

The missiology of Hieromonk Seraphim Rose

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Hieromonk Seraphim Rose is important today for the entire Orthodox world, not only for those who knew him personally. On September 2, 2022, on the 40th anniversary of his death, I made a special visit to Platina, the monastery of St. Herman of Alaska, Father Seraphim's grave, to pay respects to him and get to know the people who had direct contact with him. During the two days I spent there, I learned a lot about Father Seraphim and got even closer to him, but I also discovered that even I, a Christian living on the other side of the earth,-- the time difference between us is twelve hours -- had news to tell them about Father Seraphim; I didn't know him personally, but his glow soon reached me: in 1985 I read his "The Soul After Death". This was my first Orthodox book, thanks to which I entered the Church - before that I was no churchgoer; This is how I met my spiritual mentor, Metropolitan Daniel, in 1987, and how His Holiness and Beatitude, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia Ilia II became my teacher and a beacon: I passed the first theological exam to him in 1988 and spent 35 years by his side. It was last year in Platina that the idea of this conference was born, the purpose of which is to share personal experiences about those luminaries of the last times who changed our lives in Christ.

His Holiness and Beatitude Ilia II in 1991 founded the Department of Mission and Evangelization in the Georgian Patriarchate under the leadership of Metropolitan Daniel, where I am still his deputy. Our missionary activity needed a theoretical basis. Obviously, all missionary ideas are set out in the Holy Scriptures, but we did not have modern theoretical missiology, and Father Seraphim helped us with this. Now I am holding in my hands two books published by me: one is a lecture by Father Seraphim "In Step with St. Patrick and Gregory of Tours" published in 2003 with my translation into Georgian; I used this book for many years as a missiology textbook for the clergy of our mission school; It contains fundamental missionary ideas, some of which will be presented to you today; This second book, published in Russian in 2022, is my dissertation on the missionary aspects of the ministry of the Prophet Jonah and is an example of following in the footsteps of St. Patrick and St. Gregory of Tours. This ten-year work was inspired by Father Seraphim's lecture. Taking this opportunity, I would like to inform you that I am looking for a translator from Russian into Georgian and English. Before moving directly to Father Seraphim's lecture, I would like to note that Father Seraphim's is also responsible for the fact

that at this conference we are raising the question of the canonization of another recent luminary - Father George Calciu. A month before his death, in his last lecture, "Living with an Orthodox Worldview," Father Seraphim informed the general public about Father Gheorghe Calciu, who at that time was still suffering in a communist prison in Romania. From him, I also learned about Father George, and when in the fall of 2022 I met his spiritual daughter, Dr. Maria Rosana Stoica, we decided to push forward the process of canonization of Father George Calciu together, and the result is obvious.

In Step with St. Patrick and Gregory of Tours is also one of Father Seraphim's last lectures. In the last two talks, he laid down the basic principles of modern missiology - this is his missionary testament: a sober vision, an accurate diagnosis, finding a solution and an action plan; Orthodoxy should reflect and change a Christian's life completely, not partially. You are a Christian always and everywhere or you are not at all - it is impossible to become a Christian when you enter the church, and to leave your Christian life there when you leave and no longer stand out from the people of this world; A Christian must have a loving, merciful heart, and he himself must be simple and innocent, like a dove; Sensible faith and a Christian worldview, so as not to easily succumb to the values and behavior offered by the world; The believer must understand the spirit of the times and the totalitarian demands; Standing with two feet firmly on the ground, with an exalted mind, he should constantly be with Christ in the eternal world, for which he should feed on the blood and flesh of Christ, the Holy Scriptures, the lives of the saints and the writings of the fathers. A Christian should enjoy the true works of art, whether Western or Eastern, because all the best of this world points to Heaven; Finally, we have to learn a lot from the examples of the new martyrs, especially those who are walking the path of martyrdom today and going through their feat.

In Step with Saints Patrick and Gregory of Tours is a work full of missionary aphorisms and fundamental thoughts; I tried to highlight them, but because of their abundance today I will introduce you to only a part - I will attach the text of this lecture in three languages to the report; However, as I said, the whole lecture is a ready-made course in modern missiology.

At the beginning, speaking of Saint Patrick, Father Seraphim invites us to judge him not by the glory that he acquired in the eyes of the people today, but to see him as he was during his lifetime, and concludes: **1. This shows us that even those who later become quite glorious have to go through—in their own lifetimes—the same struggles that each one of us must go through; and it's not**

seen until the end whether a person even saves his soul - here are the thoughts that have served me many times as guiding principles in my personal life.

What practical conclusion can we draw from the life of a saint like Saint Patrick? A newly converted, inexperienced person may want to go to Ireland and “do great things”, but nothing will come of it, because once it already happened, and here is another fundamental thought of Father Seraphim: **2. We should look to lives like that of St. Patrick for some kind of inspiration or guidance as to what we can do ourselves in our own conditions.** Father Seraphim manages to express an idea that seems to be already clear, but has not yet been expressed.

The accurate assessments that Father Seraphim makes when discussing the current situation are very important, because an accurate diagnosis is a prerequisite for solving the problem:

Today, virtually the whole world has heard about Christ, and there are very few totally pagan peoples left who are not getting the Word preached to them. In Africa, as we continue to hear, the Orthodox Gospel is being preached to those wild tribes, from one country to the next, in East and Central Africa. **But in most places, the peoples of the world have become rather weary, tired, worn out people who once heard of Christianity and have now got bored with it.**

3. The whole phenomenon of the apostasy, of the falling away from the truth, means that people do not know how to accept the Gospel freshly. They have already heard about it and have been inoculated against it.

The second sign that characterizes our era and distinguishes it from the past is "Mickey Mouse" atmosphere. It is the lack of seriousness that one sees in the air, in just everyday customs. For example, when people part, they say, "Take it easy"—the sort of thing that indicates: "Relax, take it easy, there's nothing important going on. Just go along with whatever happens." We used to say things like: "God be with you." "Goodbye" even comes from the word "God".

Further: The young people of today are very much absorbed in the whole fantasy world of television/internet. This whole atmosphere—this unreal, movie-type atmosphere is very much in, not only the air, but our very homes. It affects the whole seriousness of life, the way children are brought up—though children are obviously not brought up anymore. **4. The whole idea of bringing them up, of raising them in a certain mold, is gone now.** Teenagers grow by themselves, influenced by the world around them, and the result is not delayed.

There is another reason too - mundane well-being, which deprives society of its individuality, humanity, and causes its members to care not for each other, but

for things, cars, and even more comfort. For example, The very idea of the telephone means that you can instantly have contact with someone for the sake of a message—nothing personal about it. **5.** If you have to go to great lengths to get to him, your soul is different than it would be if you just had to dial a number. And this was said and written when the mobile phone was not even imagined.

6. If we accept all that the Church hands down to us simply as something already accomplished, something given to us without our effort, as if it is just there and we can take it for granted—this already deadens us spiritually, because everything that is high must be fought for, must be struggled for.

7. As far back as William Butler Yeats, seventy-five years ago or so, everything in the modern age had been accomplished and done, all the seeds had been sown. The twentieth century can add almost nothing of its own. It has only put into effect that which has already been sown in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The result was that there was nothing more to do. Everything is done, it's hopeless. As William Butler Yeats, a sensitive Irish poet, expresses it in his poem *The Second Coming* (the Georgia translation belongs to me):

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand
The Second Coming! Hardly are these words out
When a vast image of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know

That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?

This is what a factual view of life should be: **the worst people are simply immersed in evil deeds and the best people are going frantic**, because there is no more spirituality left, there is nothing left to strive for, everything is taken away, materialism is triumphing, there is no hope for the world, and there is only one thing left: **8. "the beast slouches toward Bethlehem to be born"** And here is Father Seraphim's final assessment, which he arrived at in a completely logical, well-founded manner and imperceptibly led us too - **the vision of Antichrist. The world is going hopelessly down and there is no hope of getting out.**

This is where Father Seraphim's amazing simplicity and strength can be felt: if we want to find a solution, which, according to the Lord's promise ("and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18)) always exists, we must face the truth, no matter how harsh and cruel it may be, and arm ourselves with firm faith in the Lord.

All this is a negative part of modern life and we are forced to breathe this atmosphere. But, on the other hand, there is Orthodoxy, that is, the revelation of God in his church.

Here is the following fundamental thought that encourages us:

9. From the time when the Gospel was first preached until now, there are being gathered out of the world citizens of one kingdom, all going towards the heavenly kingdom. All these citizens will speak the same language, and know each other, because they have gone through the one, same Orthodox life, the same spiritual struggle, according to the laws of spiritual life.

The Holy Fathers spoke about the latter times as times of great weakness, in which there would not be the great signs which were performed in the early times of the apostles and in the desert by the first monks when thousands of miracles were being worked, great Fathers were raising people from the dead, many supernatural events were occurring; and these very Holy Fathers said that this dazzling age of miracles would fade away, and in the end there would be almost nothing at all like that. In fact, those who would be saving themselves would seem totally indistinguishable from everybody else, except that they would somehow keep alive the struggle against all these temptations. Just keeping alive

the spark of the true Christian Faith, without making miracles without doing anything out of the ordinary, would already make them, if they endured to the end, as great as or even higher than those great Fathers who worked miracles.

Therefore, **10.** the outward activity for Orthodox Christians is greatly limited in comparison with past times. It seems that way. Still, the inward spiritual activity must be just as possible for those who are willing to struggle. It's obvious, in looking at such people and realizing they are spiritual giants, that it is possible to do something even in our evil times.

But here too there is an ordeal: this worldly attitude of people who are themselves in the Church. We must look at it realistically and see it the way it is: apostasy, error, evil, demonic activity, when many people who call themselves Orthodox, are simply, totally worldly and do not think about the higher side of their Faith. They take it for granted. "It's all automatic. That's what has been handed down. There's always a priest somewhere. If he's not in this town, he's in the next one. He has sacraments and Holy Communion. We just go to him and get what we need and that's all.... You go home and you're content..." Based on this sane assessment, we must declare a relentless war against evil, but **11. one must learn to fight on the right battlefields.** This is extremely important, because it is very easy in the beginning stage to go totally off, by picking up and reading a book that talks about spirituality, hesychasm, and so on.

Bishop Theophan the Recluse [+1894], when quoting some of the Holy Fathers, deliberately omitted many of the passages which dealt with the physical sides of prayer. He did this knowing that—even in his time, the 19th century—many people would take those physical aspects as the end and begin imitating without getting the essence. Therefore he just left those writings out of his published works. Now, however, many of them are being published in English and you can read how you are supposed to sit on a stool with your head down, etc. People begin to imitate; they begin to think "this is it!"—and it is a matter of fact that if you fast for a long time and do certain exercises, you begin to have all kinds of things happen to you. **12. But that is not spiritual life. It is almost guaranteed, on the contrary, that it is the activity of demons:** it is more profitable *not* to say those 5,000 Jesus Prayers, but to do something else that is spiritual

The Holy Scriptures, the writings of the Holy Fathers, the examples of Saint's lives, the services of the Church—all these things have to do, not with worldliness in our daily life, but with conducting us to heaven. **13.** By looking

above to these things, we are enabled to have zeal; that is, to see that there is something above this routine of worldliness, which is very boring, discouraging, and leads nowhere.

This means the zeal must be tempered by something deeper, and that something deeper is what St. Seraphim calls *determination*; **14.** Zeal that became a determination, is constant and keeps going—a sort of constant point for your whole life. It keeps you going even when you're discouraged, because you see that there is something above towards which you are striving, and which does not depend upon your moods or your opinions. It is something which must be your constant possession. It is your determination to get to heaven. It is this determination, or rather, this zeal, that must be permanent - insured against both ups and downs and falls.

15. In everything that happens, we must look at the higher side, that is, the spiritual side; because if we are sometimes looking at the higher side and sometimes at the lower side, we will be up and down. And the lower side is so powerful

16. Therefore, if we are sometimes looking above and sometimes below, if we are going one foot forward, one foot back, and then one foot forward and two feet back, we will simply not get to the gate of heaven.

Abba Dorotheos developed a severe foot condition that forced him to severely limit his food intake. Once, pilgrim monks visited the monastery. In order not to make the guests feel uncomfortable, Abba Dorotheos dined with them. The forbidden food, as expected, aggravated the pain in his legs so much that he even lost the ability to speak for a while. **17.** He could, of course, have refused to dine with the guests, but he considered that God had sent the guests at such a time, not in order to make him deny his usual manner of hospitality, but to endure the pain which would result from this hospitality; This would be useful for his soul and therefore he fulfilled his love to the end. And so no one should grieve over what happens, but in everything he should place his hope in God's Providence, and be at ease."

St. Gregory of Tours lived in the 6th century, held his ministry and was writing a history of this people, writing in such a way that it actually comes out very inspiring. St. Gregory always sees that God is looking out. There is always something spiritual whenever something happens—a comet is seen, the king dies, etc. **18.** There is always a connection between what happens in the world and

the moral state of the people. Even when the moral state is very bad, all the constant earthquakes and famines and everything else remind us that it is the wrong way to behave, and inspire people to behave correctly¹.

Nowadays, the historians say that this is a horribly outmoded way of looking at things, that it is very "quaint" and "naive" and unsophisticated, and that of course nobody can think like that now. They think it's very cute, in fact, to look at this after all these centuries and to see how people used to think. "But of course," they say, "we serious historians are looking for the real causes." By real causes they mean what a person ate and what it caused his feet to do and so forth.

19. The Christian point of view, however, is that these are not the real causes, but the secondary causes. The real cause is the soul and God: whatever God is doing and whatever the soul is doing. These two things actualize the whole of history, and all the external events—what treaty was signed, or the economic reasons for the discontent of the masses, and so forth—are totally secondary.

Thus St. Gregory is actually looking at history in the correct way, because he sees that there is a first cause, which is what God does in history and how the soul reacts to it, and that the secondary cause is ordinary events. Therefore, whenever he sees some great event like a comet or an eclipse, he tries to give it meaning. At one point, in telling of a strange sign that was seen in the sky over Gaul, he says in all simplicity, "I have no idea what all this meant."** Of course, from the scientific point of view we know that we can predict these things, that they are caused by the shadow of the moon and so forth; **20.** but from St. Gregory's point of view, why does God choose to frighten us like this? What is the moral meaning of it? He was constantly looking *above*, not below.

21. Such people as St. Gregory as we can see by reading their writings and their lives—are constantly cheerful. This joy is not superficial or forced, but rather a deep feeling of happiness, because they are constantly looking above and

¹We have an example of contemplation of history from such an angle in the "Chronicles of Kartli", with the chronicler - in the chronicle of the time of the Mongols, i.e., a hundred-year one, which describes the state of Georgia in the 13th century, from the reign of St. King Tamar's son - Lasha-Giorgi, to George V the Brilliant's enthronement (see Sources of Georgian History, 48, Chronicler, "Centenary Chronicle", Tbilisi, 1987). The author sees the cause of the ordeal in Georgia in the nation's apostasy from God. In one place, he compares the actions of his contemporaries to the apostasy of the descendants of Jacob, the biblical patriarch, from God, and offers us a universal formula-key from the Bible to clarify the events; "As the prophet says: Jacob ate, to his fill, grew fat, and forsook God his creator and denied God his savior" (p. 43). In another place, he cannot fully reveal the atrocities committed by Jalaledin in Tbilisi, because he believes that by revealing this punishment of God to the end, the degree of the nation's sins for which God punished us will be revealed: [Sultan Jalaledin] invented another evil, which I consider it a shame to mention, ... of to what degree had we enraged the merciful and tolerant God, to not have mercy upon us" (p. 62).

keeping in mind, with determination and constancy, to get to a certain place, which is heaven.

We are told by the Holy Fathers that we are supposed to see in everything something for our salvation. If you can do that, you can be saved.

Here is one prosaic example: You are standing around and enjoying yourself, watching nice, clean, good pages come out printed, which gives a very nice sense of satisfaction, and you are dreaming of missionary activity, of spreading more copies around to a lot of different countries. But in a while it begins to torture you, it begins to shoot pages right and left. The pages begin to stick and to tear each other on top. You see that all those extra copies you made are vanishing, destroying each other, and in the end you are so tense that all you can do is sort of stand there and say the Jesus Prayer as you try to make everything come out all right. Although that does not fill one with a sense of satisfaction (as would watching the nice, clean copies come out automatically), spiritually it probably does a great deal more, because it makes you tense and gives you the chance to struggle. But if instead of that you just get so discouraged that you smash the machine, then you have lost the battle.

22. battle is not how many copies per hour come out: the battle is what your soul is doing. If your soul can be saving itself and producing words which can save others, all the better; but if you are producing words which can save others and are all the time destroying your own soul, it's not so good.

23. The details of earthly life must be second, and this looking upward must be with zeal, determination and constancy.

Constancy involves also a regular reading of spiritual texts, for example at mealtime, because we must be constantly injected with other-worldliness. This means constantly nourishing ourselves with these texts, whether in services or in reading, in order to fight against the other side, against the worldliness that constantly gnaws at us.

24. If for just one day we stop these other-worldly "injections," it is obvious that worldliness starts taking over. When we go without them for one day, worldliness invades—two days, much more. We find that soon we think more and more in a worldly way, the more we allow ourselves to be exposed to that way of thinking and the less we expose ourselves to other-worldly thinking. These injections—**daily injections of heavenly food**—are the outward side, and the inward side is what is called spiritual life.

25. You cannot decide you want to find all about some one subject and begin reading the Holy Fathers. There are a few indexes in the writings of the Fathers, but you cannot simply go at spiritual life that way. You have to go at it a little bit at a time, taking the teaching in as you are able to absorb it, going back over the same texts in later years, reabsorbing them, getting more, and gradually getting to find out how these spiritual laws apply to you. **As a person does that, he discovers that every time he reads the same Holy Father he finds new things. He always goes deeper into it.**

26. In fact, the possible activities for today are quite surprising and unexpected. What might come out, we don't know, but there are all kinds of possibilities. We should always learn to expect what is the unexpected, **to be prepared for something that might not have been the same way just a little while ago, but that is still within the possibility of true Christianity**

Archbishop John Maksimovich said: "We have no such thing as some of the later saints of the Latin Church who were sort of up in the clouds—some kind of a realm of sweetness and light and pink clouds—that's *prelest*."

27. All of our sanctity is based upon having your feet straight on the ground, and, while being of the earth, constantly having the mind lifted upward."

Archbishop John was himself like that. He was collecting these things: the lives of Rumanian saints and all kinds of different things which were very inspiring and had nothing to do with everyday business or the administration of the diocese.

28. In fact, some said he was a bad administrator, but I don't know. I doubt it, because I know that whenever anyone wrote him a letter, that person always got a reply back in the language he wrote it in, within a very short time.

29. The opposite of this is to make even the Church into some kind of business, to be looking at only the administrative side or the economic side or the lower, worldly side. If you do that long enough, you will lose the spark, you will lose the higher side.

30. If you are an Orthodox Christian, you can do this and have people call you crazy or say that you are a little bit touched, or something like that; but still

you have your own life—you lead it and you get to heaven. The alternative is to be bogged down in this boring world, which is totally overrun by machines and conveniences and opinions.

There is a certain opinion in the air that of course, when you come to church you must be warm because you cannot think about church services and prepare yourself for Communion when you have to think about cold feet. People tell us this. "It's a very great drawback," they say. "You cannot go and have cold feet and expect to have any spirituality come out." **This happens to be an opinion, and it's totally off.** The Holy Fathers have been living throughout the centuries in all kinds of conditions.

31. Obviously, there is no deliberate plot of torturing oneself with cold feet—still, this is something which helps to make one a little more sober about the spiritual life, perhaps to help one to appreciate what one has, and not to just take for granted that one is going to be comfortable and cozy and that's it.

32. If one undertakes anything in the Church, and does not have in mind to be looking constantly to the heavenly realm, one will lose the spark of zeal, the interest in doing spiritual things, and will become worldly. Worldly means dead, spiritually dead.

33. If a person is in a place of leadership, such as a priest in a parish, and if he is going to look back and look first at the people, he will see that 99% of them are going to drag him down, because they have their problems and passions, confessions weigh him down, and so on. If this side becomes too important for him, it simply drags him back and he cannot lead them to heaven. Of course, a pastor or any kind of spiritual leader must be leading to heaven first himself and then the others, by looking first to the other world.

Looking at the Protestant and Roman Catholic world, we can see that certain spiritual writings get out of date. Sometimes they come back into fashion again, sometimes they go out. It is obvious that they are bound up with worldly things, which appeal to people at one time, or rather to the spirit of the times.

This is not so with our Orthodox holy writings. Once we get into the whole Orthodox Christian outlook—the simply Christian outlook—which has been handed down from Christ and the apostles to our times, then everything becomes contemporary.

34. If you read the words of someone like St. Macarius, who lived in the deserts of Egypt in the 6th century, and he's speaking to you now. His conditions are a little different, but he's speaking right to you now, in the same language; he's going to the same place, he's using the same mind, he has the same temptations and failings, and there's nothing different about him.

It's the same with all the other fathers from that time down to our century, like St. John of Kronstadt (+1908). They all speak the same language, one kind of language, the language of spiritual life, which we must get into. When we do that, we can save ourselves and more.

35. St. Seraphim of Sarov says, "When you acquire the Spirit of Peace, the Holy Spirit, you can save thousands around you." It is not for us to calculate whether thousands around us will be saved. It is only for us to acquire the Holy Spirit, and what God will do with that is His doing.

12. N e w o p p o r t u n i t i e s

We have yet to expect in our times many surprising things, so we should not have the opinion that it is too late to do anything, everything is stuck, nobody cares, the world is collapsing.... **All that is opinion, 36. and opinion is the first stage of *prelest* (deception).** Therefore, we should free ourselves from being stuck in opinions, and should look at things freshly, *i.e.*, according to the spiritual life.

Father Nicholas Deputatov, who is obviously one who has much love for the Holy Fathers, has read their writings, underlined them and written them out in books. He says: When I get in a very low mood, very discouraged and despondent, then I open one of my notebooks, and I begin to read something that inspired me. It is almost guaranteed that when I read something which once inspired me, I will again become inspired, because it's my own soul that was at one time being inspired, and now I see that it was something which inspired me then and can nourish me now also. So it's like an automatic inspiration, to open up something which inspired me before. From this I conclude that **37.** If I found spiritual food before, I can eat the same food now. And this seems to me to be a mechanism of spiritual encouragement: unfold and read what used to have a similar effect."

Thus, when we think of someone like St. Patrick, our attitude should not be merely: "Aha, that was a long time ago, that was inspiring; but now—well, what's

the use?" On the contrary, **38.** in the activity of St. Patrick we should see the activity of a contemporary person, of a soul who was burning with zeal and love for God. He has gone to that country where we are to be citizens, if only we will strive.

39. We are all of the same nationality, the Christian race.

40. St. Patrick's life should be for us a contemporary thing, something which applies to us today. Whatever inspiration we can take from it, is for us right now. And however much fruit this bears, depends on how much we love God and how much opportunity there is. The inspiration is ours for free.