

Rest of the Venerable Archimandrite Sergius

AFTER A PROLONGED period of illness, on June 3, 2008 (New Style), the Very Reverend Archimandrite Sergius (Yazadzhiev), 84, one of the pillars of our Sister Church, the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria reposed peacefully at the Convent of the Protection of the Holy Mother of God in Kn-yazhevo (Sofia), Bulgaria, where he served for many years.



Father Sergius (*pictured, at left, at the Protection Convent in 2004*) is well known to the readers of *Orthodox Tradition*, to which, for more than a decade, he regularly contributed a number of insightful and spiritually-rich articles.

Born on February 15, 1924 (Old Style), Archimandrite Sergius was, from his earliest youth, a champion of the Orthodox Faith, to which he dedicated his entire adult life.

With the blessing of the Holy Hierarch, St. Seraphim of Sofia, he became the spiritual child of the ever-memorable Archimandrite Dr. Seraphim (Alexiev), another important pillar of the Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Bulgaria, to whom he was thereafter spiritually close throughout his life.

Thus, in 1946, on the eve of the Feast of the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos, the young Stefan Yazadzhiev was tonsured into the monastic estate and received under Father Seraphim's mantle, taking the name of St. Sergius of Radonezh. The same year, on the Feast Day of the celebrated St. John of Rila (November 1, New Style), St. Seraphim ordained him a Deacon.

Having graduated, as layman, from the Department of Classical Philology at the University of Sofia, Hierodeacon Sergius subsequently became a student at the Theological Academy in Sofia, from which he graduated and where he later became a graduate student and, eventually, an Assistant Professor of New Testamental Exegetics. In 1960, he was advanced to the rank of Associate Professor.

In his area of study, Hierodeacon Sergius was a distinguished scholar, sharing with inimitable generosity of spirit his profound wisdom with his students. During his teaching career, he published several valuable theological studies. In 1968, having already been ordained to the Priesthood for a decade,

he was also assigned to serve the Russian church of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker in Sofia. During the years of Communist domination, Father Sergius labored intensely, both in teaching and in his pastoral work, for the spiritual enlightenment of the Bulgarian faithful.

In the same year that he was assigned to the Russian Church in Sofia, he and his spiritual Father and mentor, Archimandrite Dr. Seraphim (also a professor at the Theological Academy in Sofia), in their faithfulness to St. Seraphim's instructions, refused to accept the calendar reform imposed on the Bulgarian Orthodox Church for ecumenical reasons. As a result of this, they were both expelled from their academic positions in the Theological Academy.

Both Fathers Sergius and Seraphim sought refuge in the Convent of the Protection of the Holy Mother of God, in Knyazhevo (a suburb of Sofia), where they together served God until their last breath. It was here Archimandrite Sergius co-authored, with Archimandrite Dr. Seraphim, his most important work: a critique of the heresy of ecumenism, published in Bulgarian in 1992, under the title *Orthodoxy and Ecumenism*, and subsequently published in a Russian translation.

Archimandrite Sergius was strongly attached to the liturgical life of the Church and was a profound lover of the services of the Orthodox Church. Despite his gradual weakening, during the last decade of his life, he strove to serve with touching fervor. Distinguished by his sincere compassion and tenderheartedness, by his condescension towards human weaknesses, and his childlike fidelity, Father Sergius suffered grievous pain at every treasonous assault against the Holy Orthodox Faith, which he loved with his entire heart.

In the funeral oration for Archimandrite Sergius by Bishop Photii of Triaditza, First Hierarch of the Old Calendar Church of Bulgaria, His Eminence captured the spiritual essence of this remarkable and memorable man of God, whom we shall all remember fondly. We reproduce, here, a characteristic anecdote from this eloquent tribute:

“Father Sergius was distinguished for his ardent love of the Holy Orthodox Faith, and this love, so characteristic of him, would thaw away the frost of indifference, commonplace ritualism, and popular churchliness, under the cover of which so many souls in our cold and desperate modern world are shivering and freezing.

“Years ago, when I was a student at the Theological Academy, Father Sergius quite unexpectedly asked me, “You are aware that you may die, are you not?” I do not remember how I replied. What I do remember is that, though this question was posed as a spiritual reminder of death, it was offered in a kind tone, as if to convey his wish, “But God forbid this should happen.” And now, despite the tens of years that have since passed, I have still not forgotten Father Sergius' lesson, offered with so much affection and such good-heartedness.”

Αἰωνία ἡ μνήμη! Memory Eternal!

