

# Fr. Seraphim (Rose), Reception of Converts into the Church and “Corrective Baptism”

## Introduction

The reception of the heterodox (non-Orthodox Christians) into the Orthodox Church remains a hotly debated topic, particularly in America and in other lands where overlapping Orthodox jurisdictions may have differing practices influenced by the historical circumstances of their respective countries of origin. If the reception of the heterodox into the Orthodox Church is a contentious topic, even more so is the topic of “corrective baptism”. “Corrective baptism” refers to the practice of baptizing a person in the Orthodox Church who was previously received into the Orthodox Church by a method other than baptism without the canonical presuppositions for the application of economy<sup>1</sup>. These topics were debated just as much during the life of Fr. Seraphim (Rose) of Platina (+1982) as they are today so it should be of little surprise that there continues to be great interest in his views on these topics.

While he hasn’t been officially glorified, Fr. Seraphim is widely venerated as a saint by Orthodox Christians in America and perhaps even more so in traditional Orthodox countries<sup>2</sup>. Fr. Seraphim is also widely considered to be the first American-born convert to Orthodoxy to be venerated as a saint and in his writings he is well known for advocating the “royal path” of the Fathers on various topics while avoiding extremes on both sides. Fr. Seraphim is well known for his extensive patristic commentary on the book of Genesis in *Genesis, Creation, and Early Man* and on the topic of the departure of the soul in *The Soul After Death*. On the topic of baptism and the reception of converts, however, Fr. Seraphim did not publish anything of his own on the topic, neither books nor articles for his periodical *The Orthodox Word*. It is clear from his published writings and over 300 of his personal letters that have been made available, that he did not study the topic extensively nor did he claim to receive any divine revelation on the matter. When quotes from Fr. Seraphim on this topic have been shared in various articles, these quotes are typically derived from one or two of his personal letters but are presented without clearly explaining the context of his words.

The purpose of this article is to review Fr. Seraphim’s views on the reception of converts and “corrective baptism” more comprehensively from the articles he personally published in *The Orthodox Word*, statements he made in published writings, and the more than 300 personal letters from Fr. Seraphim that have been made public. To better understand Fr. Seraphim’s views on this topic it is first important to understand the circumstances of his own reception into the Church and the ecclesiastical situation in ROCOR at the time of his writing.

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<sup>1</sup> See *On the Reception of the Heterodox into the Orthodox Church: The Patristic Consensus and Criteria* (afterwards referred to as ORHOC), chapter 5. In this text, “corrective baptism” is placed in quotation marks as it is simply baptism. “Corrective baptism” isn’t a term found in the canons and Fathers but rather refers to the baptism of someone not already baptized in the Orthodox Church in three full immersions in the name of the Holy Trinity.

<sup>2</sup> Heers, “Fr. Seraphim Rose in Greece” and Damascene, *Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works*, p. XIII.

## Fr. Seraphim's Reception into the Orthodox Church

Eugene Rose (the future Fr. Seraphim) was baptized and confirmed by Protestant Methodists when he was in the eighth grade.<sup>3</sup> When Eugene converted to Orthodoxy in 1962, Fr. Nicholas Dombrovsky received him by chrismation at the "Joy of All Who Sorrow" Cathedral following the instructions of Archbishop Tikhon (Troitsky) (+1963) of San Francisco and Western America of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR).<sup>4</sup> His reception by chrismation rather than by baptism at this time is not surprising. Prior to the Moscow Council of 1666-1667, converts to Orthodoxy in Russia were received by baptism. Due to unfortunate heterodox influences in Russia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, "The rite for the reception of Latins into the Orthodox Church was now completely changed,"<sup>5</sup> and the reception of the heterodox by baptism ceased to be the standard practice in Russia.<sup>6</sup> The priests' service books were modified accordingly and private publishing houses were forbidden in order to prevent the publication of teachings contrary to the official positions of the Holy Synod. Many holy people in Russia after the 17<sup>th</sup> century took for granted that their services books were correct since they were endorsed by the Holy Synod and simply followed the practice of receiving the heterodox by chrismation (or even by confession of faith) if they had been baptized by the heterodox in water in the name of the Holy Trinity. It wasn't until 1971, nine years after Fr. Seraphim's reception, that the Synod of ROCOR evaluated the history and canons relevant to the reception of converts and recognized that the traditional practice of the Church was to receive all converts by baptism. It was then that ROCOR issued a decree to the effect that all converts should be received by baptism unless economy was warranted out of necessity.<sup>7</sup>

Considering the practice of Russia after the 1667 Council and Eugene's own reception by chrismation, it should be of no surprise that Eugene would say in a letter on May 5/18, 1970, to Craig (the future Fr. Alexey Young) and his wife Susan regarding the reception of their son into the Church that "if as I presume he has been baptized (you should supply his baptismal certificate too) [he] will be received by chrismation."<sup>8</sup> This was one year prior to ROCOR's decree on the reception of converts. At this time, Eugene was only a tonsured Reader, he had

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<sup>3</sup> Damascene, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 199, footnote.

<sup>5</sup> Pogodin, "On the Question of the Order of Reception of Persons into the Orthodox Church, Coming to Her from Other Christian Churches," Ch. 2.

<sup>6</sup> See ORHOC, Ch. 9, 11, and 13.

<sup>7</sup> Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (1971).

<sup>8</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Craig and Susan, May 5/18, 1970. Unless otherwise stated, all references to Fr. Seraphim's letters are taken from the collection posted on <https://proza.ru/2016/10/04/1512>. This is the most comprehensive and complete collection of Fr. Seraphim's letters that are currently available. Fr. Seraphim's spiritual child, Fr. Alexey Young (now Hieroschemamonk Ambrose), also published a book containing letters Fr. Seraphim wrote directly to him, but in an edited and sometimes abbreviated form compared to what has been published at the site referenced above. In cases where the present article cites helpful clarifications and footnotes from Fr. Alexey's book, the source is noted.

not yet been tonsured into monasticism, and he was simply informing this family of the common practice in ROCOR at that time.

## Publications of Fr. Seraphim on the Reception of Converts

Eugene Rose and his friend Gleb Podmoshensky (the future Fr. Herman) published the first edition of their periodical *The Orthodox Word* in 1965<sup>9</sup> with the blessing of St. John (Maximovitch), who was at that time the Archbishop of Western America and San Francisco. In 1965, on the Feast of the Annunciation, Eugene was ordained a Reader by St. John<sup>10</sup> who reposed over a year later on June 19/July 2, 1966. In 1967, Eugene and his friend Gleb acquired the land for the future St. Herman's Monastery<sup>11</sup> in Platina, CA where they then moved on the eve of the Dormition feast, August 15/28, 1969.<sup>12</sup> Eugene and Gleb were tonsured into monasticism on October 14/27, 1970 by Archimandrite Spyridon (Efimov) (a spiritual child of St. John<sup>13</sup>) and Bishop Nektary (Kontzevitch).<sup>14</sup> On Dec 20, 1976/Jan 2, 1977, Fr. Seraphim was ordained to the diaconate<sup>15</sup> and on April 11/24, 1977 he was ordained to the priesthood by Bp. Nektary of ROCOR.<sup>16</sup> According to the author of his Life, Hieromonk Damascene (Christensen), after Fr. Seraphim's ordination to the priesthood "he baptized all the people whom he received into the Church, including those formerly baptized into non-Orthodox confessions."<sup>17</sup> When reading various statements from Fr. Seraphim in published writings and correspondence, it is helpful to understand his words in the context of his development from a new convert through his tonsure to monasticism and his ordination to the priesthood.

While Fr. Seraphim did not author any books or articles on the subject of the reception of converts and "corrective baptism", he did publish articles and books by and about the saints, and on current events in Church life, that are relevant to this topic. Two of the most important saints of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that upheld the teaching that all converts should be received into the Orthodox Church by baptism were St. Paisius (Velichkovsky) (+1794) and St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite (+1809). In 1976, St. Herman's Brotherhood published the book *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky: The Man Behind the Philokalia*. Fr. Seraphim wrote the following in an introduction to this most important work:

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<sup>9</sup> *The Orthodox Word* 1, No. 1, January-February, 1965.

<sup>10</sup> Damascene, op. cit., p. 317.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 348

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 369.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 430-431.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 762.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 770.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 200, footnote.

[For] Orthodox Christians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there is no more important Holy Father of recent times than Blessed Paisius Velichkovsy. 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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>18</sup>

On the influence of St. Paisius on the patristic and hesychastic revival in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, Fr. Seraphim continued:

Having come to spiritual maturity, Blessed Paisius then himself became a source and seedbed for the great monastic and patristic revival of Holy Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. True patristic spirituality and its hesychast tradition, to be sure, never died out in Russia, not even in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, that age of pseudo-enlightenment when the Empress Catherine closed most of the Orthodox monasteries and strictly regulated the rest of them; no, it remained and provided the fertile ground on which the disciples and the example of Blessed Paisius were to bear such great spiritual fruits. But it required the patristic bees of the great Elder Paisius, bringing back the pollen of the true and free tradition of Orthodoxy under the much more favorable climate of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to cause the native Russian trees to give forth such a marvelous abundance of spiritual fruit.<sup>19</sup>

Regarding the version of the Life of St. Paisius that St. Herman's Monastery published, Fr. Seraphim said:

The Life of Elder Paisius which we here present was written by his own disciples, chiefly by Schema-monk Metrophanes of Niamets Monastery, and was published in its present form exactly 125 years ago (1847) by the God-bearing Elders of Optina Monastery as the first of the texts of the veritable patristic revival which they inspired in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia.<sup>20</sup>

Fr. Seraphim's regard for St. Paisius (Velichkovsky) and recognition of his central role in the patristic and hesychastic revival that occurred in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, largely due to Optina Monastery's publication of this Life, are notable in that this Life clearly states that St. Paisius "was so apprehensive about heresies and schisms that all who were converted, whether from

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<sup>18</sup> Metrophanes, *Blessed Paisius Velichovsky: The Man Behind the Philolalia*, p. 13

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15,

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

sects or from the western Latin heresies, he baptized.”<sup>21</sup> Neither Fr. Seraphim nor the Optina Elders appear to have expressed disagreement with St. Paisius’ position that all converts to Orthodoxy should be received by baptism, despite the fact that the Church in Russia had, prior to St. Paisius, adopted a contrary teaching at the Moscow Council of 1666-1667.

St. Paisius (Velichkovsky) was the spiritual father of Fr. Dorotheos Voulismas who was appointed by the Patriarch of Constantinople to review *The Rudder* of St. Nikodemos which contains the canons of the Church and the commentary of St. Nikodemos, which include all of the canons relevant to the reception of converts into the Church. St. Paisius corresponded with Voulismas and the Kollyvades Fathers<sup>22</sup> regarding the reception of converts into the Church and they agreed that all converts should be received into the Orthodox Church by baptism in three full immersions.<sup>23, 24</sup> At the request of St. Paisius, Voulismas prepared a defense of the reception of Latins and Uniates by baptism, which was then translated into Romanian and published.

St. Paisius was originally from Russia but fled to Mt. Athos in 1746 to become a monk after a spiritually unfruitful education at the Kiev Academy.<sup>25</sup> St. Paisius remained on Mt. Athos until 1763, after which St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite (+1809) arrived and continued his work of seeking out and studying the canons and patristic writings while living a life of hesychasm. While St. Nikodemos produced an abundance of writings, he is perhaps best known for his compilation of, and commentary on, the canons of the Church in *The Rudder*. As St. Paisius inspired the patristic and hesychastic revival amongst the Slavs, St. Nikodemos did the same for the Greeks. In *The Rudder*, St. Nikodemos explains why, based on the canons, the Latins must be

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 158. Also serialized in *The Orthodox Word* 10, no. 5 (58), September-October, 1974, p. 203.

<sup>22</sup> The Kollyvades Fathers in the eighteenth century on Mt. Athos defended the teachings and way of life of the Holy Fathers in the face of Westernizing influences and departures from Holy Tradition. They are named Kollyvades after the boiled wheat, or kollyva, used at memorial services due to their involvement in the dispute on the Holy Mountain over praying memorial services on Sundays, the day of the Resurrection. The Kollyvades Fathers spoke out against the praying of memorial prayers on Sundays instead of Saturdays when memorial prayers are appointed to be prayed. The Kollyvades Fathers were known for their emphasis on hesychasm, noetic prayer, the importance of frequent communion, and the importance of receiving the heterodox by baptism. Among the Kollyvades Fathers are many Athonite saints including St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, St. Makarios of Corinth, St. Athanasios Parios, St. Kosmas Aitolos, St. Nektarios of Aegina, St. Sabbas of Kalymnos, St. Paisius (Velitchkovsky), and St. Nicholas Planas.

<sup>23</sup> See in Greek Οι Κολλυβάδες και ο Δωρόθεος Βουλησιμάς. Το ζήτημα της “ανακρίσεως” του Πηδαλιού και του Κανονικού (Ιερά Μονή Παναγίας Χρυσοποδαριτίσσης Νεζερώ ν). The Kollyvades and Dorotheos Voulismas. The Case of the Examination of the Pedalion and the Canonikon (Holy Monastery of Panagia Chrysopodaritissa of Nezeron). An English translation of this text will be published in the future by Uncut Mountain Press.

<sup>24</sup> See also Heers, “St. Nikodemos, the Rudder and the Reception of Converts into the Orthodox Church: A Look at the Correspondence Between the Kollyvades Fathers & Dorotheos Voulismas.”

<sup>25</sup> Metrophanes, op. cit., p. 30, 57.

received into the Church by baptism since they are heretics and because they did not practice baptism as required by the canons, with three immersions in the name of the Holy Trinity.<sup>26</sup>

In the September-October, 1965 edition of *The Orthodox Word*, Eugene published an article on St. Nicodemos (Nikodemos) of the Holy Mountain written by John Mavros. In this edition, Eugene wrote the following introductory words on the significance of Mt. Athos and St. Nikodemos:

The noble brow of the Holy Mountain of Athos, where for a thousand years Orthodox monks and many nations have furnished numerous shining examples of the Orthodox spiritual life in practice, has itself become a standard and symbol of that spiritual life.

It has become a symbol, too, of faithfulness to the holy canons and traditions of the Orthodox Church. It was here that St. Nicodemos compiled the metaphorical *Rudder* of the Patristic canons that guide the ship of the Church on its stormy course through this world.

Our own age is a time of self-will and confusion that have spread from modern freethought into the Church of Christ herself, when even Orthodox hierarchs depart from the straight, narrow path of faithfulness to Holy Orthodoxy.

In such a time the spirit of Mt. Athos still speaks to Orthodox believers. To be Orthodox it is not enough to lead a "good" life, trusting to one's own judgment to determine what such a life is; it is not enough, even, to call oneself Orthodox, to believe the whole of Christian doctrine, and to profess fidelity to canonical Orthodoxy – if these are no more than words which one's actions belie.

There are laws of the spiritual life, and laws of religious practice as well as of doctrine. These are not the goals, but they are indispensable means to the goal of the Christian life. It is those who are faithful in spirit as well as letter, those who truly follow the guidance of this sure Rudder, who belong to the true Church of Christ, the ark of salvation.<sup>27</sup>

On the back of this edition of *The Orthodox Word* is a list of books available for sale which included a copy of *The Rudder* in English, indicating that Eugene had access to this important text even in 1965. In the article on St. Nikodemos printed in the periodical, it was clearly said

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<sup>26</sup> Agaprios and Nicodemus, *The Rudder (Pedalion)*, The 85 Canons of the Holy and Renowned Apostles, footnote 66 of Canon 46.

<sup>27</sup> *The Orthodox Word* 1, No. 5, September-October, 1965, p. 161.

that St. Nikodemos “believed the Roman Catholic Church to be totally deprived of grace and even of valid baptism.”<sup>28</sup>

In this same edition of *The Orthodox Word*, Eugene stated regarding St. Nikodemos and St. Paisius, in an article on *The Philokalia*:

With the French Revolution the flood of atheism set out on its course throughout the world, and subsequently every nation was found to be more or less receptive to it. As against this the words of St. Nicodemos set forth the true Christian spiritual life for those who, in the new age of universal apostasy, wished to be conscious, mindful Christians. At the same time another Athonite, Starets Paisiy Velichovsky, then in Moldavia, was living this same spiritual life in the tradition of the Holy Fathers, and translating the *Philokalia* into Slavonic... It is the complementary labors of St. Nicodemos and Starets Paisy that have made the riches of Orthodox spirituality available to the Godseekers of modern times.<sup>29</sup>

In the same 1965 periodical, Eugene published the text “The True Church of Christ” by St. Sebastian (Dabovich) of Jackson and San Francisco (+1940). In this article, St. Sebastian stated:

[For a] Priesthood to be lawful [the priest] must administer the Sacraments orderly, according to the rules of the Holy Church Catholic, not changing essential actions, as there are acts and conditions in the rites of Mysteries that are essential, without which a certain Sacrament may not be valid. Should a sacred minister violate an essential rule he is subject to degradation [deposition], if the violation has been intentional, or at least the Mystery is void of power. The [50<sup>th</sup> rule] of the Apostolic Canon enjoins, ‘Should anyone, bishop or presbyter, administer not three immersions in Baptism in commemoration of the death of the Lord, but one, let him be cast out.’ And those who were baptized by one immersion, it was ordered that they should be rebaptized.”<sup>30</sup>

Here, St. Sebastian clearly agrees with St. Nikodemos in the Rudder that those who are not baptized in three immersions are not baptized and remain in need of baptism. The fact that the Latins and Protestants ceased baptizing in three immersions as required by the canons was a major factor that led the Patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria, and Jerusalem to decree in 1755 that all converts must be received by baptism.<sup>31</sup> This is also a major reason why today “corrective baptisms” are performed, since most heterodox who are received into the Church by

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>30</sup> Dabovich, *The True Church of Christ*, p. 186.

<sup>31</sup> See ORHOC, ch. 15.

a method other than baptism never received the apostolic and canonical form of baptism from the heterodox, three immersions in the name of the Holy Trinity.<sup>32</sup>

In the November-December, 1971 edition of *The Orthodox Word*, Fr. Seraphim printed the 1971 Decree of the ROCOR Synod of Bishops regarding the reception of converts. This was a historically significant decree because ROCOR by that time had received many Greeks and was challenged by them to clarify the Church's historic teaching on the reception of converts. The Holy Synod recognized that historically converts from the Latins and Protestants were received by baptism until this practice was changed in Russia in the late 17<sup>th</sup> to early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries under Peter I. The decree published in *The Orthodox Word* stated:

With regard to Roman Catholics and those Protestants who claim to preserve baptism as a sacrament (for example, the Lutherans), in Russia since the time of Peter I the practice was introduced of receiving them without baptism, through a renunciation of heresy and the chrismation of Protestants and unconfirmed Catholics. Before Peter, Catholics were baptized in Russia. In Greece, the practice has also varied, but almost 300 years ago, after a certain interruption, the practice of baptizing converts from Catholicism and Protestantism was reintroduced. Those received in any other way have (sometimes) not been recognized in Greece as Orthodox. In many cases such children of our Russian Church were not even admitted to Holy Communion.

Having in view this circumstance and also the current growth of the ecumenist heresy, which attempts completely to erase the difference between Orthodoxy and any heresy – so that the Moscow Patriarchate, notwithstanding the holy canons, has even issued a decree permitting Roman Catholics to receive communion (in certain cases) – the Sobor of Bishops acknowledges the necessity of introducing a stricter practice, i.e. to baptize all heretics who come to the Church, only in case of necessity and with the permission of the bishop allowing, for reasons of economy or pastoral condescension, any other practice with regard to certain persons...<sup>33</sup>

In the January-February, 1972, edition of *The Orthodox Word*, Fr. Seraphim published an article with the title "Orthodoxy in the Contemporary World: Archbishop, Priest, Parish Leave Metropolia Because of 'Modernism,' 'Renovationism,' 'Heresy'." This article was about the departure from the Orthodox Church in America (formerly known as the Metropolia before 1970) of Archbishop Amvrosy of Pittsburgh and his reception into ROCOR. In the OCA/ Metropolia, Abp. Amvrosy "was for 12 years Bishop of Sitka and Alaska, and for 7 months

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<sup>32</sup> As demonstrated in ORHOC, the historical reception of the heterodox by economy (by a means other than baptism) presupposed that at least the apostolic form of baptism had previously been administered (Canon 50 of the Holy Apostles, Canon 7 of the Second Ecumenical Council, Canon 95 of Trullo), yet reception of some specified heterodox groups by economy did not imply that the Orthodox believed baptisms performed by these groups imparted the Holy Spirit or granted remission of sins.

<sup>33</sup> *The Orthodox Word* 7, no. 6 (41), November-December, 1971, pp. 299-300.

Bishop of Japan.”<sup>34</sup> In “The Declaration of Archbishop Amvrosy (Feb. 29/Mar. 13, 1972)” that was published as part of this article, Abp. Amvrosy relates how one of his priests received a “corrective baptism” when joining ROCOR:

In early January the former priest of the Metropolia Sts. Peter and Paul church in Manville, N.J., Fr. George Lewis – a young convert who had been received by the Metropolia from the Uniates *as a priest* without ordination – was baptized, chrismated, and ordained as a priest in the Russian Church Outside of Russia in New York City.<sup>35</sup>

In May of 1981, just one year before his repose, in a talk given at the University of Santa Cruz which was later published under the title *God’s Revelation to the Human Heart*, Fr. Seraphim makes it clear that true sacraments are only to be found in the Orthodox Church and that there is no grace in the sacraments of Roman Catholics and Protestants:

“Of course, Roman Catholics and a few other groups *do* consider themselves to have sacraments. I myself would say that the true sacraments, in the sense that Christ founded them, are to be found only in the Orthodox Church.”<sup>36</sup>

“The Church of Christ is that which gives grace to people; and in the West, when Rome broke off from this Church, this grace was actually lost.”<sup>37</sup>

“In many cases, Anglicans are trying hard, but they’re starting from so far away. When you come to God, you can’t just ‘think it out’ or ‘devise a system’: you have to come into living contact with His grace. Therefore, the answer for Anglicanism is to come into contact with the Church.”<sup>38</sup>

These are the texts that Fr. Seraphim printed in *The Orthodox Word* and in the books published by St. Herman’s which touch on the topics of the reception of converts and “corrective baptism.” It is clear that Fr. Seraphim had the utmost reverence for St. Paisius (Velichkovsky) and St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, both of whom insisted that all converts be received by baptism and that the non-Orthodox cannot be received by any other means if they had not previously received the apostolic form of baptism (three full immersions in the name of the Holy Trinity). ROCOR’s decision in 1971 to receive all converts by baptism was also accepted

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<sup>34</sup> *The Orthodox Word* 8, no. 1 (42), January-February, 1972, p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>36</sup> Rose, *God’s Revelation to the Human Heart*, p.41.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44.

and published by Fr. Seraphim. As a notable example of “corrective baptism,” Fr. Seraphim published the account of Abp. Amvrosy’s reception into ROCOR from the Metropolia that included the “corrective baptism” of Fr. George Lewis. All of these texts were published by Fr. Seraphim without any footnotes or explanations that would suggest any disagreement with these writings. In fact, in the many books and editions of *The Orthodox Word* published by Fr. Seraphim from 1965 until his repose in 1982, not a single criticism can be found of the practice of receiving all converts by baptism or of the “corrective baptism” of converts received into the Church by another method. To understand why a few of his private letters seem to suggest a contrary view to what has been presented in the above publications, it is critical to understand the context of his personal letters and his concern over the influence of Fr. Panteleimon (Metropoulos) in ROCOR; and particularly the effort of Fr. Panteleimon to bring ROCOR into alignment with the extreme and sectarian ecclesiology of the Matthewite Greek Old Calendarists.

## Fr. Seraphim’s Letters, Fr. Panteleimon (Metropoulos), and Matthewite Ecclesiology in ROCOR

Fr. Panteleimon (Metropoulos) was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1935 and went to Mt. Athos in 1956 where he was tonsured into monasticism before returning to America just two years later in 1958.<sup>39,40</sup> He was ordained a deacon by Bishop Athenagoras (Kokkinakis) of Boston of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and was afterwards ordained a priest while on pilgrimage to Jerusalem.<sup>41</sup> In America, Fr. Panteleimon established Holy Transfiguration Monastery (HTM) which eventually settled in Brookline, MA near Boston.

In 1965, many among the faithful Orthodox Christians throughout the world were shocked and scandalized when Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI “lifted the anathemas” of AD 1054 without first resolving the dogmatic issues that led to the Great Schism between the Orthodox Church and the Papacy.<sup>42</sup> By 1054, the Pope of Rome and his followers had accepted the insertion of the heretical *Filioque* clause into the Nicene Creed, among other serious deviations from the Apostolic Tradition. Between 1054 and 1965, the Pope and his followers adopted many other heretical teachings including that of Purgatory, Papal Infallibility, and false teachings concerning Original Sin and the Immaculate Conception of the Theotokos. Patriarch Athenagoras, in lifting the anathemas against Pope Paul VI and all of his followers, acted unilaterally without the blessing and approval of the other local Orthodox churches and without regard for the fact that the Pope and his followers had not repented of the heresy that led to the Great Schism, nor of the heresies that they had adopted since. In response to this scandalous act, Metropolitan Philaret of ROCOR wrote three Sorrowful Epistles to Patriarch

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<sup>39</sup> *The Orthodox Word* 3, No. 1 (12), January-February, 1967, pp. 33-36.

<sup>40</sup> Find a Grave.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> “Conclusion of the II Vatican Council: Joint Catholic-Orthodox Declaration, Approved by Pope Paul vi and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople (7 December 1965) | Paul VI.”

Athenagoras to protest this act and to call him to repentance.<sup>43</sup> Seeing the patristic stance of Metropolitan Philaret and ROCOR, Fr. Panteleimon and Holy Transfiguration Monastery, along with several clergy and parishes that were associated with the monastery, petitioned ROCOR and were received that same year.

In the January-February, 1967 edition of *The Orthodox Word*, Fr. Seraphim wrote a very positive article about Fr. Panteleimon and HTM, praising them as “one of the few solid islands of genuine Orthodoxy in the vast sea of contemporary American religious life.”<sup>44</sup> Initially, Fr. Seraphim and Fr. Panteleimon seemed to be of one mind. Both were committed to establishing traditional Orthodox monasticism in America, both were committed to missionary activity to spread traditional Orthodoxy in the English speaking world, both were committed to translating and disseminating traditional Orthodox materials in the English language, and both were opposed to false Ecumenism and modernist innovations. Fr. Panteleimon visited the Fathers in Platina<sup>45</sup> and even sent money to help the Fathers purchase a new printing press.<sup>46</sup> Fr. Seraphim corresponded with Fr. Panteleimon very warmly in these years and even wrote to seek his advice, saying that the “spiritual bond” between St. Herman’s and HTM was “most close.”<sup>47</sup>

However, the relationship between the two monasteries became increasingly strained beginning in 1973 after Alexey Young, a close spiritual child of Fr. Seraphim, published articles on the Shroud of Turin and Evolution in his *Nikodemos* publication that drew harsh criticism from the Greeks that were aligned with Fr. Panteleimon and HTM. Fr. Seraphim had reviewed both articles and provided Alexey with plenty of feedback prior to publication.<sup>48</sup> But, while Fr. Seraphim was fairly pleased with the publication of the article on Evolution<sup>49</sup>, unfortunately Alexey sent out the article on the Shroud without addressing the problems and concerns Fr. Seraphim had raised.<sup>50</sup> Fr. Seraphim was not primarily upset that those within Fr. Panteleimon’s sphere of influence disagreed with these articles, but it was how they expressed their disagreement that disturbed him. By April 11/24, 1973, the attack against Alexey’s article from Fr. Panteleimon’s circle of influence became so intense that Fr. Seraphim wrote adamantly to Alexey stating:

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<sup>43</sup> *Metropolitan Philaret of New York: Zealous Confessor for the Faith*, pp. 103-142.

<sup>44</sup> *The Orthodox Word* 3, No 1 (12), January-February, 1967, pp. 33-36.

<sup>45</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Fr. Panteleimon, on April 19/May 2, 1970.

<sup>46</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Fr. Panteleimon, May 10/23, 1970.

<sup>47</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Fr. Panteleimon, Jan. 4/17, 1971

<sup>48</sup> See feedback Fr. Seraphim gave to Alexey on the Shroud article in his letters dated Feb. 13/26, 1973 and Feb. 25/Mar. 10, 1973. See feedback from Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young on Evolution in his letters dated Jan. 31/Feb. 13, 1973 and comments from Fr. Seraphim in his letter to Fr. Nektas Palassis on April 5/18, 1973.

<sup>49</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young, Jan. 31/Feb. 13, 1973.

<sup>50</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Fr. Nektas Palassis, April 9/22, 1973.

In strongest fashion we now urge you: DO NOT ENTER INTO ANY ARGUMENT WHATEVER WITH ANYONE OVER EVOLUTION OR THE SHROUD AT THIS TIME. If someone wants to provoke you into an argument, give him a reply such as you gave to Fr. Ephraim's letter,<sup>51</sup> BUT DO NOT ARGUE. No letters to bishops or anyone else either! The dust is too thick and arguing will only make it thicker, no matter who is right or wrong, and it will be spiritually very harmful for you. Don't even think about these two subjects until the dust settles, if you can help it.<sup>52</sup>

Between 1973-1975, it became increasingly clear that there were other problems with Fr. Panteleimon and his growing influence in ROCOR, far beyond simple disagreements about two articles. On Aug. 26/Sept. 8, 1975, Fr. Seraphim wrote to Dr. Alexander Kalomiros in Greece regarding these concerns and Fr. Panteleimon's efforts to join the Matthewites<sup>53</sup>:

From many sources – from Fr. Theodoritos [on Mt. Athos], from you, from people in this country (both Greeks and Americans, and also Russians), and from our own experience – we have now formed a rather complete picture of [Fr. Panteleimon], and this picture is a sad one. The man is very talented, very aware of contemporary Orthodox events, has the “right” view on most Orthodox matters, and has in general the correct “feeling” of Orthodoxy. From the beginning we have supported him, and our articles about him and his monastery in our Orthodox Word have undoubtedly helped him to grow and gain influence. It has therefore been with great sorrow that in the past two or three years we have begun to notice very dangerous characteristics in him. You wrote us in a letter two years ago that Fr. Panteleimon seems to want to have all Greek Orthodox in America under him; at about that same time we were noticing that he also wants to have all American Orthodox under him! He tried, for example, to ridicule and destroy our friend Alexey Young, whose small periodical *Nikodemos* is very helpful in inspiring Orthodox Americans and guiding them in the Faith – Fr. Panteleimon did not like it because it had one or two articles with which he disagreed. Fr. Nektas Palassis even threatened to attack Alexey publicly – a fellow Orthodox Christian and a sister periodical in the same Church!

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<sup>51</sup> Fr. Ephraim was at that time a priestmonk of Holy Transfiguration Monastery.

<sup>52</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young, April 11/24, 1973.

<sup>53</sup> Sometimes misspelled “Mathewites” in the published letters online. The Matthewites are a group (or now several groups that are not in communion with each other) of Greek Old Calendarists that broke from the Church of Greece (and all other local Orthodox churches) in 1935 following the adoption of the New Calendar by the Church of Greece in 1924. The Matthewites take their name from Bp. Matthew of Bresthena who held to the position that the Church of Greece became “schismatic” and their Mysteries became “without grace” as a result of the adoption of the New Calendar. While there have been several divisions among the Matthewites (as there have been in all of the Old Calendarist groups), their common view that the Church of Greece was “in schism,” “outside of the Church,” and “without grace” in their Mysteries eventually was applied to any local Orthodox church that adopted the New Calendar or remained in communion with a local church that was on the New Calendar.

Soon it became obvious why Fr. Panteleimon was doing this: he and his followers think that he alone is truly Orthodox in our Synod, that almost all the Russians are “backward,” theologically naive, and under “Western influence” – and only Fr. Panteleimon and his followers are true theologians, sophisticated, free of all un-Orthodox influences and able to lead everyone else in true Orthodoxy. He never attacked our Brotherhood directly, but after a while it became apparent that he was waging a campaign against us in private, and now we have the testimony of several people that he “warns” people against us, apparently because we are “Russians,” do not ask him for advice, and do not even have a telephone (so he can call us up and “correct” us whenever he feels like it!).

...From this attitude of Fr. Panteleimon’s, which is very foreign to what our instructors in the Faith have handed down to us, we have great apprehension for the future. It seems already clear what is going to happen: Fr. P. is going to seize upon some situation in which he can show himself to be “correct” in order to break communion with our Synod, then he will have himself made bishop by the Matthewites and will be the “only Orthodox bishop in America,” over Greeks and Americans and even over Russians. His position will not be entirely consistent, but many young Americans and Greek-Americans (and even some Russian-Americans) will follow him. Why? Because Fr. P. has a real “power” over a certain type of Orthodox Americans (not over real Greeks or Russians – I think you are right in this) – over those who are new or inexperienced or uncertain in the Faith, and need an “authority” to tell them what to do. We have long ago noticed that it is not possible to hold a “discussion” with Fr. Panteleimon – he is always “correct” no matter what he says or does, even though in actual fact we have found that he is quite ignorant in some areas of knowledge of the Holy Fathers – ignorant not just of facts but of the very tradition of the handing down of the Patristic teaching. This is to be expected, since he went to a modernist Greek seminary and “taught himself” the Holy Fathers – i.e., did not receive it in a continuous tradition from the past such as still exists in our Russian Church Abroad, even if our bishops and priests are not “sophisticated.” Fr. P. laughs at the seminary education of Jordanville – but even if it might be very simple, still this education continues to breathe [the] spirit of Orthodoxy, which Fr. Panteleimon does not entirely possess...

It would be very good if you could write an article for our Orthodox Word on how to keep alive the true savor of Orthodoxy in view of the many temptations besetting us today – without, however, mentioning as yet any names. If the worst does happen, and Fr. Panteleimon goes to the Matthewites, then we will probably have to publish an attack, against the Matthewites as an error “on the right hand,” with True Orthodoxy standing between the modernists on the one hand and the legalist fanatics on the other hand. But if Fr. P. does leave the Synod, it will be very difficult for us zealots who remain, because as you know some of our bishops are trying to maintain communion with “ecumenical Orthodoxy,” which is a disastrous and fatal path. But we trust that God allows all these difficult and bitter trials to come upon us for our salvation and so that we can be of help to others.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Dr. Alexander Kalomiros, Aug. 26/Sept. 8, 1975.

Fr. Seraphim expressed the concern, which turned out to be prophetic, that Fr. Panteleimon would eventually look for some excuse to break communion with the ROCOR Synod and join the Matthewites. In fact, only four years after Fr. Seraphim's repose, Fr. Panteleimon and several clergy and parishes associated with the monastery suddenly broke away from ROCOR to join the Old Calendarists.<sup>55</sup> On Sept. 29/Oct. 12, 1975, Fr. Seraphim wrote to Fr. Igor (Kapral) (later named Hilarion, who became the Metropolitan of ROCOR in 2008):

We are in correspondence with Dr. Alexander Kalomiros in Greece, who himself writes us despairing letters concerning the actions of Fr. Panteleimon in Greece (without the blessing or knowledge of his own bishop) in favor of the Matthewite schism, which Dr. Kalomiros calls real "fanaticism and legalism."<sup>56</sup>

As Fr. Damascene relates regarding Fr. Panteleimon and the effort to bring ROCOR into alignment with Matthewite ecclesiology:

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.<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Fr. Panteleimon and Holy Transfiguration Monastery eventually went into schism from ROCOR in 1986. At that time, several former monastics had accused Fr. Panteleimon of immorality and the decision was made by the Synod to suspend the monastery's clergy pending further investigation. When the monastery learned of this, they quickly joined two bishops, Akakios of Diavlia and Gabriel of the Cyclades, who were formerly part of the Old Calendarist Synod of Abp. Auxentios. The monastery had for years criticized the Synod of Abp. Auxentios in favor of the Matthewites, but since the Matthewites would not receive them, they joined these two bishops with the hope that they would consecrate bishops from among the clergy at HTM. After joining Abp. Auxentios, HTM had several of its hieromonks consecrated bishops for America and Canada and called themselves the Holy Orthodox Church of North America (HOCNA). HOCNA would eventually find itself out of communion with the Old Calendarists in Greece, after which they declared their own autonomy. For much of its history, this "autonomous" synod was comprised only of bishops who were under obedience to Fr. Panteleimon. This trajectory is not surprising when reading Fr. Seraphim's repeated concerns about the sectarian mentality of this group.

<sup>56</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Fr. Igor (Kapral), Sept. 29/Oct. 12, 1975.

<sup>57</sup> To be precise, the Matthewites refused to have communion with those local churches that adopted the New Calendar or were involved in the Ecumenical Movement, or who were in communion with local churches that were. We think "communion with" is more precise than "have anything to do with".

<sup>58</sup> Damascene, *op. cit.*, p. 532.

Fr. Panteleimon's ecclesiological sympathies manifested themselves in a variety of ways that caused Fr. Seraphim great unease. In a Jan. 28/Feb. 10, 1976, letter to Alexey Young, in the context of his growing concerns about Fr. Panteleimon and the promotion of a Matthewite ecclesiology within ROCOR, Fr. Seraphim spoke of his increasing concerns about the "hothouse" approach to Orthodoxy which he associated with Fr. Panteleimon. Since this letter is also the main letter referenced regarding Fr. Seraphim's views on the reception of converts and "corrective baptism", it is worth quoting and examining in full:

Jan. 28/Feb. 10, 1976

St. Ephraim the Syrian

Dear Alexey,

Enclosed is a new fruit – unfortunately mostly reprints, but we hope the cover is new and inspiring.

In our visit we didn't have a chance to ask you how Nina is getting along in the community. Is she getting a longing for big-city life? She told me that she and Barbara are not getting along, and she thinks it must be jealousy. Could it be that Barbara just can't stand Nina's "type" – outspoken, "intellectual," "always right," still reflecting something of the "hothouse" atmosphere of the "Boston" approach?

I've written and talked to Nina some about this "hothouse" approach to Orthodoxy – filled with gossip, knowing "what's going on," having the "right answer" to everything according to what the "experts" say. I begin to think that this is really her basic problem, and not Fr. Panteleimon directly.

An example: Nina is horrified that Fr. Herman's brother-in-law was received into the Church [from Roman Catholicism<sup>59</sup>] without baptism or chrismation; "that's wrong," she says. But we see nothing particularly wrong with it; that is for the priest and bishop to decide, and it is not our (or even more her) business. The rite by which he was received has long been approved by the Church out of economy, and probably in this case it was the best way, because Harvey might have hesitated much more at being baptized – the Church's condescension here was wise. But Nina would like someone "to read Vladika Anthony the decree of the Sobor..." My dear, he was there composing the decree, which explicitly gives the bishop permission to use economy when he wishes! We don't like this attitude at all, because it introduces totally unnecessary disturbance into the Church atmosphere; and if she is going to tell Harvey (Thomas) now that he is not really baptized or a member of the Orthodox Church, she could do untold harm to a soul.

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<sup>59</sup> Note in brackets added in Rose, *Letters from Father Seraphim*, p. 153.

Another example: Nina was very pleased that our Daniel was baptized in Jordanville [after having been a member of the Russian Church Abroad for several years<sup>60</sup>]; finally he did it “right”! (Our Laurence thinks the same thing.) But we are not pleased at all, seeing in this a sign of great spiritual immaturity on his part and a narrow fanaticism on the part of those who approve. St. Basil the Great refused to baptize a man who doubted the validity of his baptism, precisely because he had already received communion for many years and it was too late to doubt then that he was a member of Christ’s Church! In the case of our converts it is obvious that those who insist or are talked into receiving baptism after already being members of the Church are trying out of a feeling of insecurity, to receive something which the Sacrament does not give: psychological security, a making up for their past failures while already Orthodox, a belonging to the “club” of those who are “right,” an automatic spiritual “correctness.” But this act casts doubt on the Church and her ministers: if the priest or bishop who received such people were “wrong” (and so wrong that the whole act of reception must be done over again!), a sort of “Church within the Church” is created, a clique which, by contrast to “most bishops and priests” is always “right.” And of course, that is our big problem today – and even more in the days ahead. It is very difficult to fight this, because they offer “clear and simple” answers to every question, and our insecure converts find this the answer to their needs.

I wonder if Phanourios will not have this problem? He is hesitant about just going to confession to be joined to our Church, especially after hearing that his friend Macarios was baptized in Jordanville. When I asked him whether he thought he had to be baptized too, he said no, just as long as he’s given a clear answer as to what he should do. So we told him we would ask Vladika Anthony’s blessing for him to be received and how. But frankly, no matter what anyone might think or say, our Church has never broken communion with the Greek Archdiocese, and in fact Metr. Philaret’s latest epistle to the Bishops of the Patriarchate of Constantinople still addresses them as Orthodox bishops. I suspect that any priest in this diocese would be horrified at the idea of baptizing someone who comes from the Greek Archdiocese. But in this case let us see what Vladika Anthony says, and then pray that no one is coming to disturb Phanourios afterwards with tempting thoughts of solving all his problems by Baptism.

At times we would like to think that the whole “Fr. Panteleimon” problem in our Church is just a matter of differing emphases which, in the end, will not be so terribly important. But the more we observe, the more we come to think that it is much more serious than that, that in fact an “Orthodox sectarianism” is being formed at the expense of our simple people. Therefore, those who are aware of all this must be “zealots according to knowledge.” The Church has survived worse temptations in the past; but we fear for our converts lest in their simplicity they be led into a sect and out of the Church.

God is with us! We must go forward in faith.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

With love in Christ,

Seraphim, monk<sup>61</sup>

Fr. Herman's brother-in-law was received into the Orthodox Church without baptism and chrismation, which truly was unheard of in the history of the Church prior to the very problematic 1666-1667 Moscow Council. At the 1620 Moscow Council, Patriarch Philaret (Romanov) of Moscow and All Russia declared:

Since the beginning of the state of Moscow until now, there has never been a case where Latin heretics and heretics of other faiths were not baptized, except for the case of Ignatius the Patriarch, who was deposed from his episcopal throne.<sup>62</sup>

Patriarch Philaret was here referring to Patriarch Ignatius of Moscow and All Russia who was deposed in 1606 for receiving a convert from the Latins by chrismation. He was succeeded by St. Hermogenes the Wonderworker and Patriarch of All Russia who also upheld the practice of receiving all converts by baptism and who instructed his successor, Patriarch Philaret, to do the same.<sup>63</sup>

Regarding Fr. Seraphim's reference to St. Basil in the context of Daniel's "corrective baptism," Fr. Seraphim seems to be referring not to a story about St. Basil, but rather about St. Dionysius of Alexandria, with some slight deviations from the original. St. Dionysius wrote to Pope Xystus asking for advice regarding a man who had not been received by baptism, had been communing for many years, and after witnessing an Orthodox baptism became exceedingly grieved and wept constantly over not having been received by baptism. In this story, however, St. Dionysius does not simply refuse to baptize the man but sought counsel from Pope Xystus out of fear of being in error for not baptizing the man, writing:

For truly, brother, I am in need of counsel, and I ask thy judgment concerning a certain matter which has come to me, fearing that I may be in error.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young, Jan. 28/Feb. 10, 1976.

<sup>62</sup> Trebnik for Laymen, 1639 edition, pp. 399 and ff. Quoted in Troitsky, "The Unity of the Church and the World Council of Churches."

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Eusebius, *The Church History of Eusebius*, Book VII, Chapter IX:1.

We do not know how Pope Xystus responded to the letter of St. Dionysius or whether the man in question was afterwards baptized. The story shows the all-too-common experience converts have when they are not received by baptism and it shows the internal struggle that St. Dionysius had, fearing that he perhaps was wrong for not having baptized the man after the man had been in the Church for a period of time.

The concerns Fr. Seraphim expresses about Daniel's "corrective baptism" at Jordanville, and Nina's views concerning it, do not appear to be motivated so much by his views on "corrective baptism" *per se* as by his concerns about Nina and Daniel personally, and the unhealthy influence of Fr. Panteleimon on both them and other converts. This is highlighted by the lack of appeal of Fr. Seraphim to the teachings of the saints and the canons on this topic (aside from a vague reference to St. Basil which was probably referring instead to St. Dionysius), and the fact that Fr. Seraphim began and ended the letter expressing concern about the influence of Fr. Panteleimon, only mentioning these cases of reception in the context of this overarching concern.

Fr. Seraphim wrote more than 300 personal letters, including several letters directly to Nina Seco and Daniel Oliver, and letters written to others in which Nina and Daniel are mentioned. Fr. Seraphim had stated in 1973 that Nina was under Fr. Panteleimon's spiritual direction and had helped establish Holy Nativity Convent near HTM under Fr. Panteleimon's guidance.<sup>65</sup> She eventually left the convent but remained under Fr. Panteleimon's direction and influence. In an Oct. 2/15, 1975, letter to Alexey, prior to the letter above about Daniel's "corrective baptism," Fr. Seraphim said:

Concerning Nina: I had just written you a letter (superseded by this one) saying that "if Nina is being defensive about Fr. Panteleimon, it may well be that she has not quite cut the ties' after all. If she doesn't, she's going to have trouble ahead!" Well, the trouble seems to be here, and Nina will have no peace until she either does make a complete cut with Fr. P., or else joins his sect,<sup>66</sup> because the way they are going, our "Greeks" will not be long with us, and it is hardly conceivable that they will stay long with the Matthewites either, unless there is much politics (or money) involved behind the scenes.<sup>67</sup>

A week later, Fr. Seraphim wrote directly to Nina on Oct. 9/22, 1975, expressing the same concerns about the influence of Fr. Panteleimon and the tone he was setting in ROCOR, saying:

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<sup>65</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young, Nov. 10/23, 1973.

<sup>66</sup>In the letter published online "his sect" is repeated twice which appears to be a typo, so the repeated phrase is omitted here.

<sup>67</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young, Oct. 2/15, 1975.

Thanks also for the letters which give the “Boston version” of recent events. We didn’t like the tone at all – “oily,” self-justifying, and rumor-mongering... It is our “Greeks” who have now introduced into our Church the spirit of party politics, false zealotry, and suspicion. If they can’t see this, it’s pointless to talk to them.<sup>68</sup>

These concerns expressed to and about Nina, the influence of Fr. Panteleimon on her, and the fear that she would follow Fr. Panteleimon and the other Greeks into schism preceded his comments regarding Daniel’s “corrective baptism” in 1976. A few years later, in 1979, Fr. Seraphim would remark that Nina “has always been an unquestioning follower of Fr. Panteleimon,”<sup>69</sup> and as Fr. Seraphim feared, Nina did follow Fr. Panteleimon into schism in 1986, four years after Fr. Seraphim’s repose.<sup>70</sup>

Between 1970-1976, Fr. Seraphim had considerable correspondence with Daniel Olson, the one who received the “corrective baptism” at Jordanville in 1976, and Fr. Seraphim spoke of him in several personal letters to others. In an April 9/22, 1973, letter to Fr. Neketas, Fr. Seraphim mentions that after spending time at Platina, “Daniel Olson made his final decision to go to Fr. Panteleimon for good”<sup>71</sup> and Fr. Seraphim considered this an “offering” of Platina to HTM, as relations between the two monasteries at that time were positive. Daniel did not remain with Fr. Panteleimon, however, but returned to Platina, only to again leave. In a Jan. 7/20, 1975, letter to Alexey, Fr. Seraphim said:

We ourselves have had a number of “sobering” experiences by now, especially with people in whom we had great trust or hopes. Daniel is one of them; he could have turned out a zealous and fruitful laborer in Christ’s vineyard, but now.... On his two day visit to us just now we noticed that, while he is not “loose” as he was on his previous two visits, when he was out of work, still he has the same self-centered, self-satisfied view of reality; knowing so much about Orthodoxy, and having so many correct feelings about the Orthodox situation also, he probably will never bear fruit now that he has let his opportunity for commitment – first with Fr. Panteleimon, then with us – slip by. We fear he will even bring harm, quite without intending it, merely from being “correct” without being able to commit his heart to anything or anyone.<sup>72</sup>

In the Jan. 28/Feb. 10, 1976, letter to Alexey Young above, Fr. Seraphim was writing to Alexey about Nina’s “hothouse” approach to Orthodoxy that reflected the “Boston” approach of Fr. Panteleimon and HTM. Fr. Seraphim used the references to Nina’s attitude about the reception

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<sup>68</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Nina Seco, Oct. 9/22, 1975.

<sup>69</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Fr. Roman Lukianov, Nov. 1/14, 1979.

<sup>70</sup> Holy Orthodox Metropolis of Boston.

<sup>71</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Fr. Neketas Palassis, April 9/22, 1973.

<sup>72</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young, January 7/20, 1975.

and “corrective baptism” only to illustrate (he begins those paragraphs with “An example” and “Another example”) his main concern, which was the tone and approach to Orthodoxy of Fr. Panteleimon and the likelihood that those sharing in his mentality would end up in schism. If Fr. Seraphim was primarily concerned about the justification, or lack thereof, of “corrective baptism” from a dogmatic point of view, then we would likely see him discuss these matters in the context of the canons of the Church and the teachings of the saints and Fathers, as he was more than capable of doing.

Following Daniel’s “corrective baptism”, Fr. Seraphim wrote two letters to Daniel that same year<sup>73</sup> but did not bring up the topic of his “corrective baptism”. Instead, he wrote extensively about his growing concerns about the Greek Old Calendarists, about the likelihood of Fr. Panteleimon going into schism from ROCOR, and about relations between ROCOR and the other canonical Orthodox churches being “strained” but “not entirely broken” (since Fr. Panteleimon and his circle claimed that ROCOR was not in communion with any of the canonical Orthodox churches). On May 29/June 11, 1976, Fr. Seraphim wrote to Daniel:

[Fr. Panteleimon] and the Greeks who follow him have formed a kind of autonomous psychological “diocese” within our Church, and it is obvious that they trust and respect none of our bishops; they look for their authority rather to Greece – and in Greece the situation becomes more confused every day, so it is Fr. Panteleimon’s thinking alone that becomes their authority. This is a terribly dangerous situation, and it seems inevitable that unless our Greeks change the tone of their “zealotry,” it is only a matter of time until they leave us, whether for the Matthewites or to form their own jurisdiction – which will only confuse matters more. Already Fr. Panteleimon practices “selective communion” with our Church, as when he refused to serve at the funeral of Archbishop Averky, but stood in the Altar with a group of his priests and monks. Fr. Panteleimon of Jordanville, 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.” That is typical of the attitude of our Church to the too-eager “zealots” of our day: without bitterness or indignation, but with a deep and calm awareness that this is not the answer.<sup>74</sup>

Regarding Fr. Seraphim’s views expressed in the Jan. 28/Feb. 10, 1976 letter concerning Fr. Herman’s brother-in-law’s reception into the Church and Daniel’s “corrective baptism,” Fr. Alexey Young (now Hieroschemamonk Ambrose), the close spiritual child of Fr. Seraphim’s who published many letters Fr. Seraphim wrote him over their twelve years of correspondence, included the following footnote in the book after these stories:

It should be noted that in the twenty-three years since Fr. Seraphim wrote this, the situation of the heterodox Churches and the modernist Orthodox jurisdictions has deteriorated to a degree that Fr. Seraphim could not have predicted and which would

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<sup>73</sup> Letters of Fr. Seraphim to Daniel Olson, May 29/June 11, 1976, and June 12/25, 1976.

<sup>74</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Daniel Olson, May 29/June 11, 1976.

have horrified him. In general, the Russian Church Abroad now finds it necessary as well as appropriate to insist on the use of less “economy” and more pastoral strictness in order to avoid unfortunate cases of scruples later on. This, however, has nothing whatever to do with the sectarian and extremely legalistic mindset of those few who deny the existence of grace in the New Calendar jurisdictions.<sup>75</sup>

In this same Jan. 28/Feb. 10, 1976, letter to Alexey, Fr. Seraphim also speaks of the reception of Phanourios Ingram into ROCOR. Fr. Seraphim expressed his concern about whether Phanourios would accept being received into ROCOR by confession rather than by baptism since Phanourios’s friend Macarios had been received into ROCOR by baptism. Phanourios had been baptized in the Greek Archdiocese.<sup>76</sup> This was not an example of the “corrective baptism” of someone who had never been baptized in the Orthodox Church and had been previously received by economy without the canonical presuppositions for the application of economy.<sup>77</sup> Rather, this concerned the reception into ROCOR by baptism of someone who had already been baptized correctly in the Orthodox Church! Here, Fr. Seraphim did not express his views as to how Phanourios should be received into ROCOR but said he would ask Vladyka Anthony how Phanourios should be received and hoped Phanourios would accept what Vladyka Anthony decided. Fr. Seraphim said that priests in his diocese would likely be “horrified” at the idea of baptizing someone who has already been baptized in the Greek Archdiocese so he likely assumed that Vladyka Anthony would not require that Phanourios be received by baptism. This letter concludes by Fr. Seraphim again expressing the overarching concern with which he started the letter, that converts under Fr. Panteleimon’s influence might “be led into a sect and out of the Church.”

With regard to the reception of Phanourios, Fr. Seraphim was referring to the fact that some who were under the influence of Fr. Panteleimon’s Matthewite ecclesiology were insisting that the Greek Archdiocese was outside of the Orthodox Church and no longer had grace in their Mysteries, and as such those who were baptized in the Greek Archdiocese should be received into ROCOR by baptism. Fr. Seraphim expressed opposition to this practice because ROCOR had never officially broken communion with the Greek Archdiocese nor declared their Mysteries to be without grace.<sup>78</sup>

Fr. Damascene relates:

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

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<sup>75</sup> Rose, *Letters from Fr. Seraphim*, p. 154, footnote 1.

<sup>76</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young, Aug. 24/Sept. 6, 1975, and Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Phanourios Ingram, Nov. 7/20, 1975.

<sup>77</sup> The relevant canons and canonical presuppositions are discussed in ORHOC, ch. 3 and 5.

<sup>78</sup> See the letter of Fr. Seraphim to Andrew Bond on April 18/May 1, 1976.

Churches were directed by the super-correct contingent to get *rebaptized* in the Russian Church Abroad.<sup>79</sup>

In this year (1976), Fr. Seraphim wrote several letters concerning “rebaptisms” done in Guildford, England as well as in America, and these “rebaptisms” were not “corrective baptisms” as defined previously but concerned the reception into ROCOR by baptism of those already baptized in other Orthodox jurisdictions.

On April 18/May 1, 1976, Fr. Seraphim wrote to Andrew Bond in England:

We have heard of a few mistaken ‘re-baptisms’ in America and have asked several of our bishops about them. In every case, as it turns out, the diocesan bishop was not informed of the circumstances of the case. Recently 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.<sup>80</sup>

On May 22/June 4, 1976, Fr. Seraphim wrote again to Andrew Bond regarding the latter’s concern with these rebaptisms:

If I am not mistaken, what most upset you about the Guildford baptisms was the ‘fanatical’ tone it introduced into Orthodoxy in England: if this manner of reception from other jurisdictions is to become the norm, then our Church is in danger of falling into a Matthewite sectarianism... In this our bishops refuse to be ‘legalistic’: to declare that these jurisdictions are ‘schismatic’ and therefore devoid of grace. That is the Matthewite approach, which Fr. Panteleimon would apparently like to see prevail in our Church. Even today our bishops refuse to ‘define’ in this manner 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 the benefit of any doubt) that they do have grace. Fr. P. would like to be their spokesman and tell the world what our bishops should be believing – but here he is going out on a limb which one day is going to break beneath him.<sup>81</sup>

In a letter to Alexey Young on July 14/27, 1976, Fr. Seraphim explained that he was *not* totally against receiving people from other Orthodox jurisdictions by baptism in some cases, as long as

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<sup>79</sup> Damascene, op. cit., p. 532.

<sup>80</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Andrew Bond, April 18/May 1, 1976.

<sup>81</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Andrew Bond, May 22/June 4, 1976.

this was not done as a rule and did not set a “fanatical tone” or imply the absence of grace in another Orthodox jurisdiction. He wrote:

Out of all this we see the necessity 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. (We accept that in some cases this might be allowable with the bishop’s approval – but beyond a few isolated cases this practice itself introduces a fanatical tone and a spirit of discord and distrust in the Church). This will be extremely difficult to do, especially with the presence among us of a politically-powerful ‘fanatic’; but with God’s help and the prayers of our patron saints we will try our best to do our little bit.<sup>82</sup>

Fr. Seraphim here does not elaborate on what specific cases he would accept the reception of other Orthodox into ROCOR by baptism. Apostolic Canon 47 forbids bishops and priests from baptizing again anyone who has had a “true baptism” in the Orthodox Church defined in Apostolic Canon 50 as three full immersions in the name of the Holy Trinity, which supports Fr. Seraphim’s concern that baptizing those already baptized correctly in another Orthodox jurisdiction would imply that jurisdiction was outside of the Church and without sacramental grace. Canon 80 of the Council of Carthage in AD 419 and Canon 84 of the Fifth-Sixth Ecumenical Council (also referred to as the Quinisext Ecumenical Council or just the Sixth Ecumenical Council) state that if there is any uncertainty as to whether a person had been baptized correctly in the Church, and no witnesses who could confirm this, “they must be baptized without putting any obstacle in the way, lest any such hesitation may deprive them of such purifying sanctification.”<sup>83</sup> There are no canons forbidding the baptism of those who were received into the Church by a method other than baptism in three immersions in the name of the Holy Trinity, so it should not be surprising that there would be cases where Orthodox from other jurisdictions would be received into ROCOR by baptism if they had never been baptized in three immersions in the Orthodox Church.<sup>84</sup> Again, Fr. Seraphim had published just such a case regarding ROCOR’s baptism of Fr. George Lewis coming from the Orthodox Church in America (formerly the Metropolia).<sup>85</sup>

Andrew Bond in England was very much against ROCOR receiving Orthodox from other jurisdictions by baptism as a matter of course and was very vocal about his opposition to this practice. Because of Andrew’s outspokenness, his bishop (Archbishop Nikodem) wrote to Andrew calling for his repentance. About this, Fr. Seraphim wrote to Alexey on July 14/27, 1976:

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<sup>82</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young, July 14/27, 1976.

<sup>83</sup> Agapios and Nicodemus, op. cit., Canon 84 of the Fifth-Sixth Council. Wording nearly identical to Canon 80 of the Council of Carthage in AD 419.

<sup>84</sup> See also the quote above by St. Sebastian (Dabovich) of Jackson and San Francisco from his writing “The True Church of Christ” printed in *The Orthodox Word*.

<sup>85</sup> *The Orthodox Word* 8, no. 1 (42), January-February, 1972, p. 27.

Andrew sent us a copy of Archbishop Nikodem's epistle to him asking for his repentance. The hand of Fr. Panteleimon seems evident in this incident, and Archbishop Nikodem seems to have been placed in the unfortunate "political" situation of having to accept as his "defender" someone with whose views I really doubt he is in full accord. However, in that situation nothing further is possible for the good unless Andrew does what the Archbishop wants – ask forgiveness of the clergy whom he has "offended." We strongly urged Andrew to do this, in written form, emphasizing to him that this does not mean changing his opinions about "rebaptism," but only apologizing for any crudeness, etc., which he may have shown (which, judging from his letters to us, he probably has shown!) We haven't heard further from him yet.<sup>86</sup>

Fr. Seraphim did not agree with establishing a rule of receiving other Orthodox into ROCOR by baptism and agreed with Andrew's objection to this practice. However, for the peace and unity of the Church, Fr. Seraphim instructed Andrew to repent for how he behaved in speaking out about this issue, while not changing his correct views on this topic.

While Fr. Seraphim is well known for warning about the "temptation from the right" referred to in these letters, often what is left out is Fr. Seraphim's characterization of the "temptation from the right" (particularly in the context of Matthewite Old Calendarist ecclesiology) as well as his equal concerns about the temptation "from the left". Fr. Seraphim described the temptation "from the right" as characterized by a prideful attitude, thinking that you always know better than others, criticism of others, publicly and disparagingly speaking out against others who disagree with you, preoccupation with Church politics, spreading rumors, and readiness to condemn local Orthodox churches as "without grace" prior to a Pan-Orthodox or Ecumenical Council. Fr. Seraphim warned just as much, however, of the "temptation on the left" characterized by modernism, ecumenism, and an academic approach to Orthodoxy that ceases to be a living tradition received from the saints of our times and faithfully preserved. To Andrew Bond in England, after warning about the temptation on "the right", Fr. Seraphim said:

To all this I would only add: let us also beware of the temptations on the "left side." We do not need to declare fanatically that we are the "only Orthodox left," but let us also be aware of the process of apostasy that is taking possession of virtually all the Orthodox Churches now, and to which we too can fall if we are not sober and cautious.<sup>87</sup>

Fr. Seraphim saw the temptations "from the left" and "from the right" as two expressions of the same problem of pride and excessive trust in one's own opinions:

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<sup>86</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young, July 14/27, 1976.

<sup>87</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Andrew Bond, April 18/May 1, 1976.

We cannot follow the line of “Boston Orthodoxy” – which 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 is Paris, just as much the creation of human logic.<sup>88</sup>

Regarding the need to receive Orthodoxy from the saints of our time and not simply trust our own minds, our own abilities, and whatever theological education we may have received, Fr. Seraphim said:

In our confused days, when a hundred conflicting voices claim to speak for Orthodoxy, it is essential to know whom one can trust as a spokesman 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.<sup>89</sup>

While Fr. Seraphim appeared to criticize the “corrective baptism” of Daniel in his Jan. 28/Feb. 10, 1976, letter to Alexey Young, in the same year he expressed more openness to the practice in the context of the “rebaptism” controversy in Guildford, England. None of the over three hundred letters from Fr. Seraphim that are publicly available show how Fr. Seraphim understood and applied the canons, the writings of the Fathers (with the exception of the St. Basil reference that looks to be mistakenly attributed to St. Basil instead of St. Dionysius), and Ecumenical Councils to the topic of the reception of converts and “corrective baptism”. It is clear that his concern expressed in his personal letters was primarily pastoral and was preoccupied with trying to guide the faithful away from the influence of Fr. Panteleimon and his circle who were pushing for ROCOR to adopt the ecclesiology of the Matthewite Old Calendarists which viewed all Orthodox patriarchates at that time as outside of the Church and without grace. His focus in these letters was not on what was “correct” or who was “right”, but in maintaining peace and unity in ROCOR and avoiding a disastrous schism during a very tumultuous time when relations were strained between ROCOR and other canonical Orthodox churches and an influential contingent within ROCOR were campaigning for ROCOR to cut off all ties with canonical Orthodox churches and denounce them as graceless. While not concerning himself primarily with what was “true” and “correct” regarding the reception of converts and “corrective baptism”, Fr. Seraphim was not indifferent to the importance of truth and correctness. Rather, he wrote about the main problem facing ROCOR at that particular time; those who had seemingly “correct” opinions but who were nevertheless falling into pride, delusion, and sectarianism because they had not cultivated the virtues of humility and love while also striving to know and defend the truth. Of course, we must do what is good in a good way by following and defending the truth with a humble and loving heart purified of the passions.

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<sup>88</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young, June 2/15, 1976.

<sup>89</sup> Damascene, *op. cit.*, p. 486.

## Fr. Seraphim on Obedience to Hierarchs

As shown above, Fr. Seraphim did not take a strong position on the manner by which converts should be received nor on the topic of “corrective baptism” on the basis of the canons of the Church and patristic teaching, but rather responded pastorally to the situations he was addressing in his letters with deference to the bishops who would make the final determinations regarding individual receptions. Most of the letters from Fr. Seraphim pertaining to these topics were written prior to his ordination to the priesthood in 1977, so naturally he could not himself receive anyone into the Church during this time. Fr. Seraphim certainly respected the hierarchical structure of the Church and spoke of the need to obey one’s bishops, yet he also understood that such obedience must not be “blind” but must be with discernment. When certain people within ROCOR were claiming that other local Orthodox churches were without grace, Fr. Seraphim was right to point out that it is the bishops who must make a determination on this matter and not individual priests or laypeople.<sup>90</sup> However, in other instances Fr. Seraphim was very cautious about following bishops who he did not believe were being guided by the Holy Spirit, and while he had great regard for certain bishops in ROCOR during his time, he did not necessarily have equal regard for the authority of all bishops in all Orthodox jurisdictions.

In 1971, Fr. Seraphim and Fr. Herman were greatly troubled by the attempt of their Archbishop Anthony to demand their absolute obedience to himself as abbot of their monastery. It seemed that Archbishop Anthony wanted absolute control over the life of the monastery (though he lived in San Francisco, not Platina) and Fr. Seraphim was greatly concerned that Abp. Anthony would divert the monastery from the original purpose for which it was established with the blessing of St. John of San Francisco.

Expressing his grief over this trial, and seeking advice from others whom he respected, Fr. Seraphim wrote on Jan. 4/17, 1971, to Fr. Panteleimon, Abbot of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Boston, with whom he and Fr. Herman had a great deal of trust and respect at that time, prior to the development of Fr. Panteleimon’s more sectarian tendencies:

Dear Father: You know us well enough to know that we are in all things obedient and respectful of legitimate ecclesiastical authority, and that we have never tried to impose any kind of authority over others (this if anything is our great weakness!) or seek for ourselves any kind of position or tide in the Church. But if it now comes down to practicing “humility” and “obedience” and allowing a complete outsider to take over and destroy our work, our conscience will not allow it. (Please tell us if we are wrong!)...

We have thus been led into a situation where, in order to preserve our independence and continue our Orthodox Word as before, we will have sooner or later to show open “disobedience” to our Archbishop, insofar as he regards himself as our “Abbot.” And we

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<sup>90</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Fr. Nektas Palassis, July 16/29, 1976.

believe that he, being of an extremely dominating character, will try to crush this “disobedience” even if he has to break us or destroy our work in doing it.<sup>91</sup>

Fr. Seraphim’s understanding was that after Archbishop Anthony tonsured Fr. Herman and himself into monasticism he would then appoint either Fr. Seraphim or Fr. Herman as abbot. The fathers were then surprised when the Archbishop later insisted that he was in fact the abbot and demanded complete control over the life and work of the monastery. Fr. Seraphim sought advice on this matter also from Bishop Laurus (who became Metropolitan of ROCOR in 2001) and expressed his understanding of true and false obedience in the context of Abp. Anthony’s attempt to establish St. Herman’s Monastery as a diocesan monastery under his control. Fr. Seraphim wrote:

But such “obedience” – for the sake of a worldly end – is very clearly spiritually illegitimate. 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. And from him we have learned: above canons, church discipline, etc., comes the spirit. If by obedience, by faithfulness to the letter of canons, or by any other thing good in itself, the spirit of a man is crushed and is extinguished, then there is something terribly wrong.<sup>92</sup>

In another letter, Fr. Seraphim elaborated further on this same situation, stating that true and blessed obedience cannot be a form of slavery:

But now we are prepared to stand up and fight for the independence which the Church and its canons guarantee to monasteries. Monastic obedience cannot possibly be “slavery”; if that were true, then the Church would be divided up into “slaves” and “tyrants.” Some people in the Church at various times have tried to enforce this perverted concept, but it does not come from the Church or from monasticism. All Orthodox Christians, and especially monks and nuns, are trying to cut off their own will and lead a God-pleasing life; but to meekly bow down to tyranny, most especially when this tyranny only destroys a God-pleasing work and extinguishes the Christian and monastic spirit in its victims – is certainly only a parody and mockery of Orthodoxy and monasticism. We are absolutely resolved, in all obedience to the Church and lawful ecclesiastical authority, not to become a part of any such mockery.<sup>93</sup>

The same year (1971), in another letter, Fr. Seraphim elaborated further on what he perceived as a distorted form of obedience that Archbishop Anthony seemed to be demanding of the fathers, which Fr. Seraphim said they would accept “only over our dead bodies”.

In the prevailing Russian understanding today a “monastery” is a place with an incidental collection of people, with a definite function in the Church: to serve as a bishop’s summer residence, picnic center, manpower pool for church needs, etc. And “monks” are those people who becomes slaves, crushed by the authorities for the sake of

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<sup>91</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Fr. Panteleimon, Jan. 4/17, 1971.

<sup>92</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Vladika Laurus, March 12/25, 1971.

<sup>93</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Elena Yurevna, Mar. 24/April 6, 1971.

“obedience,” who can be used by the church organization: the more hopeful ones as bishops, the less hopeful ones as hieromonks in parishes that can’t afford anything better, and the complete fools to remain in the monastery and tend the cows. Against such a perverted idea, both of monasteries and of “obedience” and the monastic virtues, we emphatically protest, and if God grants us to have a real monastery here, it will fit into this “accepted” picture only over our dead bodies.<sup>94</sup>

Fr. Seraphim especially saw the problem of harmful obedience in the case of the Church in Russia during his life, where the Soviets exerted tremendous pressure and control over the bishops there. In a letter to Alexey Young on May 29/June 11, 1973, Fr. Seraphim said concerning this:

We are already in the age of “impious bishops” which St. Seraphim prophesied, and already in many places (most notably Russia) a degree of “hiding” from or even outright disobedience to bishops has already become a spiritual necessity, and one which it is by no means easy to justify always on dogmatic or canonical grounds. This by no means changes the “rule” which you cite [about obedience to bishops]<sup>95</sup>, but alas, there are people (also in our Russian Church Abroad!) who are only too anxious to take advantage of such “rules,” not for the good of the Church or the bishops, but for their own private purposes.<sup>96</sup>

Fr. Seraphim understood that “as a rule,” obedience to one’s bishop is necessary, but this rule of obedience can also be exploited by bishops to the detriment of the Church, since this rule presupposes that the bishops are holy, purified of the passions, guided by the Holy Spirit, and governed in their decisions chiefly by what is best for the Church and for man’s salvation. When these presuppositions are not met, much damage can result.

Indeed, such holy bishops guided by the Holy Spirit are not common, neither today nor in Fr. Seraphim’s time. However, Fr. Seraphim knew such a God-bearing bishop from the first years of his life in the Church: St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco. Hence, as Fr. Seraphim continued publishing *The Orthodox Word* and began his labors as a monastic under St. John’s successor, Abp. Anthony, the example of St. John’s holiness as a bishop made it especially clear exactly what is true leadership and what is worldly and tyrannical leadership. Fr. Seraphim wrote to Alexey Young on Oct. 18/31, 1972:

In our days of general decline, one should not expect too much of them [i.e. bishops]. 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*

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<sup>94</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Laurence, Aug. 10/23, 1971.

<sup>95</sup> Note in brackets added in Rose, *Letters from Father Seraphim*, p. 100.

<sup>96</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young, May 29/June 11, 1973.

*within the Church, under the conditions of growth and mutual counsel within the Orthodox tradition. [Emphasis in the original.]*<sup>97</sup>

On obedience to bishops in the light of the teachings of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov in *The Arena* and the subjugation of the Moscow Patriarchate under the Soviets (the problem of “Sergianism”), Fr. Seraphim explained:

Concerning the Arena, p. 52, the “moral, hidden obedience, performed in the soul” seems to refer to our obedient orientation to God in general, which we should not think is satisfied if we are merely outwardly obedient to monastic or church authorities. It can happen that outward obedience is so over-emphasized that it becomes a mechanical substitute for the genuine voluntary inward giving up of one’s own will and understanding. The distinction can be felt in the heart: sooner or later an unsound, mechanical obedience will produce a feeling of oppression and tenseness, which are signs that something is wrong. Genuine inward obedience is accompanied by the joy of being relieved of trusting only oneself. This subject is extremely deep and is closely bound up with the whole subject of genuine vs. false Orthodoxy in the 20th century, most acutely in “Sergianism,” where obedience indeed becomes slavery to men and the human church organization. True obedience is accompanied by inward freedom, without which there is no Church life.<sup>98</sup>

The subject of obedience to the hierarchy in the context of Sergianism was also highlighted in *The Orthodox Word* in the context of the Epistles of Hieromartyr Cyril of Kazan, a *Locum Tenens* to the patriarchal throne appointed by Patriarch St. Tikhon of Moscow and All Russia. Metropolitan Cyril stated in his Epistles that Metropolitan Sergius’ declaration, which submitted the Church in Russia to the will of the atheist Soviet regime, was such that obedience to him “automatically ceased on the part of all sincere Orthodox people” and “Metropolitan Sergius should not trouble to send us his directives, since for them in our archpastoral conscience, we cannot acknowledge any obligatory significance.”<sup>99</sup> Regarding St. Cyril’s epistles, Fr. Seraphim published in *The Orthodox Word* his understanding that St. Cyril was opposing the belief that “the Christian conscience is compelled to obey *any* command of the church authorities, as long as these authorities are properly ‘canonical.’”<sup>100</sup> Fr. Seraphim elaborated:

This blind concept of obedience for its own sake is one of the chief causes for the success of Sergianism in our century – both within and outside the Moscow Patriarchate. *Of course* the Christian conscience does not accept excommunications of a church authority made under political or other non-ecclesiastical pressure (whether from the Turkish Sultan upon the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or the Communist authorities upon the Moscow Patriarchate of our own century), but it is a kind of

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<sup>97</sup> Rose, op. cit., pp. 64-65.

<sup>98</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Nina Seco, June 24/July 7, 1974b.

<sup>99</sup> *The Orthodox Word* 13, No. 4 (75), July-August, 1977, pp. 178, 181.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 190-191.

ecclesiastical legalism to draw from this the conclusion that all the Mysteries of such a church authority are thereby without grace.

The epistles of Metropolitan Cyril present, perhaps as clearly as it can be stated, the truth that the law and teaching of the Church of Christ can never be a matter of merely soulless “obedience.”<sup>101</sup>

When those in ROCOR among the Matthewite contingent became increasingly critical of the ROCOR Synod for not officially breaking communion with other local Orthodox churches and declaring them to be without grace, Fr. Seraphim wrote to Fr. Nektas that he was not advocating blind obedience to the bishops but that perhaps more trust in the Synod was warranted:

Once again, we are not preaching to you “blind obedience to bishops” – but we are asking you to be a little less sure of yourself when you see that no less zealous Orthodox (including some of your own bishops), while in substantial agreement about the state of Orthodoxy today, advocate a humbler path.<sup>102</sup>

For Fr. Seraphim, obedience was of the utmost importance lest a person fall into pride and delusion by trusting their own opinions and thinking that they alone know what is right. In his notes on “convert pitfalls”, his first point is “Trusting oneself, *samost*. Remedy: sober distrust of oneself, taking counsel of others wiser, guidance from Holy Fathers.”<sup>103</sup>

From Fr. Seraphim’s correspondence, it is clear that he did not pridefully trust only his own opinions but regularly sought spiritual guidance and advice from monks, priests, and bishops whom he respected for their wisdom and spiritual discernment. On the subject of the reception of particular converts, Fr. Seraphim often deferred in his letters to the decisions of the bishops of ROCOR because he respected their authority. At the same time, he wrote about the dangers of “blind obedience” to church authorities and saw that true obedience to hierarchs presupposes that the hierarchs are seeking above all to lead their flocks to salvation and are not governing the Church according to worldly goals and criteria. In the case of Metropolitan Sergius, who agreed to subjugate the Church in Russia to the will of the atheist Soviet regime, Fr. Seraphim agreed with Hieromartyr Cyril of Kazan that obedience to hierarchs merely for the sake of obedience can be destructive if the presuppositions for true and God-pleasing obedience are absent. Fr. Seraphim warned also of the “Sergianist” spirit that was becoming increasingly common among Orthodox bishops throughout the world, where hierarchs who are not striving to be absolutely obedient to Christ demand absolute obedience from their clergy, which is often a mere outward obedience in service of worldly objectives (whether political or ecumenistic) rather than striving for obedience to the Holy Spirit and the teachings and examples of the saints. Fr. Seraphim understood the God-inspired approach to true obedience from his time with St. John, from the lives and writings of the saints, and applied what he learned to the trials and temptations he faced while struggling first as a simple monastic and then as a hieromonk.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Fr. Nektas Palassis, July 16/29, 1976.

<sup>103</sup> Damascene, op. cit., p. 847.

## After the Repose of Fr. Seraphim

In 1977, Fr. Seraphim was ordained to the priesthood<sup>104</sup> and subsequently received all converts into the Church by baptism<sup>105</sup> up to the time of his repose five years later (August 20/September 2, 1982) at only forty-eight years old.<sup>106</sup> In 1986, as Fr. Seraphim foresaw, Fr. Panteleimon went into schism from ROCOR together with the monasteries, clergy, and parishes that were under his influence.<sup>107</sup> Fr. Panteleimon reposed in 2016<sup>108</sup> and the HOCNA (Holy Orthodox Church of North America) group that he established is still out of communion with the canonical Orthodox churches as well as the other Old Calendarist factions. In 1991 occurred the fall of the Soviet Union, in 2000 the Moscow Patriarchate glorified the New Martyrs who were persecuted and killed by the Soviets, and in 2007 ROCOR reunited with the Moscow Patriarchate. The years leading up to the 2007 reunification were very difficult for ROCOR and many who had been influenced by sectarian ecclesiology that Fr. Seraphim warned of split off from ROCOR into many factions. As Fr. Seraphim predicted to Alexey in a letter on June 2/15, 1976, "The 'right wing' of Orthodoxy will probably be divided into many small 'jurisdictions' in [the] future, most of them anathematizing and fighting with the others."<sup>109</sup> While these divisions are tragic, the 2007 restoration of communion with the Moscow Patriarchate helped to restore relations between ROCOR and other canonical Orthodox churches, while those who had fallen into the sectarian mentality that so grieved Fr. Seraphim departed from ROCOR in the process.

While ROCOR no longer has within it a Matthewite contingent which sees other local Orthodox churches as without grace in their Mysteries, the 1971 Decree of ROCOR remains in place, converts are received by baptism as a rule, and "corrective baptisms" continue to be performed in ROCOR. At the "Uncut Mountain Press Conference" held October 6-9, 2022 at the Antiochian Village in Pennsylvania, ROCOR's Bishop Luke of Syracuse, the Abbot of Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, NY, stated:

We've established to baptize all people coming into the Church except where it's necessary to use *economia*. We've baptized many people in Jordanville from non-Orthodox backgrounds and never, ever has a person come back and said, "I should have been Chrismated and not baptized." It's totally ridiculous. However, it is very problematic when we have people coming and they want us to correct their baptism,

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 770.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 199, footnote.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 1,026.

<sup>107</sup> "A Chronology of Events Leading up to the Panteleimonite Schism."

<sup>108</sup> Holy Transfiguration Monastery.

<sup>109</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young, June 2/15, 1976.

and we do that, too. And that's with the blessing of Metropolitan Laurus<sup>110</sup> and Metropolitan Hilarion.<sup>111</sup> We do corrective baptisms for the patristic reasons why you can do them, but it's preferable to do it right the first time.<sup>112</sup>

Another major development occurred in Orthodoxy in America after Fr. Seraphim's repose when Geronda Ephraim (Moraitis) (+2019), disciple of St. Joseph the Hesychast (+1959) and former abbot of Philotheou Monastery on Mt. Athos, came to reside in America where he established 17 monasteries between 1989-2004.<sup>113</sup> As an Athonite elder and a spiritual inheritor of the patristic and hesychastic tradition of St. Paisius (Velichkovsky), St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, and the Kollyvades Fathers, Geronda Ephraim also taught that all converts should be received into the Orthodox Church by baptism in three immersions in the name of the Holy Trinity, and all who were received into the Orthodox Church by a different method still must be baptized in the Orthodox Church. However, far from merely following Athonite practice and *The Rudder* on the reception of converts, Geronda Ephraim also received the gift from God to see in the Spirit whether or not a person had been baptized in the Orthodox Church, and whether their baptism was performed with three full immersions as the Apostolic Canons require.<sup>114</sup>

Taking heed of Fr. Seraphim's advice to seek out and follow the "living links to Holy Orthodoxy,"<sup>115</sup> many who have been inspired by Fr. Seraphim's life and teachings have turned for spiritual guidance to Geronda Ephraim and the spiritual fathers appointed by him, including at least one monastery<sup>116</sup> established in the 1990s through the influence of Fr. Herman (Podmoshensky) after the repose of Fr. Seraphim. The writings of Fr. Seraphim are also carried and sold at the bookstores of Geronda Ephraim's monasteries which are known for being very selective and careful about what books they make available, thereby expressing a certain oneness of mind with Fr. Seraphim and his legacy.

That Fr. Seraphim was unaware of the many contemporary and God-bearing elders on Mt. Athos, in Greece, and elsewhere during his life is clear from his Aug. 10/23, 1976 letter to Archdeacon Laurence, where he states:

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<sup>110</sup> Metropolitan Laurus (Skurla) served as the First Hierarch of ROCOR from 2001-2008.

<sup>111</sup> Metropolitan Hilarion (Kapral) served as the First Hierarch of ROCOR from 2008-2022.

<sup>112</sup> Murianka, "We do Corrective Baptisms According to the Patristic Criteria."

<sup>113</sup> "Geronda Ephraim."

<sup>114</sup> This has been confirmed to the author from multiple testimonies including monastic fathers who were Geronda Ephraim's close disciples as well as laypeople who confessed to Geronda Ephraim and witnessed this gift.

<sup>115</sup> Damascene, op. cit., p. 471-472.

<sup>116</sup> St. Paisius Monastery in Safford, Arizona that was originally established in Northern California in the 1990s before relocating to Arizona.

I must tell you first of all that, to the best of our knowledge, there are no startsi today — that is, truly God-bearing elders (in the spirit of the Optina Elders) who could guide you not by their own wisdom and understanding of the Holy Fathers, but by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.<sup>117</sup>

Fr. Seraphim did not say absolutely that such true elders did not exist, but only “to the best of our knowledge” at that time. Certainly, had Fr. Seraphim been able to become acquainted with the many true contemporary saints and elders of his time on Mt. Athos, in Greece, and elsewhere he would have taken great interest in their teachings on all matters, including on the reception of converts.

## Conclusion

The name of Fr. Seraphim (Rose) has often been called upon as supposedly being against the practice of receiving all converts by baptism and practicing “corrective baptism” for those who previously were received into the Orthodox Church by a means other than baptism in the apostolic form. Fr. Seraphim’s supposed views on these topics are typically illustrated using only one or two quotes from his personal letters without understanding the context of his words and while ignoring other letters of his which address the matter differently. It is clear from the vast corpus of Fr. Seraphim’s writings that he did not produce any books, articles, or treatises on the topic of the reception of converts or “corrective baptism” on the basis of the canons, the Ecumenical Councils, and the writings of the saints and Fathers. While criticizing Daniel Olson in 1976 for the “corrective baptism” he received at Jordanville, a more thorough reading of the context of his letters shows that Fr. Seraphim was not necessarily concerned about “corrective baptism” *per se* but rather with the attitudes being expressed by particular individuals about such events and the growing influence of Fr. Panteleimon’s sectarian Matthewite ecclesiology in ROCOR at that time. Fr. Seraphim’s letters the same year to Andrew Bond express openness to the practice of “corrective baptism” under some conditions, though he did not elaborate on these conditions.

With Fr. Seraphim’s tremendous love for, and veneration of, St. Paisius (Velichkovsky) and St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, it is inconceivable to think that he would have considered them to be in error for insisting that all converts must enter the Orthodox Church through baptism, as he clearly agreed with them that there is no grace in the sacraments performed outside of the Orthodox Church. When discussing the reception of converts and “corrective baptism,” Fr. Seraphim seemed to be caught between two options, obedience to the bishops of ROCOR or obedience to Fr. Panteleimon, and he saw obedience to the bishops of ROCOR as closer to the royal path of the Fathers. From Fr. Seraphim’s correspondence, it doesn’t appear that he discussed these topics with any contemporary elders in Greece or elsewhere who were true spiritual successors of St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite and St. Paisius (Velichkovsky) and who upheld their teachings on the reception of converts. The main person Fr. Seraphim had contact with who represented the Athonite and Kollyvades teachings was Fr. Panteleimon, but his views on this topic were bound up with his Matthewite Old Calendarist ecclesiology which was not in line with the teachings of contemporary saints and elders on Mt. Athos and in Greece

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<sup>117</sup> Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Archdeacon Laurence, Aug. 10/23, 1976.

who remained in communion with the Church of Greece, the Ecumenical Patriarch and all Local Orthodox Churches.

Regarding Fr. Seraphim's own reception into the Church by chrismation, Fr. Damascene wrote:

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. His experience of grace upon entering the Church was too undeniably real to allow for any uncertainty.<sup>118</sup>

It is truly puzzling that despite such a heated controversy over the reception of converts and "corrective baptism" in ROCOR during Fr. Seraphim's life, that nowhere in the over 300 personal letters that are publicly available, nor in any published articles in the Orthodox Word, does Fr. Seraphim justify, or even mention, his own reception. It is uncertain what Fr. Damascene bases the above comments on regarding Fr. Seraphim's reception in the light of the ensuing controversy as he provides no quotes or references in support of this claim. According to the Old Calendarist Abp. Chrysostomos of Etna (+2019), who knew and corresponded with Fr. Seraphim, "Father Seraphim Rose, as I can demonstrate from personal correspondence, always regretted his reception into Orthodoxy by Chrismation, for which reason he unfailingly Baptized converts from Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, and this not a few in number."<sup>119</sup> As Fr. Damascene attested, Fr. Seraphim did baptize all converts, yet regarding any regrets Fr. Seraphim had over his reception by chrismation, we have not been able to obtain any letters which confirm this, so we only have this testimony of Abp. Chrysostomos.

Some have wondered that if reception of converts into the Orthodox Church by baptism is necessary, as St. Nikodemos and St. Paisius (Velichkovsky) taught and which the patristic consensus demonstrates,<sup>120</sup> what does this mean for Fr. Seraphim who never received baptism in the Orthodox Church (at least to our knowledge)?<sup>121</sup> Regarding such a question, we need not speculate but should rather follow the wise words of St. Cyprian of Carthage:

But someone says, 'What, then, shall become of those who in past times, coming from heresy to the Church, were received without baptism?' The Lord is able by His mercy to

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<sup>118</sup> Damascene, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

<sup>119</sup> Chrysostomos and Auxentios, "Common Misunderstandings on the Reception of Converts: A Reply to Father John Morris."

<sup>120</sup> See: *An Orthodox Ethos* Publication.

<sup>121</sup> "Corrective baptisms" are often done secretly in order to avoid scandal. Whether Fr. Seraphim was baptized in the Orthodox Church at some point after his reception by chrismation, we do not know.

give indulgence, and not to separate from the gifts of His Church those who by simplicity were admitted into the Church, and in the Church have fallen asleep. Nevertheless it does not follow that, because there was error at one time, there must always be error; since it is more fitting for wise and God-fearing men, gladly and without delay to obey the truth when laid open and perceived, than pertinaciously and obstinately to struggle against brethren and fellow-priests on behalf of heretics.”<sup>122</sup>

It would be foolish to refrain from receiving all converts by baptism only because Fr. Seraphim was not received into the Church by baptism when Fr. Seraphim himself baptized all converts! It would also be foolish to reject the teachings of the canons of the Church, the Ecumenical Councils, and innumerable saints and Fathers on the reception of converts based on a couple of statements Fr. Seraphim expressed in private letters!<sup>123</sup>

From Fr. Seraphim’s writings and publications, it is clear that he did not seem to give much attention to what was the patristic teaching of the Church on the reception of converts. His personal correspondence shows that his overarching concern regarding this topic was not with what was “correct”, but with the larger context of the influence of Fr. Panteleimon and his Matthewite ecclesiology and mentality in ROCOR. While after his ordination to the priesthood in 1977, Fr. Seraphim received all converts into the Orthodox Church by baptism, there is no indication from what has been published that Fr. Seraphim performed any “corrective baptisms” himself *or* refused to do so. Also, while Fr. Seraphim certainly respected the advice and decisions of certain bishops in ROCOR and upheld obedience to hierarchs as the ideal, he also understood that this rule has its limits and that Orthodox Christians are not called to “blind obedience” to hierarchs. While there has been great interest in Fr. Seraphim’s views on this topic considering how important the issue was in his time and the significant influence he has had on converts to Orthodoxy in and outside of America, we ultimately do not know much about his understanding and interpretation of the canons of the Church and writings of the saints and Fathers on the reception of converts, as he said surprisingly little concerning these things.

Above all, what Fr. Seraphim has left us with is his own example as a priest who received all converts by baptism and acted with great wisdom and discernment in the midst of major Church controversies. It is inevitable that there will be disagreements in the Church and these disagreements can stir up the passions of pride and egotism leading to divisions and schisms. In the midst of such controversies, we should humbly seek guidance from those among us who are filled with the Holy Spirit and who have the gifts of wisdom and discernment. We should not pridefully believe that we alone are right about any matter and denounce all who disagree, nor should we be quick to publicly denounce local Orthodox churches as “without grace” prior to their condemnation by a Pan-Orthodox Council. Orthodox Christians must seek to know and defend the truth and not give in to blind obedience, but the defense of the truth must be with humility and love, seeking guidance from the saints of our own times, while striving to preserve

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<sup>122</sup> Cyprian, “Epistle LXXII”.

<sup>123</sup> Concerning Fr. Seraphim’s reception by chrismation, see also Fr. Peter Heers, “What About How Fr. Seraphim Rose Was Received by Chrismation?”

unity and peace in the Church. It is above all this humble approach to the defense of the truth that shines forth from the witness of Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose).

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