

A Comparison: Francis of Assisi and St. Seraphim of Sarov

During my prayer two great lights appeared before me (deux grandes lumibres m'ont ete montrees)—one in which I recognized the Creator, and another in which I recognized myself.

—Francis' own words about his prayer

He (Fr Serge) thought about the fact that he was a burning lamp, and the more he felt that, the more he felt a weakening, a quenching of the divine light of truth burning within him.

—L.N. Tolstoy, "Father Serge."

The truly righteous always consider themselves unworthy of God.

—Dictum of St Isaac the Syrian

Studying the biographical data of Francis of Assisi, a fact of the utmost interest concerning the mysticism of this Roman Catholic ascetic is the appearance of stigmata on his person. Roman Catholics regard such a striking manifestation as the seal of the Holy Spirit. In Francis' case, these stigmata took on the form of the marks of Christ's passion on his body.

The stigmatisation of Francis is not an exceptional phenomenon among ascetics of the Roman Catholic world. Stigmatisation appears to be characteristic of Roman Catholic mysticism in general, both before it happened to Francis, as well as after. Peter Damian, as an example, tells of a monk who bore the representation of the Cross on his body. Caesar of Geisterbach mentions a novice whose forehead bore the impress of a Cross. [1] Also, a great deal of data exists, testifying to the fact that after Francis' death a series of stigmatisations occurred which, subsequently, have been thoroughly studied by various investigators, particularly in recent times. These phenomena, as V. Guerier says, illuminate their primary source. Many of them were subjected to careful observation and recorded in

detail, e.g., the case of Veronica Giuliani (1660-1727) who was under doctor's observation; Luisa Lato (1850-1883) described by Dr Varleman, [2] and Madelaine N. (1910) described by Janat. [3]

In Francis of Assisi's case, it should be noted that the Roman Catholic Church reacted to his stigmatisation with the greatest reverence. It accepted the phenomenon as a great miracle. Two years after his death, the Pope canonized Francis as a saint. The chief motive for his canonization was the fact of the miraculous stigmata on his person, which were accepted as indications of sanctity. This fact is of singular interest to Orthodox Christians, since nothing similar is encountered in the lives of the Orthodox Church's Saints—an outstanding exponent of which is the Russian Saint, Seraphim of Sarov.

It should be mentioned here, that the historical accounts of Francis' stigmatisation do not now give rise to any doubts in the scholarly world. In this regard, reference is made to Sabbatier who studied Francis' life, and especially his stigmatisation, in detail. Sabbatier came to the conclusion that the stigmata were definitely real. Sabbatier sought to find an explanation of the stigmatisation in the unexplored area of mental pathology, somewhere between psychology and physiology. [4]

Before proceeding with an explanation of Francis' stigmatisation from an Orthodox mystical standpoint—the primary purpose of this paper—an investigation of stigmata as physiological phenomena will be undertaken at this point, since such an investigation will contribute valuable information for a subsequent Orthodox evaluation of the "mysticism" of the Roman Catholic saint.

Guerier includes in his work on Francis the scientific findings of G. Dumas who analysed the process of stigmatisation from a psychosomatic viewpoint. [5] The following are the conclusions Dumas came to concerning stigmatics:

1. One must recognize the sincerity of stigmatics and that stigmata appear spontaneously, i.e., they are not self-inflicted wounds, inflicted while the person is in an unconscious state.
2. The wounds on stigmatics are regarded as phenomena relating to the circulatory system (blood vessels) and are explained as effects of

mental suggestion which does affect digestion, circulation of blood, glandular secretions. It can result in cutaneous injuries.

3. The wounds on stigmatics appear while they are in an ecstatic state which results when one is absorbed in some sort of contemplated powerful image, and surrenders control to that image.

4. The stigmata appear not only as a result of one's passive imaging of a wound on the body, but, according to the testimony of stigmatics, when the imaging is accompanied by the active action of the image itself—specifically that of a fiery ray or lance, seen as proceeding from a contemplated wound, which wounds the stigmatic's body. Often, this happens gradually, and not with the first vision, until the degree eventually is reached where the image contemplated during ecstasy finally gains control over the contemplating subject.

Dumas established the following general criteria for stigmatisation: all stigmatics experience unbearable pain in the affected parts of the body, no matter what form the stigmata take—imprint of Cross on the shoulder; traces of the thorns of a crown of thorns on the head; or, as with Francis of Assisi, as wounds on the hands, feet and on the side. Together with the pain, they experience great delight in the thought that they are worthy to suffer with Jesus, to atone, as He did, for the sins of which they are innocent. [6] (This, of course, is commensurate with the Roman Catholic "satisfaction theory," which is unknown to the Orthodox Church.) [7]

Dumas' generalizations are extremely interesting since they imply that in the process of stigmatisation, apart from the impassioned emotional state (an emotional ecstasy of the heart) a great role is also played by: a) a mental element; b) a mental imaging presenting acute suffering; c) auto-suggestion, i.e., a series of mental and volitional impulses directed toward translating the sufferings of the imagined image into; d) physical feelings—pain; and, finally, e) the production on the self of marks (wounds) of suffering—stigmata.

Dumas' observations recognize factors more than the emotional (which William James considers the source of mysticism) [8] which play an equal, if not greater role in the process of stigmatisation. These may be summarized as:

1. An intense labor of mental imagination,
2. Suggestion,
3. Sensual feelings, and,
4. Physiological manifestations.

The significance of these will be apparent later.

Following the brief scientific analysis concerning stigmaties in general, specific data, regarding Francis' ecstasy and vision, as contained in the work *Fioretti*, which will give the background leading to the vision, as well as a description of the phenomenon.

The stigmatisation of Francis of Assisi, due to the results of his vision, are ascribed to a singular prayer. The prayer is an intense pleading on his part that he may experience the sufferings of Christ in his body and soul. In the prayer, Francis desires Divine instigation of the experience and thirsts to experience this not just with his soul, but *with his body*. Thus, surrendering himself to ecstatic prayer, he did not renounce his body, but was inviting earthly, or bodily sensations, i.e., physical suffering.

Francis' prayer was answered. The chronicle says that, "Francis felt himself completely transformed into Christ." This transformation was not only in spirit, but also in body, i.e., not only in spiritual and psychological sensations, but also in physical ones. How did the vision actually occur?

First of all, quite unexpectedly for him, Francis saw something described as miraculous: he saw a six-winged Seraph, similar to the one described by the Prophet Isaiah, coming down from heaven to him. (First stage of vision). Then, after the Seraph approached, Francis, thirsting for Jesus and feeling himself "transformed into Christ," began to see Christ on the Seraph, nailed to a cross. In the words of the chronicle, "And this Seraph came so close to the saint that Francis could clearly and distinctly see on the Seraph the image of the Crucified One." (Second state of vision). Francis recognized in the image of the Seraph Christ Himself Who had come down to him.

[9] He felt Christ's suffering on his body, whereupon his desire to experience this suffering was satisfied. (Third stage of vision). Then the stigmata began to appear on his body. His striving and fervent praying appeared to be answered. (Fourth stage of vision).

The amazing complexity of Francis' vision is startling. Over the initial vision of the Seraph, who had, apparently, descended from heaven for Francis, was superimposed another image—the one Francis thirsted to have above all, that of the Crucified Christ. The developing process of these visions leaves one with the impression that the first vision (that of the Seraph), so unexpected and sudden, was outside the realm of Francis' imagination, who longed to see the Crucified Christ, and to experience His sufferings. In this manner, it can be explained how such a complex conception, in which both visions, both images—that of the Seraph and of Christ—found room in Francis' consciousness.

The experience of Francis of Assisi is remarkable and of singular interest to Orthodox Christians, since as mentioned above, nothing similar is encountered in the experience of the Orthodox Church with a long line of ascetics, and equally long history of mystical experiences. As a matter of fact, all of the things Francis experienced in the process of his stigmatisation are the very beguilements the Church Fathers repeatedly warned against!

Recalling how the ascetics of the Orthodox Church understand the highest (spiritual) prayer as detailed in the *Philokalia*, it is to be emphasized here that they regarded this prayer alongside their own personal strivings, as a synergetic operation (man co-operating with God) to achieve *detachment*, not only from everything *physical* or *sensory*, but also from *rational* thought. That is, at best, a direct spiritual elevation of the person to God, when the Lord God the Holy Spirit Himself intercedes for the supplicant with "groanings which cannot be uttered." [10] As an example, St Isaac of Syria in his *Directions* says, "A soul which loves God, in God, and in Him alone finds peace. First release yourself from all your outward attachments, then your heart will be able to unite with God; for union with God is preceded by *detachment* from matter." [11] It is the plain speaking of St Nilos of Sinai, however, that slashes through with distinct clarity to present a serious juxtaposition to the alleged Divine visitation that Francis experienced. In the *Text on Prayer*, he admonishes: "Never

desire nor seek any face or image during prayer. Do not wish for sensory vision or angels, or powers, or Christ, lest you lose your mind by mistaking the wolf for the shepherd and worship the enemies—the demons. The beginning of the beguilement (*plani*) of the mind is vainglory, which moves the mind to try and represent the Deity in some form or image. [12]

Francis' ecstatic prayer was answered, but in the light of both St Isaac's and St Nilos' counsels, clearly not by Christ. The chronicle says that "Francis felt himself completely transformed into Christ," transformed not only in spirit, but also in body, i.e., not only in spiritual and psychological sensations, but also in physical ones. While granting that Francis was fully convinced that he had been spiritually taken up to the Logos, the rise of special physical sensations cannot, according to St Isaac, be ascribed to the action of a spiritually good power.

Francis' physical sensations can be explained as the work of his own mental imagination moving parallel to his spiritual ecstasy. It is hard to say, in this given instance, which was dominant in Francis' beguilement (*plani*): his spiritual pride, or his mentalism (mental imaging); but, in any case, the mentalism was rather strong. This is confirmed by the substantive circumstances of the unusually complex vision which was presented to Francis after he felt himself completely transformed into Jesus which is clearly a very severe state of *plani*, having its roots, as St Nilos says, in vainglory.

The exaggeratedness of Francis' exaltation, which was noted in the description of his vision, is revealed very boldly when compared with the majestic vision of Christ which St Seraphim of Sarov experienced while serving as a deacon on Great Thursday of Passion Week. [13]

In contrast to Francis, St Seraphim did not seek to "feel himself transformed into Jesus" through his prayers and labors. He prayed simply and deeply, repenting of his sins. During the course of his prayer, and as a result of his great ascetic acts, the mystical power of Grace grew in him which he neither felt, nor realized. Standing before the throne (Holy Table) with a burning heart, as in the words of Elias of Ekdik "...the soul, having freed itself from everything external, is united with prayer, and that prayer, like a sort of flame

surrounding the soul as fire does iron, makes it all fiery," [14] St Seraphim unexpectedly was stunned with the appearance of the Mysterious Divine Power. St Seraphim neither imagined, nor dreamt, nor expected such a vision. When it occurred, he was so stunned that it took two hours for him to "come to his senses." Later, he himself described what had happened. At first he was struck by an unusual light as if from the sun. Then he saw the Son of Man in glory, shining brighter than the sun with an ineffable light and surrounded "as by a swarm of bees" by the heavenly powers. Coming out of the North Gate (of the sanctuary) Christ stopped before the amvon and, lifting up His hands, blessed those who were serving and those who were praying. The vision then vanished.

Several items in the account of St Seraphim's vision are of interest in this study. Firstly, in direct contrast to prayer, St Seraphim's prayer is devoid of any element that would remotely suggest that he desired any visible (sensory) signs of the Divine Presence. Least of all, did he think in his life that he was ever worthy of being "transformed into Jesus," as Francis prayed. The key characteristic of the Saint's prayer is a profound humility, evidenced by his articulated confession of sinfulness which prompted him toward prayerful repentance. The significance of this, as the Church Fathers repeatedly point out, is that true humility effectively prevents one from falling into vainglory.

A second profound aspect of St Seraphim's prayer is the fact that no favor of Divine Manifestation is asked of God. Neither, of course, as mentioned previously, was anything extraneous to his repentance, thought or imaged while he prayed. This, of course, would be commensurate with St Seraphim's repentance, since his articulation of it indicates quite clearly that he himself was never deceived to think that he had achieved a level of worthiness where, in spite of his sins, he could boldly ask for Holy things. If he had thought about himself in this manner, he would have easily slipped into conceit. St Seraphim's prayer was intended for the exact opposite which did indeed make him worthy of the Divine Vision. St Maximos the Confessor in the *First Century of Love* expressed it thus, "He who has not yet attained to knowledge of God inspired by love, thinks highly of what he does according to God. But a man who has received it repeats in his heart the words of our forefather Abraham, when God appeared to him, 'I am earth and ashes' (Gn.18:27)."

Concerning St Seraphim's vision, it should be noted that the highest spiritual state, attained through the way indicated by the ascetics in the *Philokalia*, develops in a person's heart *outside* the *mental* and *sensual* spheres, and, consequently, *outside* the sphere of mental imagination. Abba Evagrios in his *Texts on Active Life—To Anatolios*, says:

The mind will not see the place of God in itself, unless it rises above all thoughts of material and created things; and it cannot rise above them *unless it becomes free of the passions binding it to sensory objects and inciting thoughts about them*. It will free itself of passions by means of virtues, and of simple thoughts by means of spiritual contemplation; but it *will discard even this* when there appears to it that light which, during prayer, marks the place of God. [16]

The experience of man's mystical union with God is, therefore, usually very difficult to convey in human terms. It happens, however, that visions are allowed people who have cultivated passionlessness in themselves, but in the majority of these cases these visions are momentary, and they strike the inner being of the person—they come as if from within. St Isaac the Syrian elaborates: "If you are pure, then heaven is within you; and in yourself you will see angels, and with them and in them, the Lord of Angels." [17] The Fathers of the Orthodox Church teach that all these experiences are beyond any expectation of the humble man, for the ascetic in his humility does not feel himself worthy of this.

Recapitulating St Seraphim's experience, it can be seen that it bore the following characteristics:

1. Simplicity;
2. Repentance;
3. Humility;
4. An unexpected vision beyond sensory and rational categories;
5. Spiritual ecstasy or ravishment.

Emphasizing the last item, St Isaac, quoted above, explains: "...the contemplation of a hyper-conscious vision, granted by Divine Power, is received by the soul—within itself immaterially, suddenly and unexpectedly; it is discovered and revealed from within, because, in Christ's words, 'the kingdom of heaven is within you'—This contemplation inside the image, imprinted in the hidden mind (the higher intellect) reveals itself without any thought about it." [18]

From the above points taken from a comparison of the two visions and of what Francis and St Seraphim experienced in these, there is a sharp difference in the mysticism of the two. St Seraphim's mysticism appears as a purely spiritual ecstasy, as something bestowed on the ascetic, as a gift of a spiritual vision, as an enlightenment of his higher intellect, [19] while Francis' spiritual experience is a mysticism induced by his will, and obviously darkened by his own imagination and sensuality.

A further distinctive difference between the two is the different relationship expressed by them toward Christ. In contrast to Saint Seraphim, who experienced Christ's spiritual power in his heart and accepted Christ within himself, Francis in his imaging, received his impression primarily from Christ's earthly life. Francis was absorbed in Christ's external aspect of suffering. This impression came upon him at Monte La Verna as if from without.

Concomitant with his very strong desire to experience Christ's suffering, was his compulsion to imitate other earthly aspects of Jesus' life. He not only sent his own "Apostles" to various regions of the earth to preach, giving them virtually the same instructions the Saviour gave to His Apostles, [20] but he even produced before his disciples not long before his death something similar to the great Mystical Supper itself. "He recalled," says his biographer, "that sanctified meal which the Lord celebrated with His disciples for the last time." [21] This presumption cannot be excused on the basis of his flamboyant life, regardless how severe his asceticism was or how many virtuous things he did. It stands as a prime indication, from an Orthodox point of view, of the severity of his fall into the condition of spiritual beguilement.

Before proceeding it is imperative to outline briefly the condition called *plani*. In general terms, according to Metropolitan Antony

Khrapovitsky, *plani* (*prelest*, in Russian) usually results when the devil deludes the person by suggesting the *thought* that he has been granted visions (or other gifts of Grace). Then the evil one constantly blinds his conscience, convincing him of his apparent sanctity and promises him the power of working wondrous acts. The evil one leads such an ascetic to the summit of a mountain or the roof of a church, and shows him a fiery chariot, or some other such wondrous thing, which will bear him to Heaven. The deluded one then steps into it (that is, he accepts the delusion) and falls headlong into the abyss, and is dashed to death without repentance. [22]

What is clear from such a brief analysis of *plani* is that the subject who undergoes the experience usually has succumbed to some form of pride, usually vainglory, hence the presumption that one has finally achieved a state from whence he is deluded to think that he no longer must be watchful concerning the possibility of a fall into sin, or even blasphemy against God. It is, of course, the Luciferian sin, and by definition the most difficult to contend with, hence, the importance and constant emphasis in religious writing, concerning ascetic obedience and humility until the very end of one's earthly life.

It has already been shown above that Francis' vision contains strong marks of spiritual deception. What remains, therefore, is a characterization of Francis' work and acts which will stand as the prime characterization of his mysticism. Presenting a few incidents from Francis' life, and then, contrasting these with incidents from the life of St Seraphim of Sarov, it will be possible to draw a final conclusion regarding the mysticism of these two ascetics. It should be stated here that the example incidents chosen are generally characteristic of the subjects.

It is recorded in the *Fioretti* that Francis at one time failed to fulfil the rules of a strict fast because of an illness. This oppressed the ascetic's conscience to such a degree that he decided to repent and punish himself. The chronicle states:

... he commanded that the people be gathered on the street in Assisi for a sermon. When he had finished the sermon, he told the people that no one should leave until he returned; he himself went into the cathedral with many brethren and with Peter de Catani and told Peter to do what he would tell him to do according to his vow of

obedience and without objecting. The latter answered that he could not and should not desire or do anything against his [Francis'] will either to him or to himself. *Then Francis took off his outer robe and ordered Peter to put a rope around his neck and lead him half-naked out to the people to the very place from which he had preached.* Francis commanded another brother to fill a cup with ashes and, having climbed up onto the eminence from which he had preached, to pour these ashes on his head. This one, however, did not obey him, since he was so distressed by this order because of his compassion and devotion to Francis. But Brother Peter took the rope in his hands and began dragging Francis behind him as the latter had commanded. He himself cried bitterly during this, and the other brothers were bathed in tears from pity and grief. When Francis had thus been led half-naked before the people to the place from which he had preached, he said, 'You and all who have left the world after my example and follow the way of life of the brethren consider me a holy man, but before the Lord and you I repent because during this sickness of mine I ate meat and meat drippings'. [23]

Of course Francis' sin was not so great and hardly deserved the dramatic form of penance in which Francis clothed his repentance, but such was a general characteristic of Francis' piety. He strove to idealize everything which an ascetic was obliged to do; he strove also to idealize the very ascetic act of repentance.

Francis' idealization of Christian acts of asceticism can also be noted in his relationship to the act of almsgiving. This can be seen in the way Francis reacted to beggars. In Francis' eyes beggars were creatures of a very high stature in comparison to other people. In the view of this Roman Catholic mystic, a beggar was the bearer of a sacred mission, being an image of the poor, wandering Christ. Therefore, in his instructions Francis obliges his disciples to beg for alms. [24]

Finally, Francis' idealized enthusiasm was especially revealed in his recollections of Christ's earthly suffering. In the biography of Francis it says that, "being drunk with love and compassion for Christ, blessed Francis once picked up a piece of wood off the ground and, taking it in his left hand, he rubbed his right hand over it as if it were a bow over a violin, while humming a French song about the Lord Jesus Christ. This singing ended with tears of pity over Christ's

suffering, and with earnest sighs, Francis, falling into a trance, gazed at the sky...." [25]

There can be no doubt, as even Francis' biographers euphemistically attest, that this important founder of the Franciscan Order was demonstrative in his acts of repentance, revealing quite graphically the absence of a critical degree of watchfulness necessary in the ascetic life for the acquisition of true humility. As a matter of fact, whenever indications of Francis' humility are expounded upon in the *Fioretti* they are never lacking in a compromising presumptuousness whether God allegedly speaks to him, as an example, through the mouth of Brother Leon, [26] or when he presumes that he has been chosen by God "to see good and evil everywhere," when tested by Brother Masseo for his humility. [27] It is true that Francis describes his vileness and wretchedness, but there is lacking in all this any attendant remorse, or contrition that would indicate that he considered himself unworthy before God. Although he frequently spoke of the necessity of humility, and gave the Franciscan brethren useful instruction in this regard, he himself throughout his life experienced this only in isolated fits, albeit very strong ones; it came in fits not entirely free, as indicated above, from exaggeration and melodrama. Nothing can be so revealing in this matter, however, as his own statements to the brethren. At one time he was to say to his disciples, "I do not recognize any transgression in myself for which I could not atone by confession and penance. For the Lord in His mercy has bestowed on me the gift of learning clearly in prayer in what I have pleased or displeased Him." [28] These words, of course, are far from genuine humility. They suggest, rather, the speech of that virtuous man who was satisfied with himself (the Pharisee) who, in the parable, stood in the temple, while the Publican prostrated himself in a corner, begging God in words of true humility: "God be merciful to me a sinner."

When Francis' acts of "humility" are compared with St Seraphim's thousand day struggle on the rock, a stark contrast results. There, while in battle with his passions, [29] St Seraphim cried out the very words of the Publican over and over again: "O God be merciful to me a sinner." In this feat there is neither exaltation, nor ostentatious display. Saint Seraphim is simply having recourse to the only possible means open to him for forgiveness after, *a. recognition of his passions; b. a contrition welling forth from his remorse over his spiritual*

condition; c. a need to overcome the passions; d. his awareness of his inability and unworthiness to accomplish this alone and; e. his long and arduous appeal to God for mercy.

Even during his last years, when Saint Seraphim experienced many perceptions of extra-ordinary spiritual strength, as well as direct communion with God, he never succumbed to self-satisfaction, or self-adulation. This is quite apparent in his now famous conversation with N. Motovilov,[30] as well as during his talk with the monk John when he manifested, through the Grace of God, an unusual luminosity. Indeed, Saint Seraphim was unable to express the state of the latter luminosity in his own words. Also, it is well known that Saint Seraphim was the bearer of an extraordinary gift of clairvoyance as well as of prophetic vision. The hearts of people who came to him were an open book to him, yet not once does he compromise the extraordinary gifts he has received with any display of self-importance or conceit. His statements and acts (in contrast -to those of Francis of Assisi- Francis' consciousness was that he had atoned for his sins and was pleasing to God) are in consonance with what the ascetics detail in the *Philokalia*, about the humble man. In the words of St Isaac the Syrian:

The truly righteous always think within themselves that they are unworthy of God. And that they are truly righteous is recognized from the fact that they acknowledge themselves to be wretched and unworthy of God's concern and confess this secretly and openly and are brought to this by the Holy Spirit so that they will not remain without the solicitude and labour which is appropriate for them while they are in this life. [31]

Francis' emotional impulses toward humility, similar to the above mentioned incident in the square of Assisi, were in general rare manifestations. Usually his humility appeared not as a feeling, but as a rational recognition of his weak powers in comparison to the Divine Power of Christ. This was clearly stated in his vision on Monte La Verna when, "two great lights," as it says in the chronicle, "appeared before Francis: one in which he recognized the Creator, and the other in which he recognized himself. And at that moment, seeing this, he prayed: Lord! What am I before You? What meaning have I, an insignificant worm of the earth, Your insignificant servant, in comparison to Your strength?" By his own acknowledgement,

Francis, at that moment, was submerged in contemplation in which he saw the endless depth of the Divine Mercy and the abyss of his own nothingness.

Needless to point out, it is the first declaration of the "two great lights," that manifestly bares the cognitive character of his subsequent query addressed to God which, in essence, is a very daring process of comparison. There appears, therefore, a severe contradiction in the passage that cannot be compared in any sense to the lucid scriptural or patristic accounts regarding humility.

St Seraphim's humility, as noted, was not so much a rational consciousness of his sins, but a constant deeply felt emotion. In his teachings, both oral and written, nowhere does it say that he compared himself to the Divinity, drawing conclusions from this regarding his spiritual status. He constantly gave himself up only to a single emotional impulse: the feeling of his own unworthiness (imperfection) which resulted in heartfelt contrition. Theophan the Recluse, a Russian ascetic of the Orthodox Church, expressed the sense of this thus: "The Lord accepts only the man who approaches Him with a feeling of sinfulness. Therefore, he rejects anyone who approaches Him with a feeling of righteousness." [32]

If, as a result of the above, one were to draw a conclusion about Francis' humility on the basis of the ascetic prescriptions for monastics regarding humility in the *Philokalia*, then the Latin mystic does not appear as the ideal of Christian humility. A substantial dose of his own righteousness was added to his consciousness that he was pleasing to God. Something similar, from an Orthodox analysis of Francis' mysticism, may be applied from Lev Tolstoy's story *Father Serge*: "He [the ascetic Serge] thought," says Tolstoy, "about how he was a burning lamp, and the more he felt this, the more he felt a weakening, a quenching of the spiritual light of truth burning in him." [33]

Recalling St Nilos' warning, mentioned before, this sad evaluation of the spiritual results of Francis' asceticism is corollary, or more to the point, is an antecedent plani to the severe beguilement he underwent on Monte La Verna, where he announced that he had become a great luminary.

Thus, Francis' consciousness that he also was "a light," that he had the gift to know how to be pleasing to God, meets with the dour pronouncement of the father of the ascetic life, Antony the Great, who states that if there is not extreme humility in a person, humility of the whole heart, soul and body, then he will not inherit the Kingdom of God. [34] St Antony's affirmation recognizes that only deep humility can root out the evil mental power leading to self-affirmation and self-satisfaction. Only such humility entering into the very flesh and blood of the ascetic can, according to the sense of the teaching of the Orthodox Christian ascetics, save him from the obsessive associations of prideful human thought.

Humility is the essential power which can restrain the lower mind with its mental passions, [35] creating in a man's soul the soil for the unhindered development of the higher mind, [36] and from there, through the Grace of God, to the highest level of the ascetic life—knowledge of God.

"The man wise in humility," says St Isaac the Syrian, "is the source of the mysteries of the new age." [37]

CONCLUSION

The chief cause which obfuscated the path of Francis' ascetic life may be attributed to the fundamental condition of the Roman Catholic Church in which Francis was nurtured and trained. In the conditions of that time and in the conditions of the Roman Church itself, true humility could not be formed in the consciousness of the people. The "Vicar of Christ on earth" himself with his pretensions not only to spiritual, but also to temporal authority, was a representative of spiritual pride. Spiritual pride greater than the conviction of one's own infallibility cannot be imagined. [38] This basic flaw could not but affect Francis' spirituality, as well as the spirituality of Roman Catholics in general. Like the Pope, therefore, Francis suffered from spiritual pride. This is very evident in his farewell address to the Franciscans when he said: "Now God is calling me, and I forgive all my brethren, both those present and those absent, their offenses and their errors and remit their sins as far as it is in my power." [39]

These words reveal that on his death bed, Francis felt himself to be powerful enough to remit sins like the Pope. It is known that the

remission of sins outside the Sacrament of Penance and the Eucharist in the Roman Church was a prerogative of papal power. [40] Francis' assumption of this prerogative could only have been with the assurance of his own sanctity.

In contrast, the ascetics of Holy Orthodoxy never allowed themselves to appropriate the right of remitting sins. They all died in the consciousness of their own imperfection and with the hope that God in His Mercy would forgive them of their sins. It suffices to recall the words of the great fifth century Thebaid ascetic Saint Sisoie in support of this. Surrounded at the moment of his impending repose, by his brethren, he appeared to be conversing with unseen persons, as the chronicle relates, and the brethren asked: "Father, tell us with whom you are carrying on a conversation?" St Sisoie answered, "They are angels who have come to take me, but I am praying them to leave me for a short time so that I may repent." When the brethren, knowing that Sisoie was perfect in virtue, responded, "You have no need of repentance, father," the Saint answered, "Truly I do not know if I have even begun to repent." [41]

Finally, as evidenced in the preceding paragraphs, the mysticism of Francis of Assisi reveals that this highly regarded founder of the Franciscan Order moved progressively in his life in a growing condition of *plani* from the time he heard the command to renew the Roman Catholic Church, through the extraordinary vision of the Crucified Christ on Monte La Verna and until the time of his death. As startling as it may appear to some, he bore many characteristics which are prototypical of Antichrist, who will also be seen as chaste, virtuous, highly moral, full of love and compassion, and who will be regarded as holy (even as a deity) by people who have allowed carnal romanticism to replace the Sacred Tradition of the Holy Church.

The sad fact is that the attainment of a true spiritual relationship with Christ was never a possibility for Francis, for being outside the Church of Christ, it was impossible that he could have received Divine Grace, or any of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. His gifts were from another spirit.

Endnotes

1. Guerier, V., *Francis*, pp 312-313.

2. Seventeen year old Luisa Lato, usually enjoying complete good health, fell into a condition of ecstasy every Friday; blood flowed from her left side, and on her hands and feet were wounds exactly corresponding to the position of the wounds on the body of the crucified Saviour, in the form of the wounds depicted on crucifixes.

3. Guerier, pp 314-315.

4. *Ibid.*, p 308.

5. Dumas, G., "La Stigmatisation chez les mystiques cretiens," *Revue des deux Mondes*, 1 May 1907; in Guerier, pp 315-317.

6. Guerier, p 315.

7. According to the Orthodox, the Cross was not a *necessity* imposed on God, nor was the *blood* of the Only-begotten Son a source of satisfaction to God the Father, as the Latin Scholastics teach. The matter of "satisfying the Divine Justice of God" is a phrase nowhere to be found in the Scriptures, nor in the writings of the Church Fathers, but was a fabrication of Anselm of Canterbury (ca 1100) which was developed by Thomas Aquinas to become the official soteriological doctrine in the Latin West. (compare this with Athanasius the Great, *The Incarnation of the Word of God*).

8. It will be evident from the comparison in this paper that "mysticism" in the Orthodox Church is beyond all sensory as well as all rational categories. The normative for this in the ascetic life is dispassion, or detachment from all needs, feelings and even, ultimately, thoughts, positive or negative (compare, Abba Evagrius to Anatolios, cited above, p 9).

9. See the life of St Isaaky the Recluse of the Kiev-Caves, *God's Fools*. Synaxis Press, Chilliwack, B.C., Canada, 1976, p 21.

10. *Hyperconsciousness*, p 292-293, 2nd ed.

11. Kadloubovsky, E. and Palmer, G., *Early Fathers from the Philokalia*, "St Isaac of Syria, Directions on Spiritual Training," Faber and Faber, London, 1959. (hereafter referred to as *Early Fathers*).

12. *Early Fathers*, p 140, paragraphs 114, 115, 116.
13. *Saint Seraphim of Sarov*, pp 61-62 (Rus. ed.), cited in the notes translated from the Russian, see above.
14. *Philokalia*, Vol 3, p 322, para 103 (Greek ed.).
15. *Early Fathers*, p 297, 47.
16. *Op. cit.*, p 105, para 71.
17. *Works of St. Isaac the Syrian*, 3rd ed., Sermon 8, p 37.
18. *Philokalia*, Vol 2, p 467, para 49. Here we must note that the quoted dictum of St Isaac the Syrian—that a spiritual vision is unexpected—should not be understood as an absolute law for all instances of such visions. By way of an exception to the cited dictum, but as completely exceptional phenomena, certain holy ascetics have had such unusual visions which were anticipated by them; but they had a presentiment as an unconscious prophecy, as a prophecy about what unavoidably must happen. Such an exceptional instance, as it were, a prophecy of a miracle which was going to happen, occurred with St Serge of Radonezh at the end of his life. This instance is described in detail in the Russian work, *Hyperconsciousness*, p 377. (The bibliography was not available to the author. It was cited in the notes translated from the Russian, see above.)
19. See footnote 13, Ch 1, pp 13-22.
20. "Go by two's to various regions of the earth, preaching peace to people and repentance for the remission of sins." Guerier, p 27 (cf Mk.6:7-12.)
21. Guerier, p 115.
22. Khrapovitsky, Antony, *Confession: A Series of Lectures on the Mystery of Repentance*. Holy Trinity Monastery Press, Jordanville, N.Y., 1975.
23. Guerier, p 127 (our emphasis).

24. *Op. cit.*, p 129.
25. *Op. cit.*, pp 103-104.
26. Brown, Raphael, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*. Image Books, Garden City, N.Y., 1958, p 60.
27. *Ibid.*, p 63.
28. Guerier, p 124.
29. The word passions, as used here, denotes all the contranatural impulses of man (pride, vanity, envy, hatred, greed, jealousy, etc.) that resulted after the disobedience and fall of the forefathers.
30. Motovilov, N.A., *A Conversation of St. Seraphim*. St Nectarios Press, Seattle, 1973 (reprint).
31. *Works of St. Isaac the Syrian*, 3rd ed., Sermon 36, p 155.
32. *Collected Letters of Bishop Theophan*, 2nd part, Letter 261, p 103.
33. *Posthumus Artistic Works of L. Tolstoy*, Vol 2, p 30.
34. *Philokalia*, Vol 1, p 33.
35. *Hyperconsciousness, On Mental Passions*, 2nd ed., pp 65-74.
36. See above, *On the Lower and Higher Minds*, pp 6-23.
37. *Works of St. Isaac the Syrian*, p 37.
38. Compare Dostoevsky, *The Grand Inquisitor* in *The Brothers Karamazov*.
39. Sabbatier, p 352.
40. In the 15th century, Luther protested against this prerogative as expressed in the practice of granting indulgences.

41. *Lives of Saints*, Book 11, pp 119-120.

From Chapter 4 of *Light Invisible: Satisfying the Thirst for Happiness*, by
M. V. Lodyzhenskii.

St. Seraphim, our Orthodox Saint, answered the workman. Then she understood the meaning of the words of Francis about the truth being in the Orthodox Church. (St. Seraphim of Sarov: A Spiritual Biography by Archimandrite Lazarus Moore). Filed Under: All, Heterodoxy, Holy Fathers, Intercession of Saints, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, St. Seraphim of Sarov 1759-1833. Speak Your Mind Cancel reply. Seraphim of Sarov St Seraphim of Sarov 7/27/2019 A Comparison Francis. Studying the biographical data of Francis of Assisi, a fact of the utmost interest concerning the mysticism of this Roman Catholic ascetic is the appearance of stigmata on his person. Roman Catholics regard such a striking manifestation as the seal of the Holy Spirit. In Francis' case, these stigmata took on the form of the marks of Christ's passion on his body. The stigmatisation of Francis is not an exceptional phenomenon among ascetics of the Roman Catholic world. Stigmatisation appears to be characteristic of Roman Catholic mysticism in general, both before it happened to Francis, as St. Seraphim of Sarov taught everyone the following rule of prayer: "Let any Christian, upon arising from sleep stand before the holy icons, and read the Lord's Prayer "Our Father" thrice, in honor of the Most-holy Trinity, then the hymn to the Theotokos "O Theotokos and Virgin, rejoice" three times as well, and finally, the Symbol of Our Faith once." To those who for whatever reason could not complete this little rule, Venerable St. Seraphim recommended reading it under whatever circumstance: during lessons, while walking, and even in bed. He based this advice on the words of the Scriptures "whosoever should call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved".