

BOOK REVIEWS

Irina Gorainoff, *Sfântul Serafim de Sarov. Convorbirea cu Motovilov* [Saint Serafim From Sarov. The Conversation With Motovilov], Translated in Romanian by His Eminence Andrei Andreicuț (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea Publishing House, 2016)

Despite being such an important figure for the Orthodox Theology, Saint Seraphim of Sarov is not very well known in Romania. Many of the works dedicated to him are in fact popularising books¹ and a lot of them are difficult to find today. That is why the translation of Irina Gorainoff's book, dedicated to the conversation between the Russian Saint and Motovilov, his disciple, represents such an important event for us. It brings the Saint to the attention of the contemporary research and it offers the general

public the possibility to find out more about Father Seraphim, his ideas and his activity and it returns an important document to the historiographical research².

The book is accompanied by a short foreword, written by His Eminence Andrei, Metropolit of Cluj, Maramureș and Sălaj, Archbishop of Vad, Feleac and Cluj, who highlights the fact that Saint Seraphim's words "*The goal of Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit*"³ are as valid as ever today and speaks of various ways in which they can be applied. After a short presentation of his biography (p. 56), his Eminence notes:

"About the work of the Holy Spirit grace, the following comparison is very illustrative: the sinner is like a piece of rusty iron, spreading no light and no heat. When the piece of iron is put into fire, it is cleaned of its rust and it starts spreading light and warmth, so that in the end you can't tell the difference be-

¹ Gheorghe Băbuț, *Sfântul Serafim de Sarov și Sfântul Nil Sorschi – cuvinte duhovnicești (Saint Serafim from Sarov and Saint Nil Sorschi – spiritual words)*, (Oradea, Romanian Pilgrim Press, 1991); Archimandrite Dosoftei Morariu, *Sfântul Serafim de Sarov – viața, nevoițele și învățăturile, his life, struggles and teachings*, 2nd edition, edited by Archimandrite Ioanichie Bălan, (Vânători, Sihăstria Monastery Press, 2004); Michel Evdochimov, *Să ne rugăm 15 zile cu Sfântul Serafim de Sarov (Let's pray 15th days with Saint Serafim from Sarov)*, translated in Romanian Language by Măriuca Alexandrescu, (Bucharest, Sophia Press, 2010); Saint Serafim from Sarov, *Rânduiești de viață creștină (Ordinances of Christian life)*, translated in Romanian Language by Adrian Tănăsescu-Vlas and Xenia Tănăsescu-Vlas, (Bucharest-Alexandria, Sophia Press- „Orthodox Book” Press, 2007); Oxana Toporcean (ed.), *Minunile Sfântului Serafim de Sarov – din însemnările călugărilor Mănăstirii Sarov (The miracles of Saint Serafim from Sarov – from the notes of the monks from Sarov Monastery)*, (Bucharest-Alexandria, Sophia Press - „Orthodox Book” Press, 2009.

² This is because Motovilov's notes were offered to Serghei Nilus by his wife, 72 years after the conversation and, which makes it very important even as a historical document. Cf. Irina Gorainoff, *Sfântul Serafim de Sarov. Convorbirea cu Motovilov (Saint Serafim from Sarov. The conversation with Motovilov)*, translated in Romanian by His Most Holiness Andrei Andreicuț, (Cluj-Napoca, Renașterea Publishing House, 2016), p. 68.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

tween the iron and the fire. The light and heat do not belong to the nature of the iron, but to that of the fire itself. It is the same for the sinner, full of "rust". Entering the fire of the Holy Spirit, living in Christ through the Sacraments, he gets rid of the rust of sins, and becomes God-bearer, spreading spiritual light and heat around him"⁴.

The foreword is then followed by the conversation between Saint Seraphim and his disciple, divided according to various topics: the purpose of the human life (p. 10-11), the receiving of the Holy Spirit (pp. 14-19), the prayer (p. 20), the prayer and the Holy Spirit (p. 22-25), seeing God (p. 29-31), the creation and the ancestral sin (p. 32-37) etc. The Spiritual master offers Motovilov arguments from the Old and the New Testament, in order to convince him about the rationality and the truth of his assertions, but he doesn't just quote from the Holy Scripture, but also speaks of his own spiritual experience. We are reproducing bellow a paragraph which explains how when the Holy Spirit comes, the faithful needs to listen and contemplate, rather than keep praying:

"By praying, we become worthy of meeting Him, our life giver and Saviour. But we should pray only until the Holy Spirit descends upon us and gives us heavenly grace. When He comes, we must stop praying. Indeed, what would be the purpose of saying "come and dwell in us and cleanse us from all uncleanness and save our souls" when He

has already come as an answer to our call, as an answer to our thirst for Him? I will give you an example. Let us assume that you invited me to your house and I came as an answer to your invitation, but you, although I am already with you, you keep saying: "Come to me". I would certainly say: "What is happening with him? This is madness. I came and he keeps calling me. The same thing happens with the Holy Spirit"⁵.

For those who didn't have the experience of the meeting God, these words are beyond comprehension. Saint Seraphim obviously experienced the presence and the work of the Grace of the Holy Spirit. Later on, the disciple will understand his master better, having himself a similar experience, as an answer to his prayers⁶.

Written in an accessible language and beautifully translated, the Irina Gorainoff's book is both an interesting read, and a possible topic an academic research, that would certainly be useful for the contemporary scholar.

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⁴ His Holiness Andrei Andreicuț, "Saint Serafim founded the sense of life", in Irina Gorainoff, *Sfântul Serafim de Sarov. Convorbirea cu Motovilov (Saint Serafim from Sarov. The conversation with Motovilov)*, translated in Romanian by His Holiness Andrei Andreicuț, (Cluj-Napoca, Renașterea Publishing House, 2016), p. 7-8.

⁵ Irina Gorainoff, *Sfântul Serafim de Sarov. Convorbirea cu Motovilov (Saint Serafim from Sarov. The conversation with Motovilov)*, p. 24.

⁶ This moment is described, with all his details, in the book. See: *Ibidem*, pp. 52-60.