

Seraphim Rose: American “Fundamentalist” or a Twentieth Century Saint?

By Myron Zacharakis*

The priest-monk Seraphim Rose is one of the best-known figures of Orthodoxy of the twentieth century. His books, which gained great popularity, attempt to systematically record the spiritual deadlocks of the modern world, which fr. Seraphim considers to be the era that directly precedes the Antichrist. In this context, he believes that only a small group of completely uncompromising Christians will maintain the right faith, with all the rest being drawn into destruction¹.

Initially, with his work *The Soul after Death: Post-Death Experiences in the Light of Orthodox Teaching*, which is more widely considered perhaps his magnum opus, fr. Seraphim attempts to “re-construct” –or rather systematically expose– the teaching of the Orthodox Church on the posthumous “toll houses of the soul”. As it is explained in detail in the book, the soul wanders posthumously for the first two (at most) days in the places where it lived on earth, while for the remaining thirty-eight days passes through the places of paradise and hell, which is the reason for the corresponding memorial services. These help the soul a lot, although of course the prayers of the Church are unable to save that one who never really desired to be saved. However, there are twenty such evil

* Myron Zacharakis, is a PhD cand. at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.
1. The main influences on Rose’s reasoning, apart of course from the Orthodox Literature, are some distinguished Roman-Catholic writers, such as fr. Lubac, Max Picard, Josef Pieper, but also the thinker Erich Kahler, and even more Maistre and Donoso Cortés. As the French thinker René Guenon, by whom he was also influenced, fr. Seraphim speaks of the modern world as if it were a product of man’s constant distancing from the fundamental spiritual truths, that existed in other times in the surrounding “atmosphere”. Finally, an important source of him is Dostoevsky’s novels.

spirits like these, demons, that the soul goes through a trial in the form of sin². After death, Rose tells us, summarizing a multitude of patristic and Christian works (e.g. the *Synaxaria*), man's soul passes through the space of the evil spirits, each one of which is responsible for a different type of sin and attempts to obstruct its "path", by attracting it to hell. In case that the soul is not purified from passions, it will be attracted by this particular passion that exerts the greater attraction on it. The demons will consider it a "friend" and will lead it to hell³. The "posthumous" experiences that we hear and read about are usually too short, because if they had lasted longer real death would have occurred. On the contrary, an out-of-body experience can last longer⁴. If one takes into account that modern Americans have almost always had such pleasant experiences while a third of Indians with similar experiences experienced terror, we must admit that the influence of the wider cultural environment is also important. Almost all the posthumous experiences that are mentioned in modern works are too short, since real death would have occurred, if their duration had been longer. However, one cannot deny that the modern experiences of contact with the dead are the authentic continuation of the spiritualism of the 19th century.

[...] the modern "posthumous" experiences, as they are imperfect, all belong to the following rule: the "out-of-body" state is only the beginning of the initial period of incorporeal "wandering" of the soul in the places of its earthly bonds' but none of these people has remained dead for a long time, even until he meets the angels that are going to accompany him⁵.

The authentic Christian experience, Rose summarizes, comes truly from the heaven/hell places, while that of the spiritualists comes from the "airy" part of the world of the fallen spirits/ demons. Of course, most of the modern "visions" are not experienced exclusively by Christians'

2. Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Ἡ ψυχὴ μετὰ τὸν θάνατο: μεταθανάτιες ἐμπειρίαι στὸ φῶς τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης διδασκαλίας*, transl. (Greek) Panagiota Tsouropli, Myriobiblos Publications, Athens 2004, p. 286.

3. *Op.cit.*, p. 145.

4. *Op.cit.*, p. 170.

5. *Op.cit.*, p. 285.

they do not have elements of Christian spirituality, which is indissolubly linked to the fear of God and the call to repentance.

The teaching on evil spirits in Orthodox sources has never been defined as a "dogma", since it probably belongs to the tradition of Orthodox piety⁶ but this does not mean that it is something "insignificant" or a matter of "personal opinion". It has been taught everywhere and always in the Church, wherever the Orthodox ascetic tradition has been handed down. The fact that this issue has so far been outside the field of interest of many modern Orthodox theologians, is due to the fact that these theologians belong mainly to the academic world and not to the world of the ascetic tradition⁶.

This particular issue has been discussed, among other things, by Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov (1807-1867) and Saint Theophanes the Enkleistos (1815-1894), with the latter in a way opposing the former for reasons that, as fr. Seraphim believes are the result of misinterpretation of his positions. According to fr. Seraphim, although the teaching on evil spirits has not been officially defined as dogma by an Ecumenical Council, it is an important manifestation of Orthodox piety, that plays a key role in the Orthodox ascetic tradition. Indeed, the Orthodox Church considers its teaching on evil spirits to be so important, that it has included references to it in many of its services⁷. The possible rejection of it by some today:

It is the work of the same Western rationalism that has attacked the Orthodox Church so often in the past and because of which so many people have lost the true understanding and sense of the Orthodox Christianity. In the Roman-Catholic and Protestant West, this attack has fully achieved its goal, and of the remaining Lives of Saints the supernatural elements have indeed been erased and are often regarded as "moral myths"⁸,

because:

The true Orthodox teaching on the life after death, on the contrary, fills man with the fear of God and inspires him to fight for the Kingdom of Heaven against

6. *Op.cit.*, p. 377.

7. *Op.cit.*, p. 289.

8. *Op.cit.*, p. 395.

all the invisible enemies that hinder its path. All Orthodox Christians are called to this fight, and it is an inhuman injustice against them to blunt the orthodox teaching so that they feel more “comfortable”⁹.

Rose also cites the four responses of the last of the Byzantine Fathers, Saint Markos Eugenikos, in the well-known Council of Florence, with the first answer containing the most concise exposition of Orthodox teaching on these issues¹⁰, and the subsequent ones being juxtaposed with the Roman-Catholic beliefs about the purgatory. The writer concludes by quoting the homilies of Saint Markos Eugenikos to the Papists against the idea of the Purgatory. Underlining the differences between Orthodoxy and Roman-Catholicism, fr. Seraphim insisted on the highlighting the former as the preserved truth of the early Church. Thus, the question naturally arises as to how he himself dealt with the great ecclesiastical fathers of the West¹¹.

9. *Op.cit.*, p. 399.

10. *Op.cit.*, p. 304.

11. In his short and unfinished treatise *The Position of Saint Augustine in the Orthodox Church*, the priest-monk Seraphim attempted to clarify an issue that in his time (and not only) had ended up thorny. Initially, always citing the original sources, he observes that Saint Augustine deviated somewhat from Orthodoxy on three basic issues: the procession of the Holy Spirit, the relationship between divine Grace and human will, as well as the divine “punishment” of evil, however, at a time when they had not yet been formulated synodically. But what this book highlights is that the Augustinian positions were not so much erroneous as they were “incomplete” and excessively intellectual, due to his general “European” education, a fact that should not lead us to a total rejection of the work of Saint Augustine. According to fr. Seraphim, Saint Augustine was possessed by divine love, as it is shown in his *Confessions*, and for this reason he is an important source of inspiration for Christians to this day, particularly when they are neophytes. In the book, it is systematically supported with arguments that the “destination” that Augustine adopted should in no way be identified with the doctrine of the absolute destination, which was later formulated by Calvin, but that it was a mitigated destination, whose final goal was to resolve the dilemma of what precedes the relationship between God and man: human freedom or divine Grace. In this context, Saint Augustine believed that God knows *a priori* the human intention and offers His divine grace to those who desire it inwardly. In any case, fr. Seraphim deeply venerated Saint Augustine, and willingly honored the common (that is before the Schism) saints and sought to avoid unnecessary conflicts between the Orthodox. See fr. Seraphim Rose, *Η θέση τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Ἀγιοῦστίνου στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία*, transl. (Greek) Panagiota Tsouropli, Myriobiblos Publications, Athens 2004, *passim*.

His next book *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*¹² could reasonably be considered the sequel to his book *The Soul after Death*. Indeed, as he had done in this one, in this case as well fr. Seraphim explores a whole range of worship practices that go beyond rationality and “scientific” materialism, in search of a modern and “alternative” form of religiosity, that offers the participants peace, meaning of life and a way out of their problems. The book’s narratives, intensively disturbing and warning, are deliberately in contrast to the reserved and structured style of his writing. Just as in *The Soul after Death*, the so called “afterlife” experiences were presented, here we can observe some new forms of religious faith: In particular, it is the “charismatic resurgence” brought about by the Pentecostalism, the “ufology” that from curious search has already evolved into to a true object of worship, the “new religious movements” (Hare Krishna, Maharishi, Maharaj Ji), that introduced in the West in a “thinly” form some practices of traditional Hinduism, but also Hinduism itself, which is slowly “conquering” one by one the countries of the former Christian world, with the American youth being the first to move in this direction, with the rest following¹³. According

12. The entire text, with a Greek translation, is published in: http://users.uoa.gr/~nektar/orthodoxy/gerontikon/seraphim_rose_orthodoxy_and_the_religion_of_the_future.htm [19.3.2024]. [19.3.2024].

13. It is worth mentioning here the writer Klaus Kenneth, who converted to Christianity (first to the Protestant Salvation Army and then to Orthodoxy, where he remains to this day) after an agonizing spiritual pursuit, in the context of which he came (initially as a hippie pothead) into personal contact with the new-ager “guru” Maharishi, and then moved on to the systematic practice of Hinduism, in Kallkuta. He narrates these and many more in his autobiographical book *Thousands of miles to the place of the heart* (Greek edition: *Χιλιάδες μίλια πρὸς τὸν τόπο τῆς καρδιάς*, En Plo Publications, Athens 2012). Kenneth, who has founded public welfare institutions and gives international speeches narrating his adventurous life, wrote a little later another book, (Greek edition: *Θεοί, εἶδωλα, γκουροῦ: ἀπὸ τῆ σκιᾶ τῆς πλάνης στὸ φῶς τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας*, transl. Viki Patriki, En Plo Publications, Athens 2012). There, in addition to his personal experiences with oriental spirituality, citing the above-mentioned book of fr. Seraphim Rose, whose warnings seem to be confirmed by his experiences, he points out: “A philosophy of spiritual-metaphysical content over and above all religions constructed phenomena, such as science fiction, extraterrestrials, U.F.O. and many more, with the common wish to escape from the bonds of everyday life. This “post-Christian religion” of course serves the Antichrist by providing him Hollywood as springboard and crutch in order to proclaim the new super-human [...]. The innumerable incredible descriptions of U.F.O.

to Rose, there is a gradual deepening to the occupation with the eastern spirituality: The generation of the 1950s (“beatniks”) expressed a simple interest in the content of the non-Christian beliefs, the generation of the 1960s (“hippies”) went even further, and now the generation of the 1970s generation now systematically practices the worship practices of the Far East¹⁴. Rose admits that many of these worships are nothing more than passing fads, however he believes that we should not be at rest, because these fashions will not disappear until they have contributed to the further de-Christianization of our societies. Priest-monk Seraphim also warns against the moves of modern Ecumenism, which, in his opinion, threatens to destroy Orthodoxy, the last fortress of spiritual protection, from such alien forms of “spirituality”. For, as he stresses, and this is the central idea of his book, all those various religions in reality do nothing more than prepare the way for the “religion of the future”, that is, the worship of the Antichrist, in the end times of history. Rose also groups many different tendencies and spiritual movements here, as his main concern is to show the antichrist nature of all of them, which according to his view also constitutes the antichrist nature of our time, which is the time of the great apostasy, just before the coming of the Antichrist. The devil now appears to people without “embellishments”:

by reliable people –and I myself saw this phenomenon with my own eyes– testify to the thirst for a “higher Power” liberating from the bonds of necessity and poverty of this life. The wonderful untruths of U.F.O. belong all belong together in the area of parapsychology and occultism”. Kl. Kenneth, *Θεοί, εἰδωλά, γκουροῦ...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 166-167.

14. According to Rose, other religions, to the extent that they are not simple manifestations of demonolatry, are perhaps fair but certainly imperfect human attempts to communicate with the divine, with the people who participate in them being in a special situation where how they will be “approached” depends practically absolutely on God. This is what he will say in the short lecture that he gave in 1981, just before the end of his life at the University of California, entitled: “God’s revelation to the human heart”, which will be published in a separate book, and in Greek by Egrigorsis publications. In that short homily, with which one can begin his “acquaintance” with the work of fr. Seraphim, he speaks of two elements that are required for the human soul to communicate with God: inner receptivity and pain. A typical example is the communist Russia, with the gulags functioning as “schools” for new authentic Christians, like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Yuri Maskov, from whose texts excerpts are read. The text is all published electronically in: http://users.uoa.gr/~nektar/orthodoxy/geron_tikon/seraphim_rose_revelation_of_god_into_human_heart.htm [19.3.2024].

The conscious Orthodox Christian lives purely in a fallen world, both as it concerns the earth, and the stars: everything is equally far from the lost paradise, for which he is fighting [...]. He does not trust his own ability to discern the delusions of demons and for that reason he focuses as firmly as possible on the scriptural and patristic guide lines, with which the Church of Christ provides him for his life. A man like that is possible to resist the religion of the future, the religion of the Antichrist, in whatever form it may be presented: the rest of humanity, is lost lest God performs a miracle.

This, in the end, is the aim not only of movements that are clearly of a religious nature, but also the strange curiosity of many people today to communicate with "extraterrestrial" beings. As in *The Soul after Death*, Rose follows the method of consulting the scientific and academic literature in combination with Orthodox Christian literature, with the later appearing beyond where the former cannot go deeper into the understanding of the true "nature" of these phenomena. For example, the author, following historiographical sources, points out that the popular curiosity about U.F.O. was preceded (of course temporally) by the mass "consummation" of (mainly literary) readings (e.g. of Arthur Clark), which in their own way encouraged the belief in "extraterrestrial" and more "developed" civilizations than us, the conduct with which was supposed to give humanity the impetus for spiritual "evolution" towards higher forms of consciousness and bliss. Such are the expectations that are generally interwoven with "ufology" and of course there is also here plenty of group delusion, autosuggestion, without excluding incidents of crafty exploitation of human credulity. However, he continues, the multitude and the details of personal testimonies and narratives give the suspicion that the scientific explanations are not sufficient. And this is where fr. Seraphim uses the sources of the Orthodox tradition, showing the amazing, in his opinion, similarities of the "extraterrestrial" experiences with the experiences of demons as those that are mentioned in the Synaxaria (at least the Orthodox ones, says to us, because these to a large extent tend to be considered mythical and are completely removed from those of the Catholics). Similarly, the priest-monk, consulting protestant textual sources as well, compares the impressive phenomena of "glossolalia" of the Pentecostals with

the spiritual gatherings of medium, at the beginnings of the twentieth century. The four common characteristics of both are common faith, laying on of hands, passiveness and use of techniques of autosuggestion. Just as the “afterlife” experiences, so too these phenomena are ultimately the return to the pre-Christian practice of necromancy, for which the Old Testament already so strictly warned. Finally, Rose reproaches here too the superficiality of such behaviors and explicitly contrasts them with the disciplined seriousness, modesty, and austerity of the genuine Orthodox believer. Authentic divine experiences, he explains, presuppose strict fasting, humility, obedience to a spiritual guide, as well as recognition of sinfulness on the part of the believer. In the end, all these new phenomena in our “post-Christian” world are a restoration of pre-Christian religiosity, a large part of which is pure demonolatry from which Christ liberated us. It is a phenomenon of spiritual delusion which Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov had divided in two forms. The first and most spectacular of these arises when one struggles for a high spiritual state and visions, without first being purified of his passions. The devil provides him with great “visions”, that have driven many deluded ascetics to suicide or madness. The second form of delusion, which is called “fantasy”, is less spectacular, because it does not offer “visions” but only “uplifting” religious feelings. The devil, as the Orthodox tradition knows, can perform miracles by imitating God, lest he deceive those who are inclined to believe them. The book passionately inveighs against Ecumenism and against the then Patriarch Athenagoras, while at the same time emphasizing that the charismatic resurgence and new syncretistic tendencies have no other role than to prepare a united and spiritually altered Christianity¹⁵, which in turn will be the anteroom for the unification of all the religions of humanity. This is to be the religion of the future, which in its essence is nothing more than the preparation for the acceptance of the Antichrist. We are already living in the period of apostasy and we are facing the end times, just before the great events.

15. In the relevant parts of the book, there is an explicit reference to the Russian existentialist philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev, as its inspirer, perhaps because he is widely considered the father of the “post-patristic” theology. At the same time, even some Orthodox are considered “infidel”, such as the priest Eusebios Stefanou.

In his last, short and unfinished book, under the characteristic title *Nihilism: The Beginning of Apostacy in Modern Times*, Seraphim Rose will now attempt to outline the stages of the distance of the man of the West from the Orthodox truth (which of course is Christ). In the book, he is confronted with many different tendencies, however, he considers any differences between them apparent:

Whether they follow the positivistic “critique” of Christian truths and institutions, with revolutionary violence against the Old Commandment, apocalyptic visions of a global destruction and the re-creation of an earthy paradise, or they are objective scientists working for the benefits of a “better life” in this world -implying that there is no other world-their aim is common: the annihilation of the Divine Revelation and the preparation of a new order of things where there will be none trace of the “old” perception and Man will be the only god¹⁶.

According to him, the historical foundation of man’s apostacy, that began in the 18th century, is the denial of the absolute truth. That is, logic is not in a position to refuse the existence of a first and absolute truth, without at the same time contradicting itself. In particular, philosophically there is a need for at last one absolute truth, which is not based on another, but presupposes and supports all the others. This can be no other than God. Without this Truth, which acts as an “Archimedean point”, man (even the modern scientist) stands in the air, struggling continuously with the prospect of relativism. These epistemic and epistemological thoughts have clear political implications: Fr. Seraphim presents himself as a supporter of an “Orthodox Christian Hegemony”¹⁷, strongly rejecting not only the Enlightenment and French Revolution, but even the idea of a constitutional monarchy. His ideal is the absolute monarchy of a Christian ruler. Despite of any defects and passions the characterized it, he argues, that there was order, hierarchy and meaning in the old regime, which was shaken in the 18th century. With the one eye now on the liberal capitalistic world and the other on the socialist societies, Rose writes in a rather dystopian tone. Throughout

16. Eugene Rose (fr. Seraphim), *Μηδενισμός: ή αρχή της αποστασίας στη σύγχρονη εποχή*, transl. (Greek) Vasileia Katsani, Myriobiblos Publications, Athens 2007, p. 32.

17. *Op.cit.*, p. 44.

his book, the references to the mature work of Fyodor Dostoevsky play an important role, which is recognized here as prophetic for the spread of nihilism and of the atheistic totalitarianisms. To outline the dystopian climate of the modern world, Rose compares the new man with the babies that were born after thalidomide was taken. Nihilism, according to him, is a program of constant revolution, an event that takes place continuously and it will not reach its full completion until the end times, just before the Second Coming. The stages of the “dialectic” of nihilism, as he calls it, were historically the following four: liberalism, realism, vitalism, and –finally– nihilism. All of them are fallacies, however every fallacy contains a trace of truth because, otherwise, it could not even exist. In addition, every stage is the negation of the previous and at the same time its strengthening, which is the negation of the Christian truth. In particular, if liberalism, opposing the old regime, was characterized by indifference to the truth (which is Christ), realism put forward a direct denial against it, while vitalism, in turn, gave an irrational emphasis to the values of “life” (in the biological sense of the term, lower instincts etc.) and sought redemption in new religions. Finally, nihilism was now the active, systematic and by any means attack on anything that reminds, even slightly, of the truth of the Christian world. Communism, for example, did not hesitate to fight Christianity with the use of violence and persecutions. However, according to Rose, the most complete and consistent embodiment of nihilism in the political sphere was definitely Hitler’s Nazism. Nazism was more completely in nihilism even than Soviet communism, because it had obviously satanic characteristics and it did not hide them under the cloak of humanism. Therefore, what should we expect from now on? Is the end of the world imminent? Can there be a post-nihilistic world? Initially, Rose replies that the war of God’s enemies has been successful for two centuries now¹⁸. It is not excluded, he adds, that a post-nihilistic world will dawn on us tomorrow. However, if this really happens, it will happen not because nihilism supposedly receded but because its work has simply ended, that is, it has achieved the purpose it had to accomplish. Acknowledging that his above descriptions are somewhat bleak, the American priest-monk

18. *Op.cit.*, p. 146.

admits that there is also a lot of goodness and humanity in our world. Many people truly believe in the ideologies they follow, anticipating a better future for humanity. However, this should not reassure us. Because, as long as man lives based not on his supernatural destination but on (any) secular hopes, he is doomed to walk in vain. His good intentions, are unfortunately not enough¹⁹. Nihilism is a form of spiritual apostasy, and as such it can only be fought by means of war²⁰. The only solution to his progressive deterioration and unstoppable decline of the human race, lies at the eschatological level. Rose immediately anticipates The Eschata, repeating in his own way, the amazing phrase of the *Apocalypse* of John. For the nihilist man, the world is everything and God is nothing, a zero. For the Christian, however, the reverse is true: In this sense alone, the true Christian could be said to be a “nihilist”, he writes characteristically. Man is not from this world and for this world. If he realizes this, then he will also know that he can be redeemed with Jesus Christ. Therefore, we must become Christians again²¹. This is his final conclusion.

Criticism

We have attempted above to summarize as best as possible, the “quintessence” of the theological thought of fr. Seraphim Rose. Perhaps some objections can now be raised to his statements. At first, it is somewhat negative that in the modern era of great dilemmas that are raised by politics, ecology and immigration, the priest-monk Seraphim has nothing else to offer us except ascetic isolation and the expectation for the immediate coming of the Second Coming. Considering the twentieth century “dark” and almost completely devoid of divine grace, he overlooks the importance of rapid Christianization in Asia and Afrika, idealizing the past of an “Orthodox Christian Empire”, as if there were no many heresies, wars, cruelty and sin (e.g. persecutions against Jews,

19. *Op.cit.*, p. 145.

20. *Op.cit.*, p. 147.

21. *Op.cit.*, pp. 188-189.

systematic extermination of Bogomils etc.). Fr. Seraphim recognizes of course the existence of passions and weaknesses, and in Christian past, however he argues that all these were only the causes of the spiritual rebellion of nihilism against it. However, if someone wanted to search for indications about the imminent end of the world, as he does so diligently, it would not be particularly difficult to find them in almost any historical period. This is what Saint Anastasios Gordios did, for example, who foresaw the coming of the end times at the beginning of 18th century with the reasoning that Orthodoxy was constantly being attacked between the Latins and the Ottomans – persecution much harsher than anything that happened to the Christians of the last century, the communist Russia included. In fact, one would reasonably conclude that today we live in a particularly much more stable and less cruel for Christians world, compared to the past. This is the great paradox of fr. Seraphim's thinking: Although he recommended avoiding such internal conflicts, he excluded almost everyone from Orthodoxy, as heretics. If he ever recognizes the need for certain mild "corrections" to the saints, his rejection of contemporary theologians is absolute and almost Manichaeic. This applies not only to "controversial" cases, such as fr. Sergios Bulgakov and the philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev (the latter is not even considered Christian, but humanist Gnostic) but to a certain extent, also to fr. George Florovsky fr. John Meyendorff and especially fr. Alexander Schmemmann, whom he criticizes in his letters at every opportunity²².

His controversy with the theologian Alexander Kalomoiros and fr. Panteleimon Mitropoulos, in terms of the Darwinic theory of evolution, which he saw as a serious threat to Orthodoxy, and considered it part of a wider anti-Christian philosophy that has dominated the West for three centuries and is structured in many aspects, is also well-known. It seems that fr. Seraphim was very worried that the evolutionary theory might lead the Orthodox to form a theology like the "satanic" theology of the Roman-Catholic Jesuit monk and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Here, in our opinion, fr. Seraphim, failed from a scientific point of view to attempt to elevate the "Young Earth Creationism" to an

22. On the contrary, he does not spare praise for the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky.

obligatory doctrine of the Orthodox faith, a fact that, we believe, would completely alienate Orthodoxy from the modern scientific world and would favor exactly those divisions among the faithful that he himself sought to avoid (see the well-known case of the Old Calendarists)²³. There were also those who accused fr. Seraphim of “patristic literalism”, a form of Orthodox fundamentalism similar to the (usually Protestant-inspired) “biblical literalism”²⁴. At the same time, He confessed that the ecclesiastical fathers and saints, although wise in their theology, do not have any kind of “infallibility” in scientific issues, in which it is true that they are not always correct and one can easily find such errors, due to the time in which they lived. At the same time, however, he wrote that we must change also our science (e.g. paleontology) on the basis of its writings. This is the first of the two great contradictions of the priest-monk Seraphim Rose. The second is related to the issue of political theology. This is an issue that has received two main answers: The first is the (partial) identification of the divine Kingdom with the earthly and supernational Christian empire, an idea that has been identified mainly with Eusebius of Caesarea. The second position (which is attributed to Origen and his successors) believes that every political class is inseparably linked to (also) sin, therefore the divine Kingdom can only come to the eschatological level, when God restores the world to His own Kingdom. When fr. Seraphim openly expresses himself positively in favor of the “Christian monarchy” he approaches the first position which has been accused of millennialism, on the basis that it is trying to bring to the earthly sphere something that transcends it, forgetting that every human *status quo*, every state, necessarily includes physical violence and all kinds of sins, therefore it should not be “worshiped”. In fact, it is said that just when Christianity becomes political power and puts the cross on the banners, it undertakes to “Christianize” people by violence and to penalize sinful behaviors which belong exclusively

23. The above do not necessarily imply the acceptance of the respective views of the theologian Al. Kalomirois and of fr. Panteleimon Mitropoulos, with whom fr. Seraphim was confronted.

24. For the rather frequent discussions about Darwin and his theory in biology, one can read his correspondence (1961-1982) in English, published at the following link: <https://thoughtsintrusive.wordpress.com/letters-of-fr-seraphim-rose-1961-1982/> [19.3.2024].

to the spiritual sphere (e.g. heresy), precisely then is corrupted. On this issue, it would be worthwhile for fr. Seraphim to take into account some books of Berdyaev, where the above are rightly interpreted, but his absolutely condemning stance against him probably forbids this choice in advance²⁵. The isolationism of this so pious and spiritually refined priest-pilgrim seems perhaps exaggerated by the standards of an Orthodox Christian, as we usually imagine him.

And here comes a crucial question: Could we characterize fr. Seraphim as a “fundamentalist”? This might be supported by his collective rejection of the modern world, his intensely departing spirit, his certainty about the imminent end of the world, as also his calls for a return to the original “primary” message of Christianity, which he is convinced remains inaccessible even to most Orthodox believers. On the other hand, fr. Seraphim leaves no room for the exercise of violence, nor does he lean in favor of a new claim to political sovereignty on the part of Christians. On the contrary, he seems certain that the world as a whole will never become Christian again, therefore the only thing left for those who wish to live in such a way is anchoritism, that is, recourse to silence and contemplation, where they will pray to God and will try to remain faithful to His commandments.

Finally, fr. Seraphim was a truly in love man. His fiery and uncompromising love for God but also his agonizing care for people are revealed in every word that this enigmatic personality wrote. And like every lover, he could not avoid some failures and exaggerations. Perhaps in his case fits the description that he made once of Saint Augustine: His mistakes are not “heresies” but imperfections and human weaknesses. Those of us who point these out, let us never forget that he achieved what seems inconceivable, impossible and incredible to us. Perhaps after all fr. Seraphim was a new saint, a reappearance of Saint Augustine in the troubled world of the twentieth century.

25. Perhaps, after all, neither Berdyaev followed this stance with consistency, since he gave in to the “millenarian” expectations of a supposedly coming religious revival. See indicatively N. Berdyaev, *Ἡ μοῖρα τῆς κοιλτούρας*, transl. (Greek) K. Tsiropoulos, Astrolavos Publications/Euthyni, Athens 1992, pp. 32-33.