

The Toll-House
Myth: The Neo-
Gnosticism of Fr.
Seraphim Rose,
by Fr. Michael Azkoul

INTRODUCTION

We hear about the Gnostic religion first among the ancient Jews and Greeks. Apostle Paul mentions its invasion of Christian soil in 1Tm.6:20: *knowledge (gnosis), falsely called*. Gnosticism must have fascinated some of the early Christians, lest Paul would not have commented on this heresy. From time to time, in the history of the Church, it has reappeared, as it did in the nineteenth century certainly, and also in our times. Thankfully, the Gnostic influence is presently isolated; but there is some.

Fr Seraphim Rose's The Soul After Death (1) gives us much concern in this regard. In particular, his "toll- house" doctrine is Gnostic. St Irenae of Lyons and St Hippolytus, Tertullian and other Christian writers record the attempt of second and third century theologians to adapt Gnosticism to Christianity. They did not say it would not happen again. In Seraphim Rose's writing we have another occurrence, albeit without the same ambition as the first.

We must call Seraphim Rose's error "neo-Gnostic" (or "new Gnostic,") on account of his idea about "the ascent of the soul" to God after death, an idea whose source is Gnosticism, even if it came indirectly through Russian writers of the last century. Remarkable, too, is the fact that The Soul After Death and his other books and articles show no real knowledge of Gnostic doctrine, which probably explains his vigorous protests against the accusation. After reading this book, one must conclude that Fr Seraphim's view of the soul's ascent to God through demonic "toll- houses" or "places of retention" or "watch-towers" was not a conscious reconstruction of the Christian Faith. Rather, his vision of the spiritual world was the result of an undisciplined reading of nineteenth century "Russian mystics," and his interest

in Oriental religions.(2) Fr Seraphim was a victim of his own enthusiasm and ignorance.

1.

In the preface to The Soul After Death, Fr Seraphim boldly declares that the toll-house theory *is the teaching which the Orthodox Church handed down from the very beginning, which is expressed in countless patristic writings and Lives of the Saints, and in the Divine Services of the Orthodox Church, and which has been taught uninterruptedly in the Church even down to our own day* (3). His book claims to bring once more to the attention of the Orthodox public and the world this long neglected truth of Christianity.

The "chief inspirations" for his book were two nineteenth century "fathers" - Bishops Ignatius Brianchaninov (1807- 1867) and Theophan the Recluse (1815-1894). Fr Seraphim also relied heavily upon Metropolitan Macarius of Moscow and St John Maximovich of San Francisco. The first three of these bishops were contemporaries, living at a time when Russia was experiencing a great influx of Western "mystical literature" - Meister Eckhart, Jacob Boehme, Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) whom Fr Rose quotes at length (Ibid., pp. 101-105, 114-116, 121f.) Jung-Stillung, Madame Guyon, etc. were also "popular and widely read."(4) Gnostics all - or in modern parlance, "theosophists" - they were men and women who boasted of a secret knowledge of another world. To "holy Russia," they brought a mentality alien to her culture and religion.

Both Brianchaninov - *the leading defender of the Orthodox teaching [sic] of the aerial toll-house in 19th century Russia* (5) - and Theophan were well read in this foreign literature. Bishop Ignatius was more cautious about it than the latter. He

disapproved of the Western methods of meditation, particularly as practiced by Thomas a' Kempis, Francis of Assisi, and Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. Such writers, he said, attached too much importance to the imagination "which leads to unhealthy excitement and to delusion."⁽⁶⁾ Bishop Theophan, on the other hand, was better disposed to Latin mysticism. He often recommended to his spiritual children the reading of Latin spiritual writers, e.g., Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis de Sales and Thomas a' Kempis, etc.

In any case, Fr Seraphim claims that both taught the toll-house theory. Writes Bishop Ignatius (Works [vol. 3], p. 136):

For the testing of souls as they pass through the spaces of the air, there have been established by the dark powers separate judgment places and guards in a remarkable order. In the layers of the under- heaven, from earth to heaven itself, stand guarding legions of fallen spirits. Each division is in charge of a special form of sin and tests the soul in it when the soul reaches this division. The aerial demonic guards and judgment places are called in Patristic writings the toll-houses, and the spirits who serve in them are called the tax collectors.⁽⁷⁾

The four volume collected works of Bishop Ignatius were first published in St Petersburg between 1865 and 1867. Fr Seraphim's translation was taken from the 1883 edition. We can only assume that the two editions are the same and his translation correct.

Also, Fr Seraphim takes much of the "patristic testimony" for the toll-house theory from Bishop Ignatius' Russian translation of the Greek, Latin, Armenian, Syriac and Persian texts. Thus, The Soul After Death often gives us an English translation of a Russian translation of another language.⁽⁸⁾ But if one looks at that "testimony" (whenever one is able to verify Rose's sources and the accuracy of the Bishop's Russian translations), one discovers (as we shall see) that the patristic texts which they

employ fail to make the point they wish, if only because their quotations were wrenched from the context.

Again, Fr Seraphim's treatment of Bishop Theophan the Recluse ("no less a firm defender of this teaching") is arbitrary. Like Bishop Ignatius, Theophan (Govorov) is taken as a spokesman for the Orthodox Church. Thus, Rose quotes them without criticism. In fact, he seems to have reshaped the Christian doctrine of salvation (soteriology) according to what he perceived to be their doctrine. Thus, the citation from Bishop Theophan's commentary on Psalm 118:18, Let my heart be blameless in Thy statutes, that I may not be put to shame:

The prophet, does not mention how and where one 'may not be put to shame.' The nearest 'not being put to shame' occurs during the arising of inward battles... The second moment of 'not being put to shame' is the time of death and the passage through the toll-houses. No matter how absurd the idea of the toll-houses may seem to our 'wise men,' they will not escape passing through them. What do the toll-gatherers seek in those who pass through? They seek whether people have some of their goods. What kind of goods? Passions, etc... Therefore, it is very doubtful that a soul, as long as there remains in it sympathies for the objects of any passion, will not be 'put to shame' at the toll-houses. 'Being put to shame' here means that the soul itself is thrown into hell.

This quotation is found on pages 94-95 of The Soul After Death. Rose provides no bibliographical data other than the title. It does not matter. As far as he is concerned, the matter has long been settled. Bishop Theophan has corroborated the words of Bishop Ignatius.⁽⁹⁾ Two leading lights of 19th century Orthodoxy have spoken. None may doubt that the toll-house theory is a truth of the Orthodox Faith. Such is the nature of his sloppy research.

Moreover, we are expected to believe that quotes piled one on the other constitutes evidence. But, then, if there is no verse or paragraph available, Fr Seraphim simply drops the names of

important Orthodox theologians and asserts their advocacy of this Gnostic theory. But mere assertion is not proof. We hear no argument, no appeal to general principles, no call for help from other scholarship for confirmation of his views.

Curiously, after contending so furiously for this theory, Fr Rose declares, "The teaching of the toll-houses in Orthodox sources has never been defined as a `dogma,' belonging rather to the tradition of Orthodox piety."(10) In a word, sensing the weakness of his position, he tries to set "dogma" against "piety." But "dogma" is putting into clear language what the Church believes: true "piety" rests on "dogma," even as "dogma" is the product of "piety" or holiness.

2.

For these and other reasons, anyone examining Orthodox soteriology should not look to The Soul After Death as a reliable source of it.

Among its many other faults, this book nowhere shows any connection between the Orthodox doctrine of Grace and the idea of the toll-house.(11) Fr Seraphim twists the Scriptures to suit his theory. He uses altered liturgical texts (12). He takes literally in the Lives of the Saints what more reasonably commands a moral or spiritual (allegorical) interpretation. He confuses the mischief of the demons in this life (or even the sometime taunting of Christians at the hour of death) with their supposed activity after death.

Fr Seraphim's notion of the soul's relation to the body is Greek. Refusing to examine the liturgical and patristic texts about the "slumber" or "sleep" of the soul separated from its body, he naturally misunderstands them (Ibid., pp. 249-253). He disfigures the spiritual realm, unaware that "heaven" (the Age to

Come) and "hell" (eternal punishment) are not yet; and he is also ignorant of the difference between temporary "hades" or sheol (abode of the dead) and everlasting "hell" (Gehenna).

Also, his knowledge of the fathers is inadequate. He fails to distinguish between "Church fathers" (who speak for the Church) and "Church Writers" (who generally speak for themselves). He is insensitive to the difference between authentic patristic literature and to the "dubious and false" (*dubia et spuria*); for example, he quotes from a spurious Departure of the Soul (which does indeed expound the toll-house theory) as if it were written by St Cyril of Alexandria (+444), whereas, neither St Cyril nor any other Father of the Church wrote it.(13)

Finally, Fr Seraphim's reliance on non Christian sources to bolster the toll-house theory is, at best, misleading. He seeks to impress us with his knowledge of the Tibetan and Egyptian Book of the Dead, modern Theosophy, and research concerning contemporary "out of body" experiences. He approves popular TV evangelist Billy Graham's belief in angels.(14) He goes so far as to call these "testimonies" a "striking confirmation of the teaching on the state of the soul immediately after death."(15) Claiming to follow the holy fathers, it is strange indeed that he refuses to recognize such writings and experiences as "satanic."

In the pages that follow, we hope to detail these charges. The idea of the toll-house is a gross misinterpretation of the Apostolic Tradition.

ENDNOTES:

1. St Herman Press, (Platina, Ca. 1980).
2. See P. Christensen, "Father Seraphim's Search for Truth: His Religious and Philosophical Development Prior to His Conversion," The Orthodox Word XIX, 1-2 (1983), pp. 25-31.

3. The Soul After Death, p. 2.
4. Bolshakoff, S. Russian Mystics, Kalamazoo, 1976, p. 105.
5. The Soul After Death, p. 94.
6. Quote, Bolshakoff, p. 162.
7. The Soul After Death, p. 75.
8. Apparently, the commentary is not translated. Fr Seraphim Rose suggests that we read the English summary printed by the New Diveyevo Convent, Spring Valley, N.Y., 1978, p. 24 (Ibid., p. 96). The inference here is that the Mothers of the Convent are advocates of the toll-house theory. Likewise, the Convent's Archbishop Andrew, we are told "used precisely the twenty toll-houses for a very effective preparation for the sacrament [sic] of confession..." (The Soul After Death, p. 256). Fr Seraphim cites no book, no article, no lecture by Archbishop Andrew. He wants us to believe that since the Archbishop made pastoral use of the "Theodora" story (see chapter V), he also accepted it as Orthodox theology. He may have; but we have no way of knowing the truth from Fr Seraphim's account.
9. Fr Seraphim is not always certain of his ground. The facts often force him to refine his initial declaration on toll-houses. For example, "Bishop Theophan the Recluse has well said that even the trial at the aerial toll-houses may well turn out to be less one of accusation than of temptation" (Ibid., 188). One may wonder, too, whether he really was in agreement with Fr Rose and Brianchaninov on the question of toll-houses (see Ibid., p. 36).

This appeal to Vladika Theophan may have been a mistake and, perhaps, he should not have claimed him as a theological guide. There is scholarship which argues that Theophan never advocated the toll house theory. On 3 November of 1980, a professor at the Harvard University Research Centre wrote a letter to Fr Seraphim politely rebuking him for misrepresenting

Theophan and for characterizing the difference between the two hierarchs as "minor." In his book, Souls and Angels: Not Body But Spirit, the professor of the Research Centre insists Theophan "refuted it [Brianchaninov's teaching on the soul after death] in the strongest terms." In the foreword to the 1891 revised edition of this book, Vladika refers to Brianchaninov's Homily on Death and the Supplement which delineate the toll-house theory. His stated purpose is the "unmasking of the falsity of the positions contained in these brochures." In other words, the mention of toll-houses in Blessed Theophan's writing must be understood not as a post-death experience, but in the spiritual sense, as the struggle with the passions.

10. Ibid., p. 36f.

11. See Fr Panagiotos Carras' letter to Archbishop Vitaly of Montreal (11/24 Oct 1980). Reprinted in The Journal of the Nemanjic Institute for Serbo-Byzantine Studies 2 (1994), pp. 66-68.

12. Canticle VIII of the "Office of the Parting of Body and Soul" reads, "O thou who didst bear the Lord Almighty, banish thou far from me when I come to die, the Chieftain of bitter torments who ruleth the universe; and I will glorify thee forever, O holy Birth-Giver of God" (Hapgood, 1922 edition, pp. 364-365). Seraphim Rose's wording is a patent fabrication, even a falsehood. In The Soul After Death, p. 194, we read: "O thou who gavest birth to the Lord Almighty, remove far from me the Chief of *the bitter toll-houses*, the ruler of the world, when I am about to die, that I may glorify thee forever, O Holy Theotokos" (Canticle 8). The classical Isabel Hapgood translation (London, 1906, 1922) of the Church Service Books from the Old Slavonic and Greek was endorsed by Patriarch (St) Tikhon of Moscow (13 Nov 1921). Fr Seraphim does not want to tell us the source of his text, so we must conclude that his version of Canticle VIII was taken either from Bishop Ignatius or Fr Seraphim Rose made his own translation from some unnamed source, or else he simply fabricated it because he could not find any actual

agreement with his doctrine. In either case, the words *the bitter toll-houses* must be viewed as a wilful, premeditated fabrication and corruption of the text. As we shall see, Fr Seraphim was not above such practices in a vain effort to prove his point.

13. Ibid., p. 82. There was in seventh century Alexandria a work-shop whose sole purpose was to alter the writings of the fathers and heretics, including St Cyril (See J. Danielou, "L'Apocatastase chez Saint Gregoire de Nysse," Recherches de science religieuse XXX (1940), 335-336. See St Anastasius of Sinai, Via Dux PG 89 289D-292A. Also of interest is the fact that Gnosticism against which the fathers fought, was born in Egypt. The toll-house theory is Gnostic (See K. Rudolph, Gnosis: the Nature and History of Gnosticism. trans. by R.L. Wilson. San Francisco, 1987, pp. 171-173).

14. The Soul After Death, p. 92.

15. Ibid., p. 173; and pp. 99, 106, 113, 119, 124, 160. Fr Seraphim appears to have given credence to "astral projection" or "the projection of the astral body," that is, "through the cultivation of certain mediumistic techniques not merely to enter into contact with disincarnate spirits, but actually to enter into their realm and `travel' in their midst" (Ibid., p. 106).

GNOSTICISM: THE REALM OF AERIAL SPIRITS

According to Roman Catholicism, after its separation from the body, the saved soul ascending to God passes through a state of fire-cleansing (*purgatorium*), a purging from all unconfessed and venial sins committed after Baptism. The Latins also believe that, because such souls continue as members of the Church, the prayers, alms, and good works of the Faithful, as well as the Masses for the dead, apply the grace generated by Christ and the Saints (indulgences), shortening their time in purgatory.(1)

The toll-house theory of Seraphim Rose is similar, but far worse in its construction and implications. One may argue whether or not it involves a cleansing, but it alters the Orthodox doctrine concerning the After-life (about which more will be said), placing the judgment of men in the hands of the demons. "We have also seen," he writes, "that the progress of the soul through the aerial realm, once the body has actually died and the soul is finished with earthly things, is described as an ascent through toll-houses where the Particular Judgment begins in order *to determine the fitness of the soul to dwell in heaven*. Those souls that are convicted of unrepented sins are *cast down by the fallen spirits into hell*; those that pass successfully through the trials of the toll-houses ascend freely, guided by angels, to heaven."(2)

According to Fr Rose, the demons *determine the fitness of the soul to dwell in heaven* and they *convict* it of sin. They *cast down* the wicked soul into hell. Fr Rose also believes that the prayers of the Church help those who struggle through the toll-houses.(3)

From where does he derive such ideas, if, as we argue, they are not found in the Scriptures, the holy fathers, the Lives of the Saints or the public worship of the Church? Obviously, from outside the Church or, as the evidence shows, from the ancient heresy of Gnosticism.(4)

1.

A clear understanding of the difference between the Church and Gnosticism (hence, Fr Seraphim's form of it, "new Gnosticism") requires a knowledge of what the Church teaches about the world beyond the grave.

The Saviour descended before He ascended. He went to hades in order to despoil it and to remove those who believe His preaching, that His glory might be complete.(5)

"Penetrating hades at the ninth hour," writes St John Cassian, Christ, "by the brightness of His splendour extinguished the indescribable darkness of hades," shattered its power and "brought with Him to the skies the captive band of saints which was shut up there, detained in the darkness of hades," took the "fiery sword and restored paradise to its original inhabitants."(6)

Christ takes from it "the band of saints" who were detained there; thus, even the righteous of old went to hades - albeit, as the Church teaches, not to a permanent state. The Lord took them to the "skies" (not "heaven") - to the "paradise" which Adam had lost. We also know that Eden would not have been the final condition of our first parents had they remained obedient to God. They would have ultimately achieved deification.

2.

The fallen angels, under the leadership of the devil (Lucifer, Satan, etc.), dwell in our physical universe. They were cast out of "heaven" for their rebellion against God *into the air* (Job 1:7; 2:2; Eph.2:2). As the Prophet Isaiah exclaimed, *How you have fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you have been cut down, you who did weaken the nations!* (Is.14:12). And the Lord testifies, *I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven* (Lk.10:18).

Thus, St John the Theologian declares, *Therefore, rejoice, ye heavens, and you who dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea, for the evil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing well that he has but a short time*

(Rev.12:12). Before the Coming of Christ, the devil could taunt and tempt, and above all, deceive (Rev.20:2). At death, both the righteous and the wicked came to dwell in hades.

By the Cross, the devil's power was broken. Nevertheless, he continues to fight a rear-guard action. He and his band of demons seek to lure human beings to the "place" which he knows is prepared for them (the demons) - the "spiritual death," "everlasting fire," hell, *gehenna* (Mt.25:41). But they have no real power over men, for even now, as St Jerome states, "they lament under despair near the tombs of the saints."(7)

We need not *give place to the devil* (Eph.4:27). We have the grace and faith to oppose his *wiles* (Eph.6:11). He cannot *devour* us if we remain *steadfast in faith* (Eph.5:8). *Resist the devil*, urges St James, *and he will flee from you* (Jas.4:7). Jesus rebuked the devil (Mt.17:18), and so can we (Jude 1:9). In a few words, if the devil and his demons have no power over us on earth, they can have none anywhere else. The theory of toll-houses contradicts a basic fact of spiritual life.

3.

Just prior to His Crucifixion, the Lord said to the disciples, *Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of the world be cast out* (John 12:31). Thus Jesus was *lifted up on the Cross* that He might be *lifted up* into the air which is inhabited by the devil and his hosts (John 12:32). In the words of St Peter Chrysologos, "On the Cross, Jesus was captured by the devil," but in so doing the evil one was overcome by Him "Who although slain...opened the way for His sheep to conquer the devil and death."(8)

Until Judgment Day, the ordinary place for the souls of the departed is *hades* in the Greek language, sheol in the Hebrew.

But not the hades of our ancestors. We recall what the crucified Christ said to the repentant thief next to Him, *Verily, I say unto you, Today you shall be with Me in paradise* (Lk.23:43). But on that very day, the Saviour descended into hades to free its captives, to release them who believed His word.

Hades is the intermediate *state* (not *place*) for most souls until that time.⁽⁹⁾ Hades is the "occasion" of Particular Judgment, where, with some exceptions, all the dead "repose." As the resurrected and ascended Christ Himself, the Mother of God was exempt; they have their deified body.⁽¹⁰⁾ The saints dwell elsewhere, "in the heavens," but not "in heaven," "the heaven of the heavens," for they too must undergo the Particular Judgment. But how does "judgment" take place? According to the holy fathers, the "judgment" takes place in, and by means of, one's own conscience, not by means of "demons." Indeed, the whole legalistic, "physical" concept of the judgment is specifically refuted by the holy fathers. Everything that Fr Seraphim conceives and teaches as part of the "judgment" is contrary to the teachings of great Church fathers.⁽¹¹⁾

In other terms, hades is divided into "Abraham's Bosom" or "paradise" and "a place of flame," *phlygos* - not "fire," *pyr* (Lk.16:22-28). Because Abraham's Bosom is the foretaste of everlasting blessings to come, it is sometimes called "paradise"; and because the other dimension of hades, "a place of torment," foreshadows unending misery, it is often equated with "hell" in Christian literature.

Where is hades? According to Fr Rose (who uses the words "hell" and "hades" interchangeably), it is "in the bowels of the earth" even as "heaven" is above it. "Of course, hell is not material in the sense that the lava that flows up and under the crust is material," he writes. Neither is it a geographic place. No matter how deep we dig, no matter how high we fly, without "spiritual eyes" we can see neither of them.⁽¹²⁾

It is curious that Fr Seraphim quotes St John Chrysostom with regard to the location of "hell."

You ask where hell (hades) is; but why do you want to know it? You need only know that hell (hades) exists, not where it is hidden... In my opinion, it is somewhere outside the whole world... Let us not attempt to find where it is, but how to escape it.(13)

With his curious conception of the spiritual world, we understand how Fr Seraphim Rose constructs a theory of toll-houses for it.

4.

Intrigued by various "Russian mystics" whom he believed to represent the true and ancient beliefs of Orthodoxy, and desiring to support their teachings by universal religious experience, Fr Seraphim developed the theory of the After-life which he appears not to have known was Gnostic in origin.

The reality of the Gnostic system is divided into three parts: the earth, "tartarus" or hell beneath the ground, and the heavens above composed of the "firmament" or physical universe, and beyond it a continuum of seven planetary levels of existence which, in some Gnostics systems, is surrounded by twelve areas of the zodiac.(14)

Within the spiritual realm abide celestial "watch- stations" or "places of retention" with their "watch- house keepers" or "toll-keepers" which every soul, ascending to God, must confront. They are compelled to endure a cleansing, the "ordeal of scales," on which their sins are weighed, the result of which is to determine the place of the soul in the Kingdom of Light.(15)

The soul is able to ascend to it because Christ had already paved the way. If the soul succeeds in passing through "the demonic spheres," as the Ophite Gnostics called them, it is because of the "secret gnosis" which Christ gave them.

Behold I shall reveal to you your redemption... When you die...a multitude of Archons will seize you... When they say to you, 'Where will you go?' You are to reply, 'To the place whence I came...' Responding this way, you will escape their attacks...(16)

In some forms of Gnosticism, it is necessary to know the secret names of the Archons, which, they assert, Christ gave His followers.(17) Also, the earthly Gnostic communities assist the soul with their prayers, rites and sacraments. Important, too, for the Gnostic mystery cults, are the "Masses for the dead," offered by the family of the dead on the first, third, seventh, and forty-fifth day after the burial, and, too, on the anniversary of his death.(18)

Departure from the toll-houses, which such earthly assistance furnishes, is the final act in the soul's "liberation." This experience of the soul in its ascent to God is, according to Hans Jonas, "the most constant and common features in otherwise divergent (Gnostic) systems".(19)

Fr Seraphim's toll-house theory is a modified version (neo-) of Gnosticism. Remarks made in The Soul After Death must lead us to conjecture whether he understood Orthodoxy as a "gnosis" whispered by the Saviour into the ears of the Apostles; and whether he and his spiritual guides, special persons - "pneumatics," as the Gnostics called them - have been ordained by God to bring the message of truth to the ignorant. As Rose views it, the Liturgy, as in ancient Gnosticism, helps those seeking to reach the Light through a gauntlet of demons.(20)

Let us now turn our attention to the Scriptures to discover what they reveal concerning Fr Seraphim's theory.

ENDNOTES:

1. See, e.g., Council of Trent, Session VI, Canon 30.
2. The Soul After Death, p. 136. Our italics, to show that Fr Seraphim takes Judgment away from God and places it, in part, under the control of the devil and his minions.
3. The Soul After Death, pp. 197-200, 264-268.
4. "Purgatory" may also have its roots in Gnosticism, but we have no way of proving it. In any case, this doctrine has no "toll-houses" whatever the variety of Gnosticism.
5. Speaking to the angels, Christ commanded (Psalm 23: 9-10), "Lift up your gates, O ye princes; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting gates, and the Kingdom of Glory shall enter in! Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in war." See St Irenae of Lyons, Homily on the Burial of the Lord in The Lamentations for Matins of Holy and Great Saturday,. trans. by Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, 1981, p. 48). The Saint does not mention the reaction of the angels to the descent of St John the Baptizer into Hades, where "He proclaimed even to those in hades the God Who appeared in the flesh" (Troparion of the Kairon).
6. Institutes, III, 3.
7. Ep. VIII ad Eust., 13.
8. Sermon 42.
9. St Irenae, Haer. V, xxxi, 2 PG 7 1209B.
10. St John of Damascus, Homily 8, 12 PG 96 720A.
11. See, for example, St Basil the Great, On The Holy Spirit, para.38 and para. 40. St Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, 18:14-15. St Basil the Great, Homily on Psalms, 33:4;

48:2. These are clear and direct statements of doctrine. There are many others.

12. The Soul After Death, p. 139f.

13. Comm. on Romans 21:3-4 (Ibid., p. 140). There is a contradiction here. Either "heaven" and "hell" are "places" (spiritually perceptible), one under the ground, the other up in the heavens - wherein abide the toll-houses - or they are not. Fr Seraphim cannot have it both ways. He cannot agree with St John Chrysostom that they are "somewhere" beyond the cosmos and, at the same time, maintain that heaven is "certainly *up* from any point on the earth, and hell is *down*," under its surface (Ibid., p. 138).

14. Rudolph, K., Gnosis: the Nature and History of Gnosticism, trans. by R.L. Wilson, San Francisco, 1983, p. 68f. Together with the familiar universe to which earth belongs, the planetary system and the Zodiac planes (the levels of existence outside of "heaven" total twenty), are occupied by mischievous beings, sometimes called "Archons" or "Cosmocrators," etc. (See J. Danielou, The Theology of Jewish Christianity (vol. 1), trans. by J.A. Baker, London, 1964, p. 192). Twenty toll-houses and demonic tax-collectors is the exact number that Fr Seraphim requires the soul must pass in order to reach heaven (The Soul After Death, Ibid., p. 256). The entire toll-house mythology comes directly from Gnosticism.

15. Archbishop Lazar observes that the appearance of the toll-house in Russian religious art, including icons of the Last Judgment, is "very late and extremely limited," no earlier than the 16th century. The depiction of an angel with "a set of scales, weighing souls" is an intrusion on Russian iconography from the occult tradition of the West which, incidentally, has a long history, reaching to the era of the Renaissance. Germany and Poland were hotbeds of Jewish Kabbala and other forms of Theosophy (Paracelsus, Jacob Boehme, Angelus Silesius, etc.), which have roots in Gnosticism (See Z.V. David, "The

Influence of Jacob Boehme on Russian Religious Thought," Slavic Review XXI, 1 [1962], pp.41-64). Their writings and translations of ancient literature, such as the Egyptian Book of the Dead, often carried illustrations of "judging angels" (See L. Puhalo, The Soul, the Body and Death. (Synaxis Press, Dewdney, B.C.) 1979, pp. 163, 174).

16. Rudolph, p. 171.

17. Origen, Contra Celsum, VII, 60, for example.

18. The Great Book or The Book of the Souls of the Mandeans, the Gnostics of Iraq and Iran, deals with the ascent of the soul "on the road of death" to the realm of the Light. It contains hymns sung during "the Mass for the Dead." As W. Forester explains, "since the journey of the soul leads through dangerous demonic spheres certain guarantees are required," such as Baptism, the Sign (Seal), good works, the magical power of the word and, of course, the prayers of the community (Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts (vol.2), trans. by R. McL. Wilson. Oxford, 1974, p. 133). It is important to note, therefore, the correct Orthodox teaching about the commemoration of the reposed. Fr Rose is content with the Gnostic explanation and doctrine on the subject, and seems to be completely unaware of the actual Orthodox teaching, as expressed in the Constitutions of the Twelve Apostles (Bk.8, Ch.42), and by St Symeon of Thessaloniki (Homily on Things Done for the Departed). Fr Seraphim relies also upon the Massalian homily on the third, ninth and fortieth day services, falsely attributed to St Macarius of Egypt.

19. The Gnostic Religion: the Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity, Boston, 1958, p. 165.

20. The Soul After Death, pp. 189-195.

III THE SCRIPTURES

Reading The Soul After Death, one cannot always tell which translation of the Scriptures Rose uses. On more than one occasion, he not only accepts the Scriptural interpretation (exegesis) of his "Russian mystics" but has naively assumed that they explain the Bible with the authority of the fathers.

Fr Seraphim's Scriptural defense of the toll-house theory is completely unreliable. He seems unconcerned with the context of the verses and phrases he draws from the Bible (and the holy fathers). These charges can be proved with several examples of Rose's exegesis of the Scriptures.

1.

"The teaching of the toll-houses is the teaching of the Church," proclaims Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov. *"There can be no doubt whatever (emphasis in the original) that the holy Apostle Paul is speaking of them when he declares that Christians must do battle with the spirits of wickedness under the heavens (Eph. 6:12). We find this teaching in the most ancient Church tradition and in church prayers."* Fr Seraphim follows the Bishop in his explanation of the Apostle's words as a call to the Ephesians and all Christians to struggle with the demons in both this life and the next.(1)

With the same brazen confidence, Rose repeats the Bishop's quotations from the fathers who presumably teach the toll-house theory - Sts Athanasius, Macarius, Isaiah the Recluse, Hesychius, Gregory the Dialogist, Ephraim the Syrian, Cyril of Alexandria, John of Damascus, and John Chrysostom.(2) In fact, every one of Fr Seraphim's quotations from these fathers may be understood as *wrestling* with the evil spirits *in this world*, not after death. Fr Seraphim *continually and deliberately* confuses the Biblical *powers in the air* (Eph.2:2) in our universe with the so-called "aerial toll-houses" of the invisible realms.(3)

What does Ephesians 6:12 actually say? *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* What is the context of the sixth chapter? Beginning with verse 10:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, in the power of His Might. Put on the whole Armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against... Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand....

How must we understand St Paul? St John Chrysostom says:

Further, why does he call the Devil, 'the prince' of the world? Because nearly the whole race has surrendered itself to him, and all have willingly and deliberately chosen to be his slaves.... 'According to the power of the air,' Paul says, 'and of the spirit.' Here again the Apostle means that Satan occupies the space under the heavens, and that the bodiless powers are spirits of the air... His kingdom is of this age, i.e., it will cease with the end of the present age. Hear what he says at the end of his epistle, 'Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the rulers of darkness' (Eph. 6:12). He does not want you to hear of 'world-rulers' and think of the Devil as uncreated. Elsewhere Paul calls a perverse time 'an evil world' (Gal. 1:4). For it seems to me that the Devil has dominion beneath the sky...(4)

St Gregory the Theologian sums up the meaning of St Paul's exhortation to Christians, "We struggle with things below, in order to inherit the glory above."(5)

2.

"It is well known to Orthodox Christians," Fr Seraphim asserts, "that man can in fact rise above the limitations of his bodily

nature and journey to invisible realms." He mentions the famous experience of St Paul:

I knew a man about fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knows), such a one was caught up into the third heaven. And I knew such a man (whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knows); how he was caught up into paradise, about which it is not lawful for a man to utter (2Cor.12:2-4).

There is no need "to speculate" as to "how the body can become refined enough to enter heaven (if his experience was actually 'in the body')," Fr Seraphim muses, "or in what kind of 'subtle body' the soul may be clothed during an 'out of body' experience - if indeed such things can be known in this life."(6)

Fr Seraphim does not pay close attention to the words of St Paul, nor does he concern himself in the least with what the holy fathers have to say about this event. Had he done so, he would have discovered that they differ quite radically from the interpretation offered by Bishop Ignatius and himself (see fn. 9 below). What is this third heaven? The Apostle does not say. And the paradise? He does not say. The monk from Platina assumes that the reader will equate them with "heaven" where the righteous spend eternity. Notice, too, that St Paul does not say anything about his soul leaving his body. His ecstasy was an experience impossible to decipher: logic and the five senses cannot tell him whether he was in the body *or* out of the body.

In truth, then, Fr Seraphim does nothing but "speculate" on the matter. First, he wishes us to believe that the body needed to be refined if St Paul did indeed enter the third heaven with it. The Biblical text makes no mention of a body alteration. Second, Fr Rose introduces the theosophic idea of the "subtle body," a body spiritualized so that it might go where and do what it could not otherwise.

The soul, he says, may have been "clothed" in a "subtle body," a body whose materiality had changed in order for St Paul to enter

the "third heaven" and "paradise." But if the soul has shed the body, what need for another? St Paul can go anywhere with his body if God wills it. In any case, nothing in the Apostle's epistle allows Fr Rose to take such liberties with the text. Moreover, more than one of the great holy fathers of the Church has given precisely the opposite explanation, completely contradicting Fr Seraphim Rose's Theosophical speculations, but evidently, Fr Seraphim did not do any real research on the question and did not bother to see what the *actual* teaching of the Church is on the subject.(7)

How, for example, does St John Chrysostom explain the words of St Paul? There is not much to explain.

Was it the mind that was caught up or the soul, while the body was dead? Or was the body caught up? It is impossible to tell...why was he [Paul] caught up? I think so that he might not seem inferior to the other Apostles. They had been in Christ's company, Paul was not: He therefore was caught up into glory, 'Into paradise....'(8)

There was a very definite purpose for St Paul's glimpse of glory, of the Age to Come. Very few people, indeed, share in this privilege. It was a forlorn hope if Fr Seraphim expected to support the toll-house theory by drawing on the Apostle's supernatural experience.

3.

"Your adversary the devil," says the Holy Apostle Peter, "walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1Pet.5:8). According to Fr Seraphim, this takes place "both during our earthly life and after the separation of the soul from the body." He further asserts: "When the soul of a Christian, leaving its earthly dwelling, begins to strive through the aerial spaces towards its divine homeland,(9) the demons endeavour to prevent it, and strive to find a kinship with it. They desire to drag the soul into the hell which God has prepared for the devil

and his angels (Mt.25:41). "They act thus by the right which they acquired."(10)

Fr Seraphim is playing games with the obvious meaning of the holy Scriptures. Let us put 1 Peter 5:8 in context:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walks about, seeking whom he may devour: whom you must steadfastly resist in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who has called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you (vv. 8-10).

There is no justification for adding the words *both during our earthly life and after the separation of the soul from the body*. Fr Seraphim cannot just throw in a sentence to suit himself - *They act thus (i.e., judge souls) by the right they acquired*. Who gave the evil spirits this right? God? We must be shown. Where in the Scriptures or the fathers is it written that God permitted the demons to erect toll-houses to judge the souls of the righteous in their ascent to heaven?

Fr Seraphim (who borrows it from Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov) only compounds the error by linking 1 Peter 5:8 to the words of the Lord in Matthew 25:41, which, as the Gospel shows, refer to the state of the fallen angels and the unrighteous after the Last Judgment. Again, nothing in the text permits Fr Seraphim to picture the fallen angels "dragging" anyone into hell. They have no such authority now, nor in the Day of Judgment. Only God has the "right" and the "power" to glorify or condemn (Rev.20:14). The fathers say nothing differently, nothing that could be construed as supporting Fr Seraphim Rose's novel interpretation.

Listen to St Cyprian of Carthage. He warns his flock to be on guard and strive with all your powers to repel, with solicitous and full watchfulness, the enemy raging and aiming his darts against every part of our body which can be stricken and

wounded, in accordance with the Apostle Peter, in his epistle, wherein he warns and teaches, saying, *Be sober, and watch: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking anyone to devour.*

Of special concern to the saint are the sins of jealousy and envy, by which the devil himself lost the "illustrious grandeur" of heaven. Cyprian ends the discourse with the words, "We who are always to please Him in His kingdom, must previously please Him in the world."(11)

Later, the saint will warn that without leading a God-pleasing life one may expect, in that awful Day, *when the Son of man shall come in His majesty to judge the quick and the dead, to be cast into everlasting fire, which my Father has prepared for the devil and his angels* (Mt.25:31-46).(12)

If we scour the entire Bible, we will find not a single indication of toll-houses; there is absolutely no justification in Scripture for such a teaching. The interpretations forced on Scripture by Fr Seraphim Rose demonstrate a serious lack of understanding of Orthodox theology and of the holy fathers. Only those who read them with the eyes of the Apostolic Tradition will uncover the mysteries of the divine Word. One thing is certain; it is not the devil and his demons who will judge the saved - *Know ye not that we shall judge the angels?* (1Cor.6:3).

ENDNOTES:

1. Works (vol. 3), p. 138. Quoted in The Soul After Death, p. 78f.

2. Ibid., pp. 79-83. See also Fr Seraphim's other quotations from the fathers (and Service Books of the Church) in answer to "the Critic" (a.k.a. Archbishop Lazar Puhalo). Afterwards, he writes, "Some of these references, it will be noted, are partial and do not give the whole Orthodox teaching on the subject. This is

obviously because they are references to a teaching with which the ascetical and hymnological writers themselves and their readers are already familiar and which they accept, and there is no need to `define' it or justify this teaching whenever it is mentioned" (Ibid, pp. 259-260). Astonishingly, Fr Seraphim Rose makes such "qualifications" without blushing throughout his book.

3. "Toll-house" is mentioned in the homily, In exitu animi (On the Departure of the Soul) wrongly attributed to St Cyril. From its contents, it is clear that the document is from a Gnostic source (see Introduction).

4. Commentary on Ephesians, Homily 22:1; and St Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius II, 15 PG 45 569BC; St Leo the Great, Sermon on Lent 39 PL 54 265BC; St Ambrose, Epistle LXXXV, etc.

5. Apology (Oration 2), 17 PG 35 425C.

6. The Soul After Death, p. 107. We are informed also that Bishop Ignatius knew two nineteenth century ascetics (Elder Basilisk of Siberia and Schema-Elder Isaiah) "whose souls likewise left their bodies while they were at prayer" (loc. cit.). Both Fr Seraphim and his master appear to be completely unaware of the vast patristic literature which condemns the idea of "out of body experiences," and identifies such phenomena as "demonic delusions," and "fantasies." According to the holy fathers, "out of body experiences" are never real, but only hallucinations and delusions. This subject is covered in depth and in a profoundly patristic manner in the book Out of Body Experiences: the Orthodox Christian Teaching (Synaxis Press, Dewdney, B.C., 1994).

It is passing strange that Fr Seraphim is so quick to accept the Theosophical "out of body" experiences recorded by modern parapsychology as authentic. One might as well accept the teachings of the Rosicrucian Order. The latter are "satanic hallucinations." Again, Fr Seraphim says that the souls of these

holy men left their bodies, but there is no quote in The Soul After Death from them, and since such "experiences" are often reported by schizophrenic patients in mental hospitals, one is left to wonder about the sanity of those who reported such experiences. Incidentally, Fr Seraphim does not tell us whether these ascetics encountered toll-houses in their ascent.

7. See, for example, St John Chrysostom, Homily 24, on 2 Corinthians; St Athanasios the Great, Discourse Three Against the Arians, para.47; St Gregory Palamas, The Triads, 1.3:5;21; 2.1:44; 2.3:36-37, and many others. Concerning the heresy of "out of body experiences," see the book Out of Body Experiences: the Orthodox Christian Teaching, Synaxis Press, 1994.

8. Comm. on 2 Corinthians, Homily 26:1-2.

9. This is a concept drawn directly from Gnosticism. The idea that the soul was a pre-existent, divine spirit which became entrapped in matter, and is always seeking to "return to its divine homeland" is a major element in Manichaeism and its offspring. It may be that Fr Seraphim did not realize the source of his doctrine, but that is not an excuse. He was obligated to know if he was going to pass it off as a "teaching of the Church."

10. The Soul After Death, pp. 73-74. As Rose admits, this interpretation of 1 Peter 5:8 was taken from Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov (Collected Works [vol. 3], pp. 132-133).

11. Treatise 10, On Jealousy and Envy, 1-3.

12. Treatise 12, Testimonies Against the Jews, Bk. 3, i.

IV THE FATHERS

Following the holy fathers... is an expression which commonly introduces official documents of the Church. The Orthodox look to them as the supreme expositors of the Christian Faith. As expositors or exegetes (interpreters) of the holy Scriptures there is no higher authority than the fathers. So it is that Fr Seraphim turned to them in order to find support for his opinions on life after death. We, too, must look to the fathers, not only to show how the hieromonk of Platina has shamelessly misused them, but also to discern what is the true doctrine of the fathers on the question before us.

1.

A few examples should suffice. Several times Fr Seraphim calls for support from The Spiritual Homilies of St Macarius the Great:

"Like the tax-collectors sitting in the narrow ways and laying hold upon passers by, and extorting from them so the devils spy upon souls and lay hold of them; and when they pass out of the body, if they are not perfectly cleansed, they do not suffer them to mount up to the mansions of heaven, and to meet their Lord, and they are driven down by the devils of the air. But if whilst they are in the flesh..."⁽¹⁾

Reading this version of the Saint's discourse, one would probably agree that he taught the toll-house theory. But let us look at the *entire* passage:

"Just as the winds, blowing powerfully, shall all creatures in the sky, produce a very loud sound; likewise does the power of the enemy shake our thoughts, and carry them away, stirring the depths of the heart at will while scattering those thoughts for his own purposes. Like tax-collectors [Gr., telonai] who sit along the narrow street, extorting money from passers-by, so also the

demons watch carefully and grab hold of souls. And when the thoughts pass out of the body, if they have not been completely purified, they are not permitted to reach the heavenly mansions to meet its Master. Rather they are driven down by the demons of the air. If, however, they are yet in the flesh, they shall..." (Sp. Hom. 43:9 PG 45 777BC).

Clearly St Macarius refers to the soul which, through its thoughts, seeks to transcend the limitations of the human body. Thoughts are born in the soul or, more precisely, the spirit (See chap. 5, endnote 10). Thus, the devil and his demons "watch carefully" or "spy" upon the soul in order to discover some weakness in it. In that way, the demons can *prevent our thoughts* from soaring to "heavenly mansions."(2)

Fr Seraphim draws once more upon St Macarius. Using the Mason's less than accurate translation, he quotes the twenty-second homily:

"When the soul of a man departs out of the body a great mystery is there accomplished. If it is under the guilt of sins, there comes a band of devils and angels of the left hand, and powers of darkness take over the soul, and hold fast on their side. No one ought to be surprised at this. If, while alive in this world, man was subject and compliant to them, and himself their bondsman, how much more when he departs this world is he kept down and held fast by them."(3)

Now a *correct* translation from Migne's Patrology:(4)

When the soul of a man departs his body a great mystery occurs. If he is yet under guilt of sin, bands of demons and angels of the left, powers of darkness, descend upon the soul and drag it as prisoner to their own place. None should be surprised at this. For if, while in this life, a man lives in subjection to them and was their obedient slave, how much more when he leaves this world shall he be captive to and controlled by them. When the righteous leave their bodies, bands of angels receive their souls

and carry them to their side, to pure eternity. And so they are with the Lord (Spir. Hom. 22 PG 34 660AB).

There is no mention of toll-houses here. But more important than this, *why did Fr Seraphim omit the last few sentences of the homily?* Why did he not inform us that St Macarius believed that, while evil spirits will claim their own, the angels of the Lord will take the righteous (i.e., believers) to dwell with the Lord?⁽⁵⁾ In other words, the latter do not pass through a gauntlet of demons before they reach "pure eternity." Of course, the wicked have no need to do so, for they have already chosen to belong to Satan.

2.

Let us take two more examples before presenting the Christian doctrine of the fathers - from St Gregory the Dialogist and St Anthony the Great.

In the second book of his Homilies on the Gospel (39, 8 PL 76 1298D-1299D), Pope St Gregory urges his listeners to ponder what verdict the "Strict Judge" might render concerning our lives. The translation is from the Latin:

"We should think very seriously about that dreadful hour of our resolution, think of it with trepidation of mind, recalling our many evils, with apprehension of the strict Judge. How can we delight in this present life when we know that everything passes away. What we love shall perish; it begins where sorrow never ends. Then, too, shall the wicked spirits look for their own works in the soul as it goes forth; then will they display the evil deeds which they instigated in us, so that they drag it down with them to torment. The perversity of the demons may even touch the elect as they depart this life, seeking in them something of their own, if they are able. Among all men there was One Who said

before His Passion, 'I will no longer...' Thus, in our concern we must reflect daily with many tears upon how dreadful will be the claims of 'the ruler of the age' on the day of our death..."

Here is Fr Seraphim's English translation of Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov's Russian translation of the same passage (Fr Seraphim's unique version appears in The Soul After Death, p. 81):

"One must reflect deeply on how frightful the hour of death be for us, what terror the soul will then experience, what remembrance of all the evils, what forgetfulness of past happiness, what fear, and what apprehension of the Judge. Then the evil spirits will seek out in the departing soul its deeds; then they present before its view the sins towards which they had disposed it, so as to drag their accomplice to torment. But why do we speak only of the sinful soul, when they come even to the chosen among the dying and seek out their own in them? Among men there was only one who before His suffering fearlessly said, 'Hereafter I talk not much with you. For the prince of the world cometh, and hath nothing in me' (John 14:30)..."

Compare the wording in the first translation, especially *So as to drag their accomplice with them to torment* to the Seraphim Rose translation - *so as to drag their accomplice to torment*. He has maintained all the time that those who fail the toll-house interrogation are "dragged" into hell.

If we accept Fr Seraphim's English wording, there is surely an allusion to the toll-houses; but his "from Latin to Russian to English" translation is faulty. The words "so as to drag their accomplice *with them* (was this *intentionally* excluded by him?) to torment" refer to *The Judgment Day of the Second Coming*, when the devil and his human accomplices will go away into Gehenna.

Fr Seraphim is wrong for another reason. That the demons "seek something of their own" in the departing soul, even the righteous, is hardly something new. It is their pleasure, their

reason for being, not only to lead us into sin, but to accuse falsely of sin every soul whether "in the body" or "out of the body." The demons want human company in hell. But Fr Seraphim implies much more. He believes that the toll-houses exist "to determine the fitness of the soul to dwell in heaven."(6)

Fr Rose was just as wrong about St Pope Gregory as he was about the other holy fathers. He nevertheless manages to convince himself that, one way or another, they support his Gnosticism. He is persuaded, also, that there is an experience of the toll-houses not only after death, but before death. He gives us one of "the many and clear examples" from St Athanasius' Life of St Anthony.

During prayer, St Anthony "was seized by the Holy Spirit and raised up by the angels into heights." His ascent was opposed by "demons in the air." They accuse him of many sins, "but the angels closed the mouths of the slanderers." "Immediately Anthony came to himself and found himself standing in the same place where he had stood for prayer." He forgot about everything and remained all night in prayer with tears and groans, "reflecting on the multitude of man's enemies, on the battle against such an army, on the difficulty of the path to heaven through the air, and on the words of the Apostles, *Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood...* (Eph.6:12; Rm.2:2). St Paul, "knowing that the aerial powers were seeking only one thing," hope to impede "our free passage to heaven..."(7)

How does Fr Seraphim describe this event? "We have seen above that the experience of St Anthony the Great with the toll-houses was during an 'out of body' experience..."(8) These remarks are important. They illustrate the "care" with which he does his research.

Nowhere in St Anthony's encounter with the demons is there any mention of the toll-houses; nor is he detained, nor does he see souls detained by them. Fr Seraphim labels the saint's experience as "out of body," but it was not his soul, *but he*

himself, St Anthony, who was carried to the "heights" - not to invisible realms. He was slandered by the demons whose mouths were shut by the angels - an aspect of the After-life experience not mentioned in Rose's definition of the toll-house theory.

Apparently, it is unthinkable that the influence of the "aerial demons" exists only in this world; and that St Anthony had an "in the body" experience with the demons in the "heights" of the air. They will accuse all men at the Final Judgment, as they do now and at the hour of our death. But this is not the same as stopping the soul at the toll-house, or "custom houses," as some Gnostics call them, adjudging the soul worthy or unworthy of heaven, releasing it or casting it into hell.

3.

"Falling asleep" is the Christian phrase which describes death, the separation of body and soul.⁽⁹⁾ At the moment of death, the individual is prejudged by God: the body goes into the ground and the soul, now without any senses or physical instrumentality, is sent into a temporary state of joy or grief.

Listen to St Gregory the Theologian's oration at the funeral of his brother, Caesarius:

I believe the words of the wise, that every fair and God-beloved soul, when set free from the bonds of the body, departs hence, and at once (Gr., euthus) enjoys a sense and vision (Gr., theoria) of good things to come, inasmuch as what was dark in it has been purged or laid aside...and feels a wondrous pleasure and exultation, and rejoices in the Lord. Then, a little later, it will receive its flesh, which once shared in its pursuit of things above... And, as it shared the hardships of the body through a common life (Gr. sumphyan), so also is bestowed upon the body

the joys of the soul hereafter, gathering it up into itself, and becoming with it one in spirit and mind in God... I await the voice of the Archangel, the last trumpet, the transformation of the heavens... Then shall I see Caesarius himself, no longer an exile, no longer spread on a bier, no longer the object of mourning and pity, but brilliant, glorious, heavenly, such as in my dreams I have often beheld thee, dearest and most loving brother, in very truth if not by my desire (Oration VII, 21 PG 35 781BC).

In the words of St Ambrose, "Body and soul are judged together" (De Ex. Frat. sui Satyrus, II, 8). If for no other reason, Fr Seraphim's toll-house theory is false: it does not recognize the common judgment belonging to body and soul. Christ alone judges all men.

As the body decays in the grave, the soul immediately enters hades - "to the left" or "to the right" - to await judgment with its body. Thus, as the corpse must remain in the grave until the general resurrection, when it reunites with the soul, so the soul must remain where it has gone until it rejoins its body. As St John Chrysostom says:

Nor indeed is it possible for a soul, torn away from the body, to wander here any more. For the souls of the righteous are in the Hand of God (Wisd. 3:1)...and the souls of sinners are also led away hence. This is evident from the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man; and elsewhere also Christ says, This day your soul will be required of you (Luke 12:20). Therefore, when the soul has gone forth from the body, it cannot wander here; nor is the reason hard to understand: for if we, going about in the earth which is familiar and well know to us, as once we did when encompassed with a body, journeys down a strange road, know not which way to go unless guided; how should the bodiless soul, having lost her accustomed condition, know where to walk without someone to show it the way (Commentary on Matthew, Homily 28, 3 PG 57 373-374).

To be sure, God may cause us to have visions of a departed person, even as St Columban "appeared" to St Brendan or the Three Hierarchs to St John of Euchaita; but these occurrences involved no "disincarnate spirit," to use Fr Seraphim's Theosophic language,(10) wandering the earth - no, not in this world nor the next; neither does the soul float, like some ghost, around its dead body - not for three or nine or forty days.(11)

The soul resides where it is taken; it "slumbers." Fr Seraphim is wrong to identify "the sleep of the soul" with the vulgar doctrine of modern sectarians.(12) He is right, however, to insist upon the soul's awareness of its new existence.(13) "Although sleeping soundly, the soul, as if in a dream," exclaims St Aphrahat the Persian, "sees something of what the Lord has promised to give it, and (if righteous) exults and is gladdened" (Select Demonstrations, VIII, 8-20).(14) The soul "either rejoices or laments after death," writes St Anastasios of Sinai (Answer, 89).

Also, judging from the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, even those in "the place of torment" recollect their life on earth. The Rich Man, cognizant of his earthly life, pleads with Father Abraham to send someone to warn his five brothers about the fate that awaits them. The Patriarch replied that they have Moses and the Prophets to help them avoid the "torment" which he endures (Luke 16:28).

Moreover, the dead may be affected by the prayers of the living. "We pray for the departed," writes St Peter of Damascus, "that they may receive salvation."(15) And, of course, the Theotokos and the Saints "hear" the living and intercede for them as well as the prayers they offer for the departed. This they do by the Will of God and not by virtue of some power inherent to the soul.

Thus, the holy fathers teach that God controls the destiny of the soul, where it shall dwell, what powers it retains, after its separation from the flesh. The devil has no authority over the soul, asserts St John Chrysostom, "having not the power to bring

violence upon the soul, whether in the body or after its departure from it, but, according to the words of the Lord, *the beggar died and was carried away by the angels*. Not only the souls of the righteous, but also the wicked are carried away" (On Lazarus and the Rich Man, Hom. 2 PG 48 984).

Both the righteous and the wicked abide, in a conscious but immovable state, in hades, with the exception of the glorified Saviour, the Mother of God and the Saints. The Church prays for her dead, her members who have gone over to the other side. They are still her sons and daughters. By her pleadings He forgives their sins and alleviates their pain. More about this matter later.

ENDNOTES:

1. The Soul After Death, p. 257 (A.J. Mason translation. Willits, 1974, p. 274).

2. This in itself condemns the heretical teaching of "out of body experiences." If one reads the Philokalia, one will find many warnings against allowing the thoughts or imagination to depart "outward," where they pass into the realm of demonic delusion. This is the whole purpose of prayer of the heart. St Gregory Palamas says, in this context: "To cause the mind to abide outside the body itself, so as there to chance upon noetic spectacles, is the root and source of the very worst of Hellenic [i.e., pagan] errors and of all heresies, an invention of demons, an instruction engendering folly and an offspring of senselessness..." (Response to Barlaam).

3. Ibid., pp. 257-258 (Mason, p. 171).

4. In the last century, the French scholar J.P. Migne made a collection, in the original language, of fathers and other church writers. The books of the Greek authors is cited PG with the

volume number and page; and of Latin writers the same way, but as PL.

5. It is important to pay attention to this aspect of Fr Seraphim Rose's writing. He has no conscience at all about "selectively editing" the fathers that he quotes, or even distorting their words to suit his purposes. One must seriously ask: why was he not rather instructed by the holy fathers instead of attempting to correct them?

6. The Soul After Death, p. 136. The Synod of Constantinople (1672) defines the Particular Judgment another way: "We believe that the souls of the departed are in either repose or torment as each one has wrought, for immediately after the separation from the body they are pronounced either in bliss or suffering and sorrow; yet we confess that neither the joy nor the condemnation are yet complete. After the general resurrection, when the soul is united to the body, each one will receive the full measure of joy or condemnation due to him for the way in which he conducted himself, whether well or ill" (in Frank Gavin, Some Aspects of Contemporary Greek Orthodox Thought, Milwaukee, 1936, p. 395f). Fr Seraphim's conclusions are incredible. No one other than the Gnostic "Mystic Masters" ever afforded such authority and power to demons.

7. Taken from Bishop Ignatius' Works (vol. 3), pp. 138-139; and Life of St Anthony, Eastern Orthodox Books, ed., p. 41 (in The Soul After Death, pp. 79-80).

8. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

9. "Sleep," writes Archbishop Lazar, "is the metaphor used to describe the condition of the person after death." There is an exceptionally good discussion of this matter in Chapter 3 of the third edition of The Soul, the Body, and Death, p. 22f.

10. Whether Fr Seraphim was aware of it or not, his idea of the soul is Greek and Gnostic (See St Gregory Palamas, Hagioretic Tome PG 150 1233BD). He seems to believe that the soul is

imprisoned in the body and death a blessing which frees it to dwell in an atmosphere more amenable to its spiritual nature (Ibid., p. 36, 106, 123-124, 141, 128). The credibility of the "out of body" experiences rests on the body/soul dualism, with the soul as the true self whose home is heaven, a home it cannot find until released from the prison of the body. Fr Seraphim's teaching about the relationship between soul and body is so patently heretical, and has been so often condemned by several fathers of the Church that his ignorance in the matter is astonishing.

11. The popular notion that the family must offer Kolyva on the third, ninth and fortieth days for the rest of the soul, hovering over the body from which it had been separated in death, has no basis in Christian belief. The practice is Gnostic in origin. See Archbishop Lazar's discussion of St Symeon of Thessalonica, On Things Done for the Departed in *The Soul, the Body and Death*, pp. 51-52, 1st edition. The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles gives the same reasons as does St Symeon. The Church's commemoration of the reposed is in fact a prayer for the renewal of human nature.

From where did the Gnostic doctrine of the commemoration of the dead come? Perhaps, the earliest record of it is a clearly Gnostic document entitled, "*The Revelation of an Angel about Apocryphal and Ineffable Mysteries about the Commemoration of Those Fallen Asleep*" falsely ascribed to St Macarius of Egypt and attached to his Fifty Spiritual Homilies. That St Macarius lived in Egypt is not without significance, for in this land are found the non-Greek roots of Gnosticism. Pagan Egyptian mythology teaches that the soul cannot rest until the body has been properly buried and, therefore, the soul must wander until the embalming ritual for the dead is completed. During this period, the soul is judged and weighed by forty two nome-gods (See M. Eliade, A History of Religious Ideas [vol. 2], Chicago, 1982, pp. 403-407; and chap. 1 above, note 11).

12. Ibid., pp. 249-253.

13. Fr Seraphim was unfair to accuse "the Critic" of describing the souls of the departed as "narcotized and unable to perceive anything." He clearly states quite the opposite (See The Soul, the Body and Death, p. 14, 1st edition). Fr Seraphim was apparently simply prevaricating for political reasons.

14. Quoted in Archbishop Lazar Puhalo's The Soul, The Body and Death, where he gives a soundly patristic explanation of this.

15. Philokalia (vol. 3), trans. by G.E.H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, K. Ware. (London, 1984, p. 200).

THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

In order to prove his theory about "the soul after death," Fr Seraphim drew on every available source, religious and secular, not the least of which was the Lives of the Saints, East and West. In this, he followed the lead of Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov.

1.

Fr Seraphim was greatly impressed with a tale told by the 10th century Gnostic, Gregory of Thrace (Greece), a tale of the appearance of the departed St Theodora of Constantinople (d.940) in a dream to the Elder, Basil the New (d.944). Whether in its Greek or Slavonic version, the authenticity of the story has been seriously questioned. It is not part of the medieval synaxaria (collection of Saint's Lives) of the Orthodox Church. The spread of Basil's Life in Russia is the result of Bogomil literature reaching the popular imagination.(1)

According to Gregory, she came to Basil in a vision and related to him her experiences after her soul left her body, of her encounter with twenty toll-houses in her soul's ascent to heaven. Rose believes the story to be true and takes the account literally; others do not, including Fr Michael Pomozansky.(2)

In a letter to Deacon Lev Puhalo concerning "Prayers for the Dead,"(3) Fr Michael takes up the question of the toll-houses. He observes that this vision came about in a dream. "This dream is of course allegorical and is composed of a series of symbols," symbols which Basil "put into a certain order, ... the sins of people into a certain scheme, as this is the generally accepted [practice of] ascetic writers."

Fr Michael, therefore, interprets "Theodora" as the soul, the angels as being its virtues and the demons as being in reality, its sins. "Both are in the soul of a man and perhaps after death are found, as it were, on the scales of a balance."(4) Our sins accuse and convict us, the grace of God and our faith save us.

Fr Michael's attitude of "heavenly things," he confesses, comes from Metropolitan Macarius' Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, where Vladika advises, "Accept earthly things here as the weakest kind of depiction of heavenly things."(5) Fr Seraphim was certainly aware of Fr Michael's interpretation of the toll-houses, but chose to ignore it; or did he? Perhaps, his use of the word "metaphor"(6) to describe the toll-houses signifies, on account of his respect for Fr Michael, a slight retreat. In any case, Fr Seraphim Rose did not learn his lesson.

2.

Fr Seraphim illustrates his theory from the Lives of the Saints (hagiography). We will examine only two - from St Adamnan's Life of St Columban and "the vision of a monk at Wenlock"

from the Letters of St Boniface. He prefaces his treatment of these medieval Saints with the admission that the name of "toll-houses" is not found in any of their Lives. The term, he says, seems to be restricted to Eastern hagiographies, "but the *reality* described in Western sources is identical."(7)

Turning our attention first to St Columban (d. 597), Fr Seraphim recounts the Saint's words spoken to his monks.

Now let us help by prayer the monks of the Abbot Comgell, drowning at this hour in the Lough of the Calf for behold, at this moment they are warring in the air against hostile powers who try to snatch away the soul of a stranger who is drowning along with them. Then after the prayer, he said, `Give thanks to Christ, for now the holy angels have met these holy souls, and have delivered that stranger and triumphantly rescued him from the warring demons'.(8)

We observe that the holy angels have "met these holy souls" and "delivered" the stranger. Inasmuch as the word "soul" also means "human being" in Western medieval literature, we cannot be certain whether the monks drowned. St Columban says, "drowning," not drowned." In any case, they are met by demons "in the air," precisely where we would expect to find them. Also, St Columban refers to "warring demons," not "judging demons."

The choice of this episode is a poor one; it has no application to the argument at hand. No Orthodox denies that his life is a struggle against the devil. We anticipate his lies and slanders, now and at the Final Judgment. We do not deny the hatred and pretensions of the demons; nor the protective love of God's angels.

Fr Seraphim next calls upon the Letters of St Boniface (680-754), "Apostle to Germany," for corroboration. Boniface had learned personally about the vision of a monk of the monastery of Wenlock "who died and came back to life after some hours,"

as Rose describes the experience (The Soul After Death, p. 85-86). As he cites Boniface:

Angels of such pure splendour bore him up as he came forth from the body that he could not bear to gaze upon them.... 'They carried me up,' he said, 'high into the air...in the spirit...' He reported further that in the space of time while he was out of the body, a greater multitude of souls left their bodies and gathered where he was than he had thought formed the whole race of mankind on earth. He said also that there was a crowd of evil spirits and a glorious choir of the higher angels. And he said that the wretched spirits and the holy angels had a violent dispute concerning the souls that had come forth from their bodies, the demons bringing charges against them and aggravating the burden of their sin, the angels lightening their burden and making excuses for them.

Fr Seraphim copies two more paragraphs in which the monk was given a vision of "many fiery pits vomiting forth terrible flames" which tortured the damned. His angelic escort warned him that only the saved can avoid this punishment. The monk is further shown "the heavenly Jerusalem where holy souls shall live forever" with God in everlasting happiness.(9)

Even a cursory reading of the text reveals that the monk of Wenlock was "in his *spiritus*" or spirit - not his *anima* or soul (10) - when carried "high into the air." His "spirit" was free of his body. There is no mention of the monk's death, only of what occurs after death. There is no indication of souls passing through toll-houses, only the accusation of demons and the defense of angels. The monk is shown the joys of heaven and the terrors of hell;(11) but not as the places where souls are cast for failing the test of twenty "tax-collectors." The monk was given a vision of the future. Nothing more.

Fr Seraphim's analysis of the monk's "vision" is dishonest. When St Boniface tells us that his "spirit" was carried away by an angel, Rose substitutes "soul" and declares him dead. When

the Saint writes that his spirit was given "heightened awareness," Rose intrudes the notion that a soul free of the body naturally has "heightened awareness" of the spiritual world. When St Boniface states that "he (his spirit) returned to himself," Rose says the monk returned from the dead. When St Boniface mentions the demons condemning the monk and the souls of the dead for their sins (as is their wont), Fr Seraphim describes "the monk of Wenlock, after being raised by angels" as "passing through toll-houses."(12)

Fr Seraphim Rose violates all the Lives of the Saints in the same way. They are valuable to him only as they may be construed (with some imaginative interpreting) to illustrate his theory. He is not cautious about words and their meaning. One is left in the uncomfortable position of not trusting him.

ENDNOTES:

1. The Bogomils were Manicheans, that is, they believed that spirit is good but matter evil; hence, the soul is good but the body is evil. The Manichean heresy originated in the second century AD; the Bogomils developed in the tenth. The first Bogomil was "Pope Bogomil," a Bulgarian from whom his followers derived their name. From Bulgaria the heresy spread to southern Russia, Serbia and Bosnia, and then into western Europe, where this eastern dualistic doctrine bore different names: Patarins in Italy, Cathari in Germany and Italy, Pobleicans and Albigensians in France (A.A. Vasiliev, History of the Byzantine Empire, vol. 2. Milwaukee, 1964, p. 383f.).

2. Rose cites Protopresbyter Michael Pomozansky as a toll-house believer (The Soul After Death, p. 257). But Fr Seraphim translated Fr Michael's Orthodox Dogmatic Theology (Platina, 1984) into English; and The Ascent of the Soul is footnoted on page 334. Several comments in Orthodox Dogmatic Theology might lead us to consider Fr Michael his ally. But, then, Pomozansky cautions the reader to view the toll-house in "a

spiritual sense" (loc. cit.). Moreover, Fr Seraphim's appeal to Fr Michael Pomozansky is unjust, because in a letter to Fr Puhalo, Fr Michael expresses exactly the opposite opinion. He states that the entire "Theodora dream" is, after all, only a dream, and that all the elements of it are purely metaphorical. Indeed, he instructs that the "toll-houses" should be considered a metaphor for one's own conscience (see fn. 3 below).

3. See The Soul, the Body, and Death, pp. 158-162.

4. Ibid., p. 162.

5. Pomozansky, Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, p. 334.

6. "It is obvious to all but the youngest child that the name of 'toll-house' is not to be taken literally; it is a metaphor... for describing the reality which the soul encounters after death" (The Soul After Death, p. 255). Does he concede that the soul ascending to God does not literally encounter demons which judge its fitness for heaven?

How does Fr Seraphim explain these things metaphorically? Fr Michael understands the toll-house as the person's own conscience; the demons as vices; and the angels as virtues? If Rose does not accept his allegorization of the story, what does "metaphor" mean? What is a metaphorical toll-house and a metaphorical toll-collector? What is the metaphorical interrogation the soul is given? If he does not take literally the toll-house theory, his book was for nothing, a complete waste of time.

7. Ibid., p. 85.

8. St Adamnan, Life of St Columba, trans. by W. Huyshe, London, 1939, III, 13 (The Soul After Death, p. 85).

Incidentally, as Fr Michael Pomozansky points out in the letter cited above, the Lives of Saints do not constitute sacred tradition, but inspirational reading. Many of the stories in Lives of Saints come from completely unknown and unverified

sources. They are not useful for the formation of doctrine, particularly when the stories contradict the teachings of the great Church fathers.

9. St Boniface, Letters, trans. by E. Merton, New York, 1973, pp. 25-27.

10. Man is composed of body, soul and "spirit." The soul is the principle of life. The spirit is "the inner man," bridging body and the soul. The fathers often use "heart" and "mind" and "spirit" interchangeably. Thus, "if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart..." (Rm.9:10). "I commune with mine own heart; and my spirit made diligent search" (Ps. 76:10). "Create a right spirit within me, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps.50:10). The spirit is the source of faith, wisdom and virtue. It is with the purity of spirit that we *see God* (Mt.5:8), whence comes sin (Mt.15:8).

11. It must be noted that, according to the doctrine of the Orthodox Church, clearly stated by St Mark of Ephesus at the Council of Florence, neither heaven nor hell exist as yet. No one is in either heaven or hell yet, and so even if this tale is true and the monk of Wenlock thought that he saw such things, he could not have seen anything like reality, but only visualized some impressions he may have had. On the other hand, the whole thing may simply have been an ordinary nightmare which, in that superstitious age, became interesting in the retelling. The monk is not identified, nor is he noted as a saint. There is no certainty at all of the source or veracity of the tale.

12. The Soul After Death, pp. 126, 144. Rose draws from the mystical experience of the monk of Wenlock's evidence for his own philosophy of the soul: the soul is immaterial and the body is material. The soul is the self. Eternity is more natural to it than its connection with the body. On the contrary, the soul and body form the human being. God created the body and soul of each person. Their separation is unnatural. From his book, one cannot be sure that Fr Seraphim was deliberately elucidating a

body-soul dualism. He does not show himself a competent historian of philosophy, nor that he grasps the crucial problems of philosophy, nor their impact, if any, on Christian theology. Nevertheless, the implications are there: to believe, as he does, that the soul may be judged without the body, that the soul may achieve merit after death, give "satisfaction to the devil," or dwell in "the heaven of heavens" without the body, provides him with excellent Gnostic and Hellenistic credentials.

PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD

The worship of the Church is very important. "The law of faith is the law of worship," goes the old saying. The Liturgy, Matins, Vespers, etc. are the basic source of Orthodox teaching. The revealed truth, as expressed by the Scriptures, the fathers and all the Saints, is found in them, because we pray what we believe. Worship is essential to piety. Thus, the Faith of the Church, including her beliefs concerning death, are found everywhere in her sacred rites, most especially in the liturgical Offices relating to the parting of soul and body.

1.

As we have already seen, if Fr Seraphim does not merely extract a paragraph, a sentence or a phrase from its context for the sake of his theory, he renders them to fit his argument; or, what is the same thing, he puts Brianchaninov's translation into English. Wherever we look, he is guilty of considerable mischief and dishonesty with words and their meaning.(1)

Let us take an example from the funeral services of the Church. Here is Fr Seraphim's personal version of Canticle 4, Office of the Parting of the Soul from the Body:

As I depart from earth, vouchsafe me to pass unhindered by the prince of the air, the persecutor, the tormenter, he who stands on the frightful paths and is their unjust interrogator.(2)

Here is the Hapgood translation:

O Conqueror and Tormentor of the fierce Prince of the air, O Guardian of the dread path and Searcher of these vain words, help Thou me to pass unhindered, as I depart from earth.

The words of both translations are directed to Christ; both suggest an impediment to the soul's departure. What is it? The devil? *But he has been conquered* and, if we believe the Scriptures and the fathers, the righteous soul is carried directly to Abraham's bosom. And if we recall the toll-house theory, it is with the righteous that the "tax-collectors" are concerned. The "aerial spirits" seek to find some fault in them by which they might "drag" the elect into hell.

What, then, is the "dread path"? The gauntlet of demons, as Fr Seraphim insists? Listen to Stanza 8 of the Burial of Laymen:

Today is the soul severed from the body, and translated to the world eternal; for it sets out upon a path which it has never trod, and goeth to the Judge Who respecteth no person; where the angelic Hosts stand round about (Tone 8).

The path is dreadful *because it is the unknown - a path which it has never trod*, a path which finally ends before the awful Judgment Seat of Christ.

Remembering that rites of the Orthodox Church are as much poetry as they are theology, one understands the "impediment" to be our sins. The "path" is the unique experience of the frightened soul, which has never before existed without its body, and which is now being deprived of the fullness of "personhood" by being separated from the body.

Thus, prayers for the dead call upon God to forgive the sins of His children and, therefore, deliverance from "bitter torment" (Burial of Laymen, Cant. 7). The "bitter torment" is not only the "flames" of Hades, but "the burning of fierce Gehenna" (Cant. 10, Office of Parting). "Therefore, at this time prepare eternal

bliss for those who slumber in the hope of the resurrection, forgiving them their trespasses through Thy bounty... (Meat-Fare Saturday, Aposticha of Vespers, Tone 6).

In the Vespers for Meat-Fare Saturday (Stichoi, Tone 8) the Church prays:

O Saviour, Who didst purchase us with Thy blood, and delivered us by Thy death from bitter death, and granted us everlasting life by Thy resurrection, grant rest, O Lord, to all who slumber in true worship... Wherefore, we beseech Thee ceaselessly that we may rest in Thy tabernacles, in the bosom of Abraham, even Thy servants who have worshipped Thee in purity from the days of Adam... In the "tabernacles of God," the soul will abide "until the final Resurrection" (Canticle, 9 Office for the Parting of the Soul).

The righteous "rest" in "a heavenly abiding-place, a meed of Thy gifts, granting him redemption for his sins" (Ibid., Cant. 5).

There is no mention of toll-houses in the Church Services, no matter how Fr Seraphim would twist their words. Even if the text intimated their existence, sound theology should have compelled Fr Seraphim to draw some other conclusion. Toll-houses do not exist, if only because they are unnecessary. Once we understand the meaning of salvation, the reasons become more than obvious.

Salvation means two things: union with God and escape from the devil who holds the power of death (Hb.2:14). The funeral offices consistently repeat these themes. Therefore, we hear the Church reproach the devil, seeking God's forgiveness for the sins of the departed, while petitioning Him to receive His children who have "fallen asleep." She implores Him that they escape the "flames of hades" and "the condemnation of Gehenna" (Final Prayer of Parting).

Christ has "trampled down death by His Death" and stripped the devil of all his power. He has no claim on us. The Lord has paid

the ransom to the grave. As the Gospel says, "the Son of man is come... to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The devil may taunt and tempt us now; and he may slander us at the hour of death and at the Judgment Seat, but *the souls of the righteous are in the Hand of God* (Wis. 3:1).

Our salvation depends on true faith in Christ. We do not escape the torment of hades and Gehenna without grace. *For by grace are you saved through faith*, St Paul affirms (Eph. 2:8). By Baptism, we belong to Christ, by the Eucharist nourished, by faith perfected. *Who, then, shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?* the Apostle asks the church at Rome. *It is God Who justifies. Who is it that condemns? It is Christ Who died, yea rather, that is risen again, Who is even now at the right hand of God, and makes intercession for us* (Rom. 8:33).

2.

Let us now consider the "testimony" of St Mark, Bishop of Ephesus which Fr Seraphim found so essential to his defense of the toll-house theory.⁽³⁾ We will also use the English translation from The Soul After Death.⁽⁴⁾

St Mark teaches that those who reposed in faith are helped by Liturgies, prayers, almsgiving performed in their behalf, a custom, he says, "which has been in force since antiquity" (e.g., 2Macc.12:44-45). The Church has also received the truth that even the souls suffering in hades may be alleviated a little. Although the prayers of the Faithful may move God to forgive the sins of the reposed,⁽⁵⁾ we must not think that His action takes the form of a "purgatorial fire."

We entreat God, St Mark continues, that He will deliver the souls in hades from eternal torment, "and not from any other torment or fire apart from those torments and that flame which has been proclaimed to be forever" (Hom. I, 2). Clearly, if remission of sin were achieved by mere prayer, or simply by the divine Love, there would be no need for cleansing or punishment. There is more to it.

"We affirm," St Mark writes at the beginning of the *Second Homily on The Purgatorial Fires*, "*that neither the righteous has received the fullness of their lot....nor have sinners, after death, been led away to the eternal punishment in which they shall be tormented eternally.*" Rather, both are in "places" proper to them. The righteous dwell in "heaven," "in absolute repose and free," "already as if in the paradise from which Adam fell." Likewise the damned abide in a "place" which is a preview of the unending darkness and pain to come.

Even "the devil and his angels" do not yet endure the fire of Gehenna, as Matthew's vision of the Last Judgment (Mt.25:1-46) confirms. The Lord then proclaims to the wicked, *Depart from me, you accursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* Observe the word prepared, says St Mark. If "prepared," Gehenna has not "been given;" likewise, if the righteous *inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*, clearly the saved do not yet people the Kingdom of God.

But there is another reason that no soul enters either Gehenna or the Kingdom until the Judgment. As already mentioned, the soul did not become righteous or wicked alone. It acted with the body. No person is body alone, nor soul alone; but the unity of both. "Do you not see," asks St Mark, "*that before we stand in front of the Judgment Seat and before the time when we shall all appear gathered together, none shall receive except that which he has done through the body?*" (Ibid., 2).

Thus, until the time that body and soul are reunited, the soul dwells where its earthly life has led it. The abode of the dead is not a "place" - whether above the earth or below it. The abode of the saved and the damned is "noetic" or "spiritual." It is better called "the Place of God."

For John the Damascene says in his thirteenth Theological Chapter entitled `On the Place of God': "The place of God is

said to be that which has or, he who has a greater share in His energy and grace" (loc. cit.).

"Energy and grace" - Fr Seraphim makes no mention of them. Those who welcome it by virtue of their love for God, are comforted by the Presence of God, that is, through Energy of His Grace. Those who reject or ignore God's Word, in this interim period, the Particular Judgment, receive the same Energy. The greater the sinfulness, the hotter the "flame" of "nethermost hades." The greater the holiness of the soul, the closer it is to God, the greater Abraham's consolation.

But whether the one or the other, all is the action of God's Grace: the Grace of perfection brings joy to the believing soul, the Grace of rebuke fills the profane soul with sadness. The same Uncreated Energies of God pour Light upon the first, darkness upon the second.

The intermediary conditions are, using the term in its broadest sense, hades. Beginning with Adam, it is the natural abode of the departed. Those who died before the Resurrection of Christ, heard John the Baptizer when he entered hades to prepare its inhabitants for the coming of the Lord; and when He descended into hades, those who believed His Gospel came out of its depths.

"Death" is another word for "hades" in Matthew 16:18 - *and the gates of hades (death) shall not prevail against it (the Church)*. "Death" has been overcome and hades is powerless to hold those who have reposed in Christ. Yet, "darkest hades" detains the unbelievers until their bodies are resurrected, and the soul with its body stands before the Judgment Seat to hear the verdict of Christ; likewise the righteous leave Abraham's Bosom for the "resurrection unto salvation."

The righteous include the Saints who, as some of the fathers says, are scattered throughout the many heavens close to the Throne of God. Here is their Particular Judgment, their Abraham's Bosom (which, in a sense, is part of hades), from

where they come to rejoin their bodies and to hear Christ welcome them into His eternal Kingdom.

The saved are wholly deified, *partakers of the divine Nature* (2Pet.1:4): body and soul become forever immortal, sinless, without aging or sickness (incorruptible). The elect enter the Age to Come, a transfigured world, *which eye has not seen; nor ear heard*, a life of eternal communion with the Holy Trinity.

St Gregory of Nyssa tells us that, in the Age to Come, the perfection of the saved will not cease. The process of becoming God-like (deification), begun at Baptism, will continue throughout eternity. We shall become more and more like God - "the Good," as St Gregory sometimes called Him.

Our perfection begins in this life, grows in the Particular Judgment (Abraham's Bosom) as our sins are forgiven, and, in the Kingdom of God, Paradise, Heaven, our beings will become increasingly divine, a condition without end, beyond our imagination. All of this is the action of God's Uncreated Energies, His Grace and Light.

Fr Seraphim never understood the place of Grace in the Orthodox religion. His toll-house theory proves it. If salvation is becoming like God through Grace; and if this process of salvation or deification begins in the Church, continues into the next life, what possible role can toll-houses play in God's Plan? How shall the devil and his demons judge His elect? Can they condemn God's Own (1 Pet.2:9)? Can they condemn us? Can they purge our sins? No, all these things are the action of God's Grace.

As the saved shall enter the Kingdom of God, the damned, body and soul, shall go away into everlasting fire, where, becoming ever more demonic, hating God, they are burned by the very Love with which He loves them.(6) The devil, whom they join in Gehenna, has already played his part in their destiny while on earth. In any case, the wicked do not pass through the toll-

houses, if we believe Fr Seraphim, only those souls in their ascent to heaven. The Gnostic toll-houses are superfluous.

ENDNOTES:

1. The Hapgood translation will be our general source.
2. The Soul After Death, p. 194.
3. One may question his choice of St Mark. As Fr Seraphim admits, "It should be noted that St Mark's writings concern primarily the specific point of the *state* of souls after death, and barely touch on the history of the events that occur to the soul immediately after death." In other words, if St Mark does not discuss the toll-houses, it is not, according to Fr Rose, because he disbelieves in their existence, but because they were "not under discussion at Florence" (Ibid., p. 206). The appeal to St Mark has the hidden purpose of deflecting criticism of the toll-houses, but also showing that the theory is not the equivalent of purgatory, a not uncommon observation of reviewers.
4. It is in fact an English translation (Ibid., pp. 207-220) of the Russian translation of Archimandrite Amvrossy Pogodin's St Mark of Ephesus and the Council of Florence, Jordanville, NY, 1963, pp. 58-73. Archbishop Lazar also quotes from St Mark's Refutation of Latin Chapters Concerning the Purgatorial Fires (The Soul, the Body and Death), pp. 117-120). He extends Rose's quote to include portions of St Mark's treatise which Fr Seraphim purposely chose not to use, because they actually refute his position. The Greek text (Oratio de igne purgatorio) is found in volume 15 of Patrologia Orientalia (ed. by R. Graffin & F. Nau), Paris, 1903 -.
5. We must be extremely careful with our understanding of this. One could arrive at the conclusion that the faithful are more moral and righteous than God is they are able to forgive more quickly than He, and even overcome their fear of Him in order to shame Him into forgiving also, through their prayers. We

must exercise great caution and spiritual awareness in the way we understand such things.

6. See Dr Alexandre Kalomiros, "The River of Fire," St Nectarios Orthodox Conference (22-25 July), Seattle, 1980, 103-131.

VII CONCLUSION

Fr Seraphim was a Gnostic. The toll-house theory is taken from that ancient heresy. Condemned by the Church, Gnosticism is a stubborn theological virus. It clings tenaciously to the hull of the Church, a barnacle of destruction to the unwary. The monk from Platina was a victim. Not that he consciously sought to change the teachings of the Church on "the last things" (eschatology), but unduly impressed by certain nineteenth century "Russian mystics" smitten by the heresy, he too was led astray. His pride did not permit him to correct his error.

Some critics of Fr Seraphim have misconceived the toll-house theory as a form of purgatory; it is not, despite the similarities: the saved pass through a third state of spiritual reality; salvation depends on "satisfaction," that is, accounting for sins; the end of the soul's ascent is heaven. The prayers of the Church help the soul on its "road of death."

Toll-houses differ from purgatory in several ways: purgatory cleanses from sins with "fire"; toll-houses involve interrogation by the demons, whose judgment may cause the soul to be cast into hell. Purgatory involves remission of sins, toll-houses do not. In this sense, purgatory is more consistent with Orthodox teachings than the toll-house Gnosticism.

Gnosticism cancels the Particular Judgment - although Fr Seraphim several times in The Soul After Death insisted that toll-houses are a stage of it. On account of their false

understanding of human nature, the Gnostics believed that heaven was the natural home of the soul; hence, death is a blessing, a release of the soul from the prison of the body, the beginning of its journey home. Toll-houses, through which none passed before Christ, are obstacles to its quest.(1)

What happens to the Particular Judgment? The verdict of the toll-houses is final: the saved are those who pass the demonic examination; those who fail share the fate of the damned or, to be more consistent, are they the damned? One soul proceeds to heaven, another is cast into hell. Thus, hades becomes a synonym for hell, as Abraham's bosom and paradise is for heaven. In point of fact, neither heaven nor hell are yet open to us.(2)

Rose is aware that his toll-house theory is awkward, for which reason he fiddles with it throughout his book. He hopes to find support for it in other religions and in the accounts of wandering souls, visions and what is popularly known as "out of body" experiences. These do not always fit, and he is forced to make some adjustments in his theory.

He listens to no one and is benefited by no correction.

When "the Critic" observes that souls "sleep" after death - that is, repose in and are confined to the states of Particular Judgment - Fr Seraphim accuses him of adopting the heresies of the Seventh Day Adventists and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Rose falsely and dishonestly denounces "the Critic" for holding the opinion that the soul after death is unconscious, which necessarily outlaws any possibility of intercession of the Saints. He mocks "the Critic" for trying to wriggle out of a contradiction, describing the soul's slumber as a "metaphor." As we have seen, Fr Seraphim uses the same word for his toll-houses. "Soul sleep" or "slumber" or "falling asleep" (1Cor.15:6,18) are indeed "metaphors," language which gives us a hint of something impossible to conceive. No wonder "the Critic" labelled Fr Seraphim a "rationalist." Gnosticism is

rationalism, human reason pretending to go where it cannot. God has given to His Church all that can be known about life after death. Heresy is the attempt to supersede the limits of divine revelation.

Hence, Gnosticism is rationalism. It claims to speak from divine revelation. How is it God's revelation when it opposes the Church, Her Scriptures and fathers? How is it revelation when it thinks with the mind of Plato? Professing a fantastic universe filled with demons, archons and signs of the zodiac or with holy angels, the devil and his minions, Gnosticism is nothing more than human pretension. Finis.

ENDNOTES:

1. The Soul After Death, p. 244. If Fr Seraphim is right, then, not even the righteous of the Old Testament, including Moses and Elias, escaped the toll-houses. Where did they go? Prophet Elias and his chariot, of course, remain somehow "up there" while Moses, naturally unable to pass the test of the tax-collectors, was cast into hell with the other Prophets, the Patriarchs and Kings of Israel, as well as all "the noble Gentiles" (Noah, Job, Plato, Buddha, Iknahton, etc.), as St Justin Martyr referred to them. I suspect that Fr Seraphim would admit that Christ, descending into hell, retrieved them. But, then, hell is not everlasting for everyone. Rose could have avoided all these queries if he abandoned Gnosticism and distinguished between "hell" and "hades."

2. There is every good reason not to confuse hell (Gehenna) and hades (abode of the dead). First, the condition of the soul immediately after death is temporary; heaven and hell are permanent. Second, if Abraham's Bosom or "paradise" are *the* heavens, the Kingdom of God; and if "the place of torment" in Luke's parable is hell, then, the Particular Judgment is silly speculation. Third, if the souls of the departed reside already in the Kingdom or in hell, then, God has judged the soul without

the body. Fourth, if souls are already in heaven and hell, the Final Judgment is meaningless. Fifth, if souls have entered heaven and hell, the prayers of the Church are not only superfluous but ludicrous. Finally, if hades and hell are the same; and if Christ, by descending into hell, has broken its power, to what purpose are the wicked consigned to Gehenna?