John in 1959.

[f] Fr. Seraphim's godson, the former Br. Laurence, who had lived for three years at the St. Herman Monastery.

[g] The same man who had converted Fr. Herman.

[h] The aforementioned co-founder of the Jordanville monastery; reposed in 1984.

[i] This prayer was actually spoken in Russian, forming a rhymed couplet.

[j] Formerly Igor Kapral, the spiritual son of Bishop Sava mentioned earlier (see [p. 722](#)). In 1984 he was consecrated a bishop.

[k] Cf. I Peter 3:15.

[l] *Proskomedia*: preparation of the Holy Gifts before Divine Liturgy.

[m] The complete text of this talk was later published in *The Orthodox Word*, no. 94 (1980), pp. 211–36.

[n] I.e., the headquarters of the Synod of the Russian Church Abroad on Park Avenue in New York City.

[o] That is, they read labels to see whether or not foods have oil or dairy products in them, and thus determine whether they are strictly “lenten.”

[p] *Litia* here refers to a service of commemoration of the dead.

[q] Metropolitan Evlogy Georgievsky of Paris (†1946). See the note on [p. 228 above](#).

## [Chapter 90. ST. XENIA’S SISTERS](#)

[a] Later, in 1988, she was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).

[b] *Kamilavka*: monastic hat.

[c] *Paramon*: a square piece of cloth, worn by tonsured monks and nuns, on which are embroidered a cross and the words “I bear on my body the wounds of Christ.”

[d] Fr. Seraphim started to translate St. Theophan the Recluse’s most popular

book, *The Path to Salvation*, to be serialized in *Orthodox America* and then to be published in book form. Before his death he completed a third of it. In 1996 the St. Herman Brotherhood published the entire book, including the portion translated by Fr. Seraphim.

[\[e\]](#) The books published by St. Xenia Skete during Fr. Seraphim's lifetime included *Blessed Athanasia: Disciple of St. Seraphim* (1980), and *Maria of Olonets: Desert-Dweller of the Northern Forests* (1981).

## PART XI

### Chapter 91. THE SOUL AFTER DEATH

[a] As Fr. Seraphim pointed out in his “Answer to a Critic,” several Holy Fathers of the *Philokalia* talk about the toll-houses, including St. Hesychius the Presbyter, St. Diadochos of Photiki, St. John of Karpathos, St. Abba Dorotheus of Gaza, St. Theognostos, and St. Peter Damascene.

### Chapter 92. THEOLOGY ABOVE FASHIONS

[a] During the same year, 1976, Fr. Seraphim used many ideas from this talk in writing his article “The Orthodox Theology of Archbishop John Maximovitch,” first published in the *St. Herman Calendar*, and later as the introduction to *The Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, 1978.

[b] The service was composed by Archimandrite Ambrose Pogodin. It was presented by Archbishop John to the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, and was approved by them to be used in churches (Synodal Document of May 2/15, 1955). An English translation of it has been published in the revised edition of *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church* (St. Herman Brotherhood, 1996), pp. 117—38.

[c] Reprinted in 1994 with the title *The First-Created Man*.

[d] Fr. Seraphim’s English Akathist was used as the basis for the Akathist in the official Church service to Archbishop John in the Slavonic language, published by Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville after Archbishop John’s canonization.

In 1987, the St. Herman Brotherhood published an expanded version of *Blessed John*, under the title *Blessed John the Wonderworker*. This book, which includes the *prima vita* of Archbishop John and other articles by Fr. Seraphim,

has now been published in Russian, Greek, Serbian, and Romanian.

[e] Fr. Michael also set forth the Orthodox teaching on redemption in his article “Orthodox Dogmatic Theology in the Exposition of Macarius, Metropolitan of Moscow: The Dogma of Redemption,” in *Pravoslavny Put’ (The Orthodox Way)* (Jordanville, New York: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1972), pp. 3–18 (in Russian).

[f] In a letter Fr. Seraphim noted that Fr. Michael, being unfamiliar with the scientific side of the creation/evolution issue, felt “out of his depth” in presenting the full Patristic teaching on creation. The resulting lack in Fr. Michael’s book is more than made up for by Fr. Seraphim’s own work on creation: *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*. (Fr. Seraphim’s note on Fr. Michael is found on p. 534 of that book.)

[g] In 1992 the St. Herman Brotherhood published a new Russian edition of *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* incorporating Fr. Michael’s changes and additions, and sent it in large quantities into Russia and Bulgaria. In 2009 a Romanian edition was published in Bucharest.

### [Chapter 93. THE RESURRECTION OF HOLY RUSSIA](#)

[a] At that time the Tsar had not been canonized, either in Russia or abroad.

[b] After Fr. Seraphim’s death, the St. Herman Brotherhood learned in Russia that Fr. Dimitry had in fact done this to save a group of young men who were being persecuted.

[c] The story of Fr. George’s prison ordeal, together with the complete text of his Lenten Sermons, was published by the St. Herman Brotherhood in 1997 under the title *Christ Is Calling You!* After his repose, his life and an account of his last days were published in *The Orthodox Word*, no. 255 (2007), pp. 155–77.

[d] Canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in 1996.

[e] From the Paschal Canon, Canticle 8.

#### Chapter 94. TODAY IN RUSSIA, TOMORROW IN AMERICA

[a] American Civil Liberties Union.

[b] The difference between international Communism and U.N. globalism is not as real as one might think. Of the seventeen individuals identified by the U.S. State Department as having shaped U.S. policy leading to the creation of the United Nations, all but one were later identified as secret members of the Communist Party U.S.A. The U.N.'s first Secretary General, who orchestrated the conference that drew up the U.N. Charter, was a man later convicted as a Soviet agent: Alger Hiss.

[c] This is corroborated in Malachi Martin's study of demonic possession, *Hostage to the Devil* (New York: Harper & Row, Perennial Library, 1987, pp. 83-171), in which a priest becomes possessed through harboring vague religious ideas and feelings (e.g., worship of the spirit of the earth) he had received through the teachings of Teilhard de Chardin.

#### Chapter 95. SANTA CRUZ

[a] The future Metropolitan Jonah, chief hierarch of the Orthodox Church in America.

[b] The future Hieromonk James.

[c] For this talk, Fr. Seraphim generally followed the written outline of his talk at the 1978 St. Herman Summer Pilgrimage (see [p. 787 above](#)).

[d] This part of Fr. Seraphim's talk has been quoted in the previous chapter.

[e] Fr. Seraphim is referring to the Patristic interpretation of II Thessalonians 2:4 regarding the Antichrist: *So that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself to be God*. See St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* V, 25:3–4; St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Homilies* 15:12; and St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 4:26.

[f] This observation has become especially relevant today, when an influential segment of Jews in Israel has been actively working toward the rebuilding of the temple, and the Israeli government has come out in favor of the project.

[g] Cf. Romans 11:12-15.

[h] According to St. John Damascene, at the end of the world “Enoch and Elias the Thesbite will be sent and they shall *turn the heart of the fathers to the children* (Malachi 4:6), that is to say, turn the synagogue to the Lord Jesus Christ and the preaching of the Apostles.” (*Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 4:26.)

[i] The same young man whom Fr. Seraphim described in the journal of his trip across the country ([p. 860 above](#)).

[j] Cf. Psalm 62:8.

## [Chapter 96. FORMING YOUNG SOULS](#)

[a] In his “Survival Course,” Fr. Seraphim said: “We know that Elder Macarius of Optina [1788–1860], before he became a monk, played the violin. Obviously, he played those musical pieces which were around at that time, 1810 or so. In the West, what did they have?—Paganini, Mozart, Boccherini, etc.”

[b] This was probably Dr. Henry Cord Meyer, who taught German and European History at Pomona. Meyer was the academic mentor of the history major Kaizo



Kubo, who greatly admired him. He was the same professor, mentioned earlier, who was on a year's leave from Pomona when Kaizo's tragedy occurred.

[c] Old Testament, New Testament (using Archbishop Averky's textbook), Apologetics (I. M. Andreyev's textbook), Church History (Nicholas Talberg's textbook), Patrology, Dogmatic Theology (Fr. Michael Pomazansky's textbook), Homiletics (Archbishop Averky's textbook), Canon Law, Liturgics, Pastoral Theology, Moral Theology, etc.

[d] The 1951 British version with Alastair Sim as Scrooge.

[e] The father of the aforementioned seminarian George.

#### [Chapter 97. HEAVENLY VISITATIONS](#)

[a] *Panagia* (literally, "All-Holy") here refers to an icon of the Mother of God worn by a bishop.

[b] Philip Blyth was later ordained to the priesthood and served at the Surety of Sinners mission in Redding. He reposed on December 5/18, 2002.

## PART XII

### Chapter 99. HOPE

[a] This was written a few months before Archbishop Averky's repose in 1976.

[b] The agenda of the failed "Living Church" or "Renovationist" movement in Russia included making provisions for a married episcopacy and the remarriage of widowed clergy, as well as instituting numerous liturgical reforms.

[c] See [p. 228 above](#).

[d] Formerly Bishop Laurus Skurla of Jordanville, mentioned earlier.

[e] It is worthy of note that Metropolitan Laurus, who at the end of his life was pivotal in effecting the reunion of the separated parts of the Russian Orthodox Church, was praised by Fr. Seraphim over three decades earlier for what the latter called "several invaluable qualities: simplicity, honesty, 'unpoliticalness' (despite being in the center of the Synod!), and being a little 'not of this world.'" (Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young, June 16, 1976.)

[f] This was Fr. Paul O'Callaghan, assistant pastor of St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral in Los Angeles, later dean of St. George Cathedral in Wichita, Kansas.

[g] I.e., because Fr. Dimitry was a priest of the Moscow Patriarchate.

### Chapter 100. THE DEATH KNELL

[a] Cf. Luke 17:21.

### Chapter 101. AD ASTERA!

[a] *Epigonation*: liturgical thigh-shield.

[b] Latin for “To the stars! To the stars!” From the saying *Per aspera ad astra* (“Through difficulties to the stars”).

#### [Chapter 102. REPOSE](#)

[a] In August of 1983, less than a year after Fr. Seraphim’s repose, brothers from the St. Herman Monastery arrived on Spruce Island, Alaska — the island St. Herman named “New Valaam” — and soon thereafter built a skete there dedicated to the Archangel Michael. Since that time the Brotherhood has maintained a continuous monastic presence on the island.

[b] This was Archimandrite Mitrophan’s icon. See [p. 221 above](#).

#### [Chapter 103. THE FORTY DAYS](#)

[a] See [p. 253 above](#).

[b] The evangelizers of the Slavic peoples, reposed in 869 and 885 respectively.

[c] Cf. Luke 2:30.

#### [Chapter 104. WITH THE SAINTS](#)

[a] Bishop Nektary reposed on January 24/February 6, 1983.

[b] See [p. 251 above](#).

[c] The church combined two Orthodox communities of Protestant background, formerly known as the Evangelical Orthodox Church and the Holy Orthodox Church. Before coming together as one church, the communities had been located in the same area and had stayed closely connected, the pastor mentioned

above being the leader of the latter group.

[d] An acronym for the Greek words *mysterion*, *agape*, *nous*, *sophia*.

[e] Named after the Archangel Raphael, whose name means “God has healed,” and who appears in the book of Tobit as an angel of healing.

[f] For more details on the entrance of the Holy Order of MANS/Christ the Saviour Brotherhood into the Orthodox Church, see Hieromonk Jonah Paffhausen, “The Doors of Repentance,” *Again* magazine, vol. 23, no. 1 (2001), pp. 23–26.

[g] This was Eugene’s letter to his parents (quoted in [ch. 18 above](#)) in which he explained his reasons for leaving the academic world.

[h] This was the place of the grave of Archimandrite Gerasim, located near his cabin. In 1995 an Orthodox priest from Kodiak, Archpriest Peter Kreta, was buried next to Fr. Gerasim. Hence this place is referred to here as a “graveyard.”

[i] St. Michael’s Skete, located about four miles from Monk’s Lagoon, was founded in 1983 by the St. Herman Brotherhood. The Brotherhood has had a continuous monastic presence at the skete since that time.

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