

[Serbian Conversations, Part 2](#)

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At long last, I present the second interview with Fr. Daniel Sysoyev and Yuri Maximov which they gave in Serbia.

“O Lord, open Thou my lips and my mouth shall declare Thy praise”

Stanoje Stankovic: The first question: What do you think about missions in the world, that is, in Africa, in Russia, in Serbia, and in the Balkans?

Father Daniel: I think that the Lord has now created such a situation that almost the whole world is open for Orthodox missions. Truly, such was not the case 20 years ago. And regarding globalization-this is an act of God in order that the Gospel makes it to the ends of the world, so that the undistorted preaching of the Holy Apostles could reach every people of the earth. If we, Christians, do not use this chance then the Lord will demand an answer from us for the fact that we did not convert people to the light of Orthodoxy. Regarding missions, they are beginning to be revived. We know that there are active missions in the Russian Church and the Greek Church; the Orthodox Church of Alexandria actively preaches. Yuri Valeryevich can talk about that in more detail, and I will speak about Russia.

In Russia there are two types of missions: internal missions targeted at nominal Orthodox, more correctly called catechism, and missions targeted at those outside the Church. Unfortunately, external missions are less active, but it is also starting to intensify right now. Yuri Valeryevich and I, having studied the experience of a number of missionaries, came to the conclusion that it was necessary to create a missionary movement and we did that in the creation of the missionary movement of the Holy Prophet Daniel, where the a program based on the general experience of the Russian Orthodox Church, in a sense, exists. We have courses, over the course of a year, for training Orthodox missionaries which train people to preach on the streets, among sects, among those of other religions, as well as among average nominal Orthodox.

How is this done? People are invited to talk about God; those who have for a long time not been to church, and those who have never been there are invited; people are invited to confession and communion; the unbaptized are offered baptism. At the same time, our missionaries hand out special leaflets in which is explained why one should cross themselves, go to confession, and go to communion and the address of a church is given-this is very important, so that there is a place to send them.

Further is the second stage: catechism. There are a few systems of catechism in use. In my church there is a system of five talks: on God, on the creation of the world, on Christ, on the Holy Mysteries, and on the Law of God. Each talk is two-and-a-half hours long, and during those talks the person is prepared for baptism or reconciliation to the Church if it is a sectarian. They will

also read the four Gospels and Acts and then be solemnly joined to the Church. We usually have baptisms at a baptismal liturgy.

Then, after baptism, is the second step: people enter into the life of the Church, studying Holy Scripture. For this we have permanent classes on studying the Bible. Every week, in our church and in a few other churches in Moscow, we study the holy Word of God in detail. This is very important as, for many Protestants, one of the reasons why they are not in the Orthodox Church is that the Holy Scripture is not studied. I think that we, having such rich interpretation of the Bible from the Holy Fathers, must use it.

Also very helpful are missions in the hospitals. For example, in Moscow almost all hospitals are under the care of a priest who are helped by “needs” sisters, that is, those people who help prepare a person for their first confession. This is truly a great work that needs to be enlivened. There is the same type of experience in a few other dioceses. As far as the Russian Church as a whole, there are regions where missions are active, where they are very successful but there are regions where, on the other hand, priests are afraid to preach because of the fact that, for example, Islam is very active. So there are different situations in different regions. It is, of course, very important that not only priests participate in missions but also lay people. The experience of the Russian Orthodox Church shows that lay missions are one of the most successful. For this, of course, lay people must be prepared and act under the supervision of priests but preach themselves.

It is very significant that there already is a prepared program for lay people for studying the Holy Gospel, according to which “Gospel circles” are organized, where lay people begin to study the Gospel on the foundation of the Holy Fathers. Such circles are already active. There were a few unsuccessful experiences in that sphere but there is now quite successful experience. I saw a lay group near Ulianovsk in which everything is studied on the foundation of the Holy Fathers and it works well, spiritually helping young people, though not only young people. We often talk about missions among young people, but we must not forget that missions must be among all layers of our society. The Gospel must be preached for all: for adults, for the elderly, and for children.

And, by the way, my personal experience of preaching in Kyrgyzstan showed that one of the best programs is when you invite Protestants or occultists and their faith is not even criticized but you just tell them about Orthodox Christianity as it is, as the Holy Fathers taught, as the Lord Himself taught through the Holy Apostles. Then people begin to change because the holy Word of God itself changes a person. This is very important. As far as missions in the Russian Church...they are well organized. Relatively well. We would like it to be much better but at least something is being done, some kind of missions. In Moscow and generally in central Russia in many districts, missions work is organized well. However, it goes without saying that it could be improved. Missions are well organized in the Kemerovo Diocese and in Siberia where Fr. Igor Kropochev and other priests of the missionary department are actively involved in missions among the local peoples, in particular, the *Shortsi*. There are regions, such as Central Asia, where missions are almost completely absent. However, there are active people in Kazakhstan and I have a hope that soon Kazakhstan will be completely enveloped by Orthodox missions. As far as the Far East is concerned, Patriarch Kirill has very fixed attention on it and, therefore, in a number of dioceses, particularly in the Sakhalin, Khabarovsk, Primorye, and Kamchatka dioceses, there is missionary

activity, and in the Chukotka Diocese it is starting. Missions in Yakutia are very active. Sizes are very big there. Yakutia is like all of Europe in size and there are very few priests.

As far as the territory of the Russian Church beyond the borders of the CIS, missions are very difficult in China, of course. Father Dionisii Poznyaev and a few other priests do all that they are able but, unfortunately, due to Chinese law, but more so due to the lack of lay missionaries, who could preach to the Chinese, missions are very difficult there. Although work is being done, a large number of translations into Chinese are being made, people are doing what can in reality be done at the moment. In Japan, under the new primacy of Vladyka Daniel, missions are intensifying, thanks to his enthusiasm. In Ukraine, things are much worse. There, due to the schism as well as the abundance of Uniates, Orthodox missions have practically stopped and the Protestants have enormous success. For example, the mayor of Kiev is a Pentecostal. And in the Crimea the influence of Islam is increasing. Unfortunately, due to schisms, many people in Ukraine have fallen away from the Church. There are currently talks about the fact that it is necessary to intensify missions but, to great regret, it turns out that missions often comes off as some sort of nationalism instead of remembering that we are, in fact, Christians, which is higher than any nationality. As a matter of fact, missions connected to nationalism does not work at all; experience has shown this.

Yes, you can interpret patriotism from an Orthodox point of view, and there have been such attempts, for example St. Nikolaj of Serbia said that a true Serb is one who imitates Serbian saints in their pleasing of Christ. We can put it this way and such words will be meaningful to Serbs but not to Croatians, Hungarians, Albanians, etc. For us, for example, one of the problems of preaching Orthodoxy to Tatars is the fact that they often think that by accepting Orthodoxy they must renounce being Tatar, but this is not so. The true Christian understands that they do not change their ethnicity but become above that ethnicity and that which is was the best in their ethnicity they take with them, and that, by being baptized, they become particularly a Christian and not a Russian, Serb, or Greek. This is very important to understand.

Another thing that hinders missions right now is that we have a delayed response to challenges. Many new attacks on Christianity have now appeared: The Da Vinci Code, the Gospel of Judas, and many lies directed against Christ. These are lies which are spread out across the whole world, including, as I know, in Serbia.

We can, refuting them, use Orthodox apologetic works which have been published in the West and even non-Orthodox works; what is most important, of course, is to be able ourselves to respond to these attacks, and to be able to do it quickly. It is very important not to delay. For example, when the Da Vinci Code is released there must already be a response ready. And it is important not just to answer by printing a book and putting it on sale. An informational uproar must be made, for which we must use the internet, including blogs and social networks. An Orthodox answer must be presented as an informational event. For the modern consciousness, which is fully encompassed by information, it is very important to make informational booms. You can't say that this is missions but it is something that leads to missions. For secular people now, it is very important to be able to interest them, to catch their attention, and then move on to a regular, in-depth, unhurried study of Orthodoxy. That is my view on what is going on.

Yuri Maximov: To what Fr. Daniel said I would like to add that truly, even when we write a

response to those attacks, even if it is a good response, we have a problem in how to reach the common reader. Let's say that a thousand people watched the Da Vinci Code film and our response to the film was read by one person of that thousand. These are two incomparable things. Nine-hundred-ninety-nine people were left with only the film; they did not hear our response. We need to work a lot so that our voice is heard.

Stanoje Stankovic: In Russia there are Orthodox TV channels and radio stations. In Serbia there are one or two programs on radio and they often have things that have no connection to Orthodoxy.

Yuri Maximov: Yes, we have the same problems. I'm not saying that what we are now discussing is easy to do. It is not easy but it must be done; we must reflect a lot and try to find a solution. The Lord will help. Concerning missions as a whole, you know, some people think that missions is like some kind of hobby. Someone collects stamps, someone grows rare flowers, and someone is engaged in missions—they express themselves in that way. But this is not right. Missions are a virtue, a fulfillment of the commandment of Christ. The Lord said, *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost* (Matt. 28:19). This is a command that we must fulfill and also one which, unfortunately, Orthodox do not want to fulfill. And what happens when we do not want to fulfill the commandments? Well, nothing good. Until the beginning of the previous century, the overwhelming majority of Orthodox did not want to go anywhere and preach; and what happened in the 20th century? Such suffering befell all local Orthodox Churches, Russian, Serbian, Greek, Romanian, Bulgarian, Georgian, and Arab, without exception that people had to flee their home into foreign lands and there build churches, translate Orthodox literature into the local languages, etc. In such a way the 20th century became a century of the spreading of Orthodoxy across the planet. Those Orthodox who did not want to go to other lands in order to preach were driven out by the Lord Himself. He scattered them all across the world. And, like it or not, they were forced to do something so that the local people would come and become Orthodox. The opponents of missions should think about this and what misfortune they bring upon their own heads as well as their children with their stiff-necked and firm resistance to fulfill the will of God.

From the lips of such people you hear talk as though it is impossible to convert another person to Orthodoxy; for example, it is impossible that a Muslim would become Orthodox. But if you ask them, "But have you tried to do that?" They admit that they have not. Those who say that it is impossible have never tried it. They say it, as a matter of fact, so as not even to try.

Stanoje Stankovic: What is most important in missions? Some say that we need to go and preach at stadiums or discotheques while others say that prayer is more important, remembering the words of St. Seraphim of Sarov, "acquire the spirit of peace and thousands around you will be saved." So what do we need for missions to be successful? Maybe for a person to first make oneself a good Christian and then their own life will be a witness? I read somewhere that these are two different approaches to missions, so which of them is more successful?

Yuri Maximov: It seems to me that such a division takes place, to a large extent, in the minds of those people that are practically not involved in missions but only reflect on it theoretically. Only theoretically can one think that I will first become a good Christian and then go and talk to others. In order to become a good Christian one must fulfill the commandments of Christ and one

of those is to go and teach. So how can you become a good Christian if you are not a missionary? If you have fulfilled all the commandments except one, how can you say that you have become a good Christian, if you have disdained a commandment of Christ? The Lord gave you commandments not so that you would write them down, hang them on the wall, and forget about it but so that you would live according to them. A person who loves God is involved in missions. Surely the Apostles weren't imperfect Christians? Surely they acquired the spirit of peace?

Now on your first question on what is most important for missions. For a missionary, important are prayer and hope only in God, not in your own strength, not in yourself, not in your friends, not in your sponsors but only in God. Prayer to God and love for Christ and the person to whom you are preaching are important for a missionary, as well as resolution to deny yourself. What prevents us from going and preaching to our friend? We don't have to go to the discotheque or stadium; for example, we have a neighbor or a colleague at work. It happens that we live next to our neighbors knowing that they are Catholic or Protestant, we've known them for ten years, we greet them, greet them at holidays but not once have we asked them, "My friend, why are you not Orthodox? Do you want me to tell you about Orthodoxy?" We say no such word. Why? Maybe because we want to acquire the spirit of peace in ourselves? But not at all, it is because we are afraid to trust in God and think, "What if I tell him 'Do you want to know something about Orthodoxy?'" and he gets offended and says, "No, I don't want know; I'm not going to talk with you." This is what is inside many opponents of missions: lack of faith and fear.

These are people that don't think about God. A person that trusts God dedicates everything to Him. He says, "Though people trample on me, though they stone me I will glorify and preach the Name of Christ." Such were the Apostles; they were not the type of people who are afraid of missions, people that justify their fear with objections against missions-such fearful people do not have the joy of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. This is so because when you have gifts of the Holy Spirit you are overflowing with such a joy that you want to share it. It is that candle which, as the Lord said, no one places under a vessel but holds in the open so that it would light up for everyone. One wants to say, "My friend, look at what happiness I have. Let me tell you about it." This is what inspires missionaries. But if a person doesn't want to share this what can be said about their spiritual state?

Christ has given us salvation; it is not from us-we received it as a gift. Without Him we would die. God gave us this gift not only for us but for those near us, so that we would go to other perishing people and share it with those who want salvation. And when we share that salvation with them we display love to them and become like God Who is love. Where is our love if for ten years we have been greeting our neighbor and smiling but have not told them one word about God? We go into our house, and think that since icons hang on the walls and we have Orthodox books that we are Orthodox, but this isn't Orthodoxy.

And that very same St. Seraphim of Sarov preached to Old Believer schismatics when they came to him, saying, "I beg and plead with you: go to the Greco-Russian Church, it is in all the glory and power of God! It is as a ship, having many riggings, sails, and a great helm and is directed by the Holy Spirit." He called them to the Orthodox Church. And he convinced a woman who came to him from the Old Believers so that she and all her relations came into the Church. What is this if not missions?

Father Daniel told me another great example not long ago. Saint Symeon the Stylite was a great missionary: he didn't go anywhere and lived on his pillar but he pleased God so much that the Lord glorified him and many pagans came to him and said, "Pray so that God would heal us." And they bothered him very much with their pleas. He sought quiet and solitude but it happened that the cries of people surrounded him. Then he said, "Ok, come and I will pray for you, but when God heals you be baptized." They agreed and those being baptized were so many that the Church sent a bishop who lived next to the pillar and baptized people. Father Daniel has just come from a trip during which he saw that pillar and the remains of the church.

Father Daniel: At the time of St. Symeon there was a huge church around his pillar and inside was a special font for adults and children; it was like "conveyor belt" baptism.

Yuri Maximov: From this is it obvious that even a great hermit had a true missionary mindset and he was ready to reject that which he would have liked for the sake of fulfilling the commandment of God. The examples of such saints shows that the above mentioned division between spiritual life and missions is false. If we truly fulfill the commandment of God then this will not be the case. They are both interconnected. Orthodox missions is impossible without a serious spiritual life, and there will be no true spiritual life without the preaching of the Gospel.

Father Daniel: I would like to add another reason why people often do not want to be involved in missions. The thing is that the Bible makes a clear distinction: there are spheres of light and spheres of darkness, there is a place for the elected of God, the Church of God-the region of the saved, as it says in the canon-and a place where the devil acts, where there are people under the power of the prince of darkness, who after death inevitably end up in hell. So, in our consciousness that boundary is blurred. There are such people that say, "Outside of the Church there is no salvation," who also say, "But outside the Church there are good people." And this, for the most part, is the reason why they do not evangelize. They think that one can be saved by one's own works, but this is impossible, it is the heresy of Pelagius. If one can be saved without the Church then Christ died in vain. And that feeling of a possibility of salvation without Christ kills missions. For I cannot calmly sit by and say nothing of Christ if I know that my non-Orthodox neighbor is guaranteed to end up in hell, that people outside the Church are perishing. People who are sliding into hell know this themselves; no one has told them this, they feel it themselves: they have depression and consuming passions, their consciences prick them, they are tormented with life, they are unhappy, and they languish in false hopes and have true sorrow. These people seek an escape and we say to them, "Don't worry, be a good person and everything will be ok." This is a lie. Namely this lie, the absence of the sense of the chosenness of a Christian, gives birth to the reluctance for missionary work. We are chosen; God chose us not so that we would pridefully strut and say that we are so good but in order to carry the light of God, to exclaim, "Join us on the boat." You know there is a well-known anti-ecumenical picture: Christ navigating a ship which is being attacked on every side; this is true but the ship must rescue all those who are swimming in the water. But we do not even want to throw out nets. Further, sometimes those who attach themselves to the ship are pushed away. This is, of course, contrary to the Gospel.

I think that if we look at the Gospel and remember the Beatitudes we will see that many of them require missions.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy (Matt. 5:7). What is superior mercy? Not to give money but to give eternal life. A beggar will spend the money after a few days but eternal life will be theirs forever.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God (Matt. 5:9). What can be higher than when someone makes peace between a person and God? People fight against God and you, missionary, carry out Christ's service, you are sent by the Lord Christ Himself and will receive His reward, as a son of God, says the Lord. Isn't it so? But people say, "How can I be a missionary? They will persecute me." Of course they will, for it is written, *Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in Heaven* (Matt. 5:11-12). The reward is huge in Heaven. But people have forgotten about the heavenly reward, forgotten that we live here in order to receive a reward there. We are too attached to the earth. You read the Orthodox press and what do they talk about? They talk about politics, about how to make things comfortable here, about how to create good relationships. But, forgive me, we for sure will be departing from here. Maybe we will depart today. We are all in the hands of God. Death is not over the mountains but over the shoulder as we say in Russia. People have forgotten this and don't want to think about the fact that they need to prepare for eternity.

Furthermore, some people say, "To prepare for eternity is egoism." But what did Christ say? He did not say, "Do not lay up treasure at all." He said to lay up treasure in heaven where there are no thieves, rust, or moths. For where your treasure is there will your heart be. But people have forgotten about this; people lay up treasure on earth, live for the earth, and use God as a secondary power. As Pushkin wrote in the tale of the golden fish: the fish was at beck and call. Just the same way do people try to use God. Naturally, such a person will not preach if he even thinks of God as a tool for himself. This is all false and I suspect that such a person in actuality is not a Christian.

But the true Christianity is having pity for the perishing people. Fear to be punished by the Lord for burying one's talent and desire to receive great reward in heaven—these are what must move a missionary. We should walk with God as the Lord said of Enoch, *Enoch walked with God and... God took him* (Gen. 5:24). Just that walking with God is the root of missions. In such a case you can see that both prayer and missions is, generally, the same thing. When I go out to preach, I kiss my priestly-pectoral cross and say, *Lord, open Thou my lips and my mouth shall declare Thy praise* (Ps. 50:17). I know that as soon as I depend upon myself the missions fail but as soon as I depend upon God it picks back up. For I am a servant of Christ, and any person can become a servant of Christ. Anyone can receive a reward and more than just that. The council of the Russian Orthodox Church adopted a missionary concept, and in it are some very important words. It says that missions of the Church is a continuation of the mission which Christ sent. Christ is the first Apostle, and the Word of Christ continues in us. In us, the Son of God Himself preaches. We are moved by the Holy Spirit Himself. Furthermore, do you know that God the Father is carrying out great espionage work? As the Lord says, *for the Father seeketh such to worship Him* (John 4:23). He seeks those people on earth who are ready to worship Him. And do you know through whom He seeks them? Through missionaries. He sends missionaries to find those people. Imagine what God the Father will say to us if we refuse? Of course the Lord will send others. He is compassionate, He will send others, but what will we have to answer for? The

Lord will say, "A person was perishing here and you passed by. You refused to carry out My Word." How will we stand before Him then? We will say, "Yes, Lord, but we prayed to you so well." The Lord will say, "What does 'we prayed' mean? A person perished. Why did you disobey my direct Word? He asked for bread and you gave him a stone; you turned your back on him." Rejection of missions is also disregard for the Judgment of God-disregard for the fact that we will answer for every one of our actions. It is disregard of the fact that even in secular law there is an understanding of "criminal omission," the lack of rendering help to the perishing. This also relates to the spiritual law. The lack of rendering spiritual help-is this not a crime?

By my own experience, I can say that when you preach you are on the very edge. The Lord reminds you that you are walking before Him and if you want to fall into sin, you immediately get hit in the head-the Lord does not allow you to fall. But even if you have fallen, the Lord will pick you up and not let you become trapped in sin because, truly, He will remind you through His Word which you are saying.

What does a missionary need to do first of all? The Lord commanded us, *ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth* (Acts 1:8). Therefore, it is our business to be witnesses of Christ, which means to exclusively preach the Holy Gospel-not to preach Russianness, Serbness, Americanness, or whatever but to only preach the Lord Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Speaking in such a way you will be judging yourself. Just imagine, you say "don't fornicate" yet you yourself fornicate. The problems begin. You preach not to curse but you yourself curse. The very same problem. The Word of God starts to judge you when you preach. St. Gregory of Nyssa said so well that, "If you want to anoint someone with fragrant chrism, pour chrism on your own hand then on him. Who do you anoint first? You anoint yourself."

And so, the Gospel for a missionary is a living book. It is not a text from which to extract quotes for theological papers. It is particularly the living book about which you always need to talk and by which you must live. A huge mistake made by missionaries is to try and dilute the Gospel. There is a passage in the Second Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians which says the following in Slavonic, "we are not as many, which corrupt [*korchemstvovati*] the word of God" [2 Cor 2:17]. *Korchemstvo* is from the word *korchma*, that is, a tavern. What do bad vendors do at a tavern? They take wine and add water, but so that it's not noticeable they add some coloring. Wine in and of itself is healing and good for one's health but when it has been diluted with water it loses its benefit, and the added poison may even harm. Incorrect missionaries do just the same. They say, "Well, people today won't understand the direct Word of God." Just a few days ago I was told, "Fr. Daniel, in vain do you preach so straightforwardly; it is not interesting for them to hear about Christ." And, therefore, let's add a little from ourselves. Let's dilute the Word of God and make it more contemporary, more understandable, and more tolerant. However, it seems to me that, in actuality, particularly about Him [Christ] it is interesting. Politics are not interesting. And sports are not interesting. But Christ is interesting.

Yuri Maximov: I would like to add something. It is very important to understand what Fr. Daniel is talking about. Some people, speaking about missions theoretically, think that Orthodoxy has to be changed in order to be successful in missions. This is false. Particularly the patristic and evangelical preaching of Orthodoxy, not distorted, modernistic Orthodoxy, but traditional,

healthy Orthodoxy, which we received from the Apostles themselves through the Holy Fathers, this exactly what can affect people. But modernistic “Orthodoxy” cannot attract anyone and modernistic missionaries, as a rule, are not successful. This is because modernism says, generally speaking, “believe as you please and live the way you want; it is most important to be a good person, then everything will be alright.” But such preaching may only attract those who need something comfortable and not those who need truth. If a person who needs truth hears the preaching of modernistic pseudo-Orthodoxy, he will say, “But I can still be a good person without that, why should I become Orthodox?” Modernists cannot essentially answer that question because their missions fail. And they think that missions in general fail and that people are not really interested in knowing the truth about God. But this is not true. People aren’t interested in hearing them speak because there is no power or truth in their words. But the Word of the Gospel, the word of the Holy Fathers that is true theology is interesting to hear even to simple people without a theological education.

Saint Theophan the Recluse said the following about this phenomenon, “The twelve Apostles went out and converted such a multitude of people, why? How were they able to do that? Because they did not proclaim their own philosophizing but the Truth of God. And in every person is a conscience which distinguishes truth from falsehood.” And so, when we tell another person our fantasies, he simply listens while nothing responds inside of him. He thinks, “Yes, he has thought up something interesting. Well, I’ve heard it and that’s enough.” But when we speak to him the Word of God, his conscience within him responds. It witnesses to him from the inside, “that which they are saying to you is the truth.” At this point two paths open up for him who hears the Gospel and feels within himself the action of the conscience. The first path is chosen by those who say, “I am following the Truth.” What does it mean to follow the Truth? It means to reject everything within oneself that contradicts the Truth. They say, “God is important to me, and everything sinful is unimportant. I will expel from myself all darkness-everything that prevents me from approaching God and I will go [after Him].” The second path is chosen by people who say within themselves, “No, I will remain with my sins, with my opinions, and with my philosophy.” And then their conscience begins to burn them like fire. Therefore, no one relates indifferently to Orthodox people: they are either loved or hated-particularly because such an action occurs in the conscience. We see that in the lives of the Apostles many people turned to them because truth within them echoed the words of the Apostles. But the Apostles themselves suffered at the hands of those who hated them.

Stanoje Stankovic: But there are such people who are indifferent to faith. In Elder Paisios of Mount Athos I read that indifferent people are the worst of all. One can speak to them of God and they will answer that it is not interesting to them.

Father Daniel: If someone says that God is not interesting to them, he is making his choice. God is not interesting to him means that he rejects God. It is a revolt against God. Beginning from this, the indifferent person will next come to hate you. That will be a choice for evil.

The job of a missionary is to be a witness. It is not his job to force someone to accept Orthodoxy or not. We cannot convert everyone. We can never do that. The Lord Himself didn’t convert everyone. This is because the gift of free will, which the Lord gave His creation, presupposes the possibility of a complete rejection. And, therefore, of course, we should not expect that which

God did not promise. God did not promise that we would convert everyone. God promised that we would witness to all. I think that, unfortunately, we have waited a little too long. We still have not preached the Gospel to the whole world. Presently there is such a possibility. Everyday we repeat “Thy Kingdom come” but our inaction, by the way, delays the coming of Christ. If missions had been completed then the Lord would have returned, right? As it says, this gospel shall be preached unto all nations; and then shall the end come. [Matt. 24:14]

Stanoje Stankovic: Some people refer to St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov) where he says that apostasy is allowed by God and we should not try to stop it with our feeble hands. How do the words of St. Ignatius relate to missionary work?

Yuri Maximov: This is in reference to those people who have already made their choice and when their choice is made you are not able to do anything with them. If a person doesn't want to hear about God right now and you continue to insist, he will not become Orthodox but will simply come to hate you. And you won't be able to change that. But if a person wants to know the truth, you will be able to change very much. You know, there's a parable about a man who walked along the seashore after a storm. The storm had washed very many starfish on the sand so that all of it was strewn with them. The man saw a little boy taking the starfish and throwing them back into the sea. Going by he asked the boy, “Why are you doing that?” The boy answered, “If you don't pick them up and throw them into the sea they will dry up and die.” The man objected, “Look how many starfish there are, you can't change anything, you won't manage to throw them all back.” Then the boy picked up another starfish, looked at it, threw it into the sea, and said, “Maybe I can't change something for all of them but for that one I have changed a lot.”

Father Daniel: I would add the following. This is very important for missionaries to understand. We spend too much energy in order to stop apostasy but we don't spend as much in order to save people. Indeed, trying to stop apostasy is impossible. Apostasy-revolt of man against God-is unstoppable. This is the truth. Remember that ancient Christians didn't struggle against the pagans' sin or licentiousness. Ancient Christians did not struggle even against the gladiators, they were saving the pagans. They gathered them and told them that they shouldn't worship idols but should worship the One True God. And when pagans became Christians they gave up fornication, gladiatorial games, etc. And then, when the Christians became multiplied, only after that were debauchery and the gladiatorial games outlawed. And we have turned everything upside down. We struggle with that which is impossible to overcome, while at the same time ignoring those whom we could save. This is a mistake. And St. Ignatius is completely correct when he says that we don't need to busy ourselves with that. It's not necessary to struggle with that which is impossible to change. But we can save those people who desire it. This is a very important moment. There is so much energy spent in Russia on the battle with those wretched INNs [individual tax number] and passports; if all that energy were spent on preaching Orthodoxy to Muslims then Russia would be quite different, do you understand?

Yuri Maximov: I would like to add something that our Serbian readers might not know. Saint Ignatius was a diocesan bishop in the Caucuses where very many Muslims lived, and he worked in missions. He had, as did every large diocese of the Russian Church, special diocesan missionaries who were to preach the Gospel to Muslims and other unbelievers. In Russia, until

the revolution, this was common practice, and in his letters he mentions these missionaries as well as Muslims in his diocese who were baptized thanks to miracles. Therefore, it is absurd to think that St. Ignatius spoke against missions.

Stanoje Stankovic: I would like to ask a question about the state of Orthodoxy in Russia. There are some people in Serbia who say that Orthodoxy in Russia is being revived, that churches are being built, that there are Orthodox television programs, etc. But there are also people who say that Russia is corrupted like Swiss cheese, that it has huge problems, that people are suffering from drug addictions, alcoholism, etc. Which is true?

Yuri Maximov: You could say that both of them are correct. Truly there are problems. There are many moral and religious problems in Russia. But at the same time there are examples of holiness in Russia. These things are not mutually exclusive. If we look at the history of the Church we will learn that it has always been that way: in the history of the Universal Church, that of the Russian Church, and that of the Serbian Church. When I, for example, read the letters of St. Peter of Cetinje, I read a lot about the terrible moral state at the time in Montenegro both among the Serbian priests and the simple people. As he wrote, there were very many problems. But at the same time there was a lot of holiness and he himself was a saint of the time. You know, sometimes in Russia they want to judge the spiritual state of the Church by some external factors. Allegedly, if everything is well on the outside it means that spiritually everything is well, but this has never been the case. During the time of Sts. John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, and Gregory the Theologian, as we know, there was the confusing Arian conflict and there were horrible problems in the Church.

Father Daniel: Saint Basil the Great, when he was asked, “How is the Church?” answered that it is like his body: everything hurts and there is no hope for its recovery.

Yuri Maximov: This is how it is in Russia right now. St. Nikolaj [Velimirovic] of Serbia said that the Russian soul doesn't seem to have a middle: it either walks on the heights or on the bottom of hell. Not long ago I read the very same observation by a Belgian priest who lived for a few years in Russia. He said that, on the one hand, in Russia there are people who it is frightening to walk by on the street and, on the other hand, there is such holiness like nowhere in Europe.

Stanoje Stankovic: Yes, that article was on pravoslavie.ru.

Father Daniel: I would add that this concerns not only Russia. Simply, there are two cities: the heavenly city, which is a pilgrim on the earth, and the earthly city, which is being built on the earth. This is very obvious in Russia. In Russia there are two Russia's. There is the Holy Church, which is traveling in this world.

This very distinct type is called “*tserkovnik* [church person]” in Russia and I also call them uranopolitans, heavenly citizens. That is, those people who live here on the earth but have heavenly pursuits. There are not a lot of such people but among them there are truly wonderful people who truly carry out the Holy Gospel in their lives. I think that such outward things as, for example, Orthodox tv stations or radio, are not so important but what is important is the inner shining of holiness which, in fact, makes the Church the Church as such. And there are people who have made their home on the earth, who want to live here in their pleasure, and who “take

everything from life [common advertising slogan].” Such people might even wear a cross or stop into church but they are unfamiliar to God. I won’t say forever, though. There is still hope for them and the Lord also visits them with both financial crises and swine flu. God visits everyone in a different way and among them there are many who repent. By the way, it is interesting that this division is not in any way connected with financial position. There are righteous rich people and impious poor people.

Blessed Augustine said long ago that, “People belong to the traveling city when they love God to the contempt of the earth and themselves. And people belong to the earthly city when they love themselves to the hatred of God.” [City of God, Ch. 28?] This division is very distinct and in Russia it is very visible. One could say that they both are right particularly because it [Russia] is two lands. By the way, I think it’s the same in Serbia.

Stanoje Stankovic: The next question is about modern temptations that we have. In Serbia, they have started to introduce biometric passports and there is a temptation among people in the Church that think that if someone accepts a new passport they are denying Christ and accepting the mark of the Antichrist.

Yuri Maximov: This is demonic delusion and one of the traditional traps of the devil. This is easy to see through the history of Russia. Not long ago when they changed Soviet passports for Russian passports people said that those who accept Russian passports are no longer Christian and nothing will save them; one shouldn’t accept the new passports, they are from the Antichrist, you have to keep the old, Soviet, “good” passports. However, forty some years ago when they introduced those “good” Soviet passports all across the country similar people said the very same thing-that they were from the Antichrist and one shouldn’t accept them. And furthermore, even previously, before the revolution, under the tsar there were people that said the same thing-that one shouldn’t accept the tsarist passports because they’re from the Antichrist.

Father Daniel: St. Dmitry of Rostov wrote that in the 18th century at the introduction of the first passports and first paper money there were people that alleged that it was the mark of the Antichrist.

Yuri Maximov: What is the aim of this trap? To make a person look not to Christ but at some kind of outward things: passports, cards, barcodes, and such. But one person can’t serve two masters. It ends up that one doesn’t notice if they are with Christ or not, if they carry out his commandments or not, if they keep to the faith of Christ or not but they look at whether they accepted a passport or not, if there is a barcode on the package or not. That is, people stop looking at the essence and get distracted.

Stanoje Stankovic: People that have such opinions about new passports, etc. refer to the words of elders, Elder Paisius of Mt. Athos and some others, about which I don’t know anything except what is written on the internet. What should we think of this?

Father Daniel: We know that even the Holy Fathers committed errors when they taught against Holy Tradition. As St. Vincent of Lerins said that Holy Tradition is that which has been taught to by all, always, and everywhere. And, by the way, the teaching about a “stamp,” as some kind of external tool, or “pre-stamp” (in Russia they have come up with such a term) this is a teaching

that only just now appeared. There was no such thing previously. But the thing is that this opinion is faulty also in a theological sense. Yuri Valeryevich spoke of the spiritual meaning and I will speak of the theological meaning. The fact is that for us what is most important is the covenant of a person with Christ. We have an agreement with God and He has one with us. As the Lord said that no one can pluck us out of the hands of the Heavenly Father because Our Father is greater than everyone. The Lord said that from His hands, no one can pluck us. And the very stamp of the Antichrist, which is described in the thirteenth chapter of the Apocalypse, according to the explanation of the Holy Fathers-St. Hippolytus of Rome, St. Andrew of Caesarea, St. Irenaeus of Lyon-is namely a question of a personal agreement with the Antichrist. This is also a covenant only different. Not in vain did St. Andrew of Caesarea say that as we receive the stamp of the Holy Spirit in chrismation, so will the Antichrist give an evil, impure stamp. The question is not even about the technical means-this is a false way of thinking. For a stamp can be applied by a simple hand or whatever else. Because the essence of that stamp is not in technical means but in the fact that a person voluntarily moves to the side of the enemy. This is what is so important!

Many, for some reason, think that the Antichrist cannot identify a person without a stamp, but Satan will dwell in the Antichrist; as it says in the Epistle to the Thessalonians he will act according to Satan-and all evil spirits are subject to Satan. Evil spirits are after us and compromise us as they can. As it is written in the toll-houses of Blessed Theodora, they write down any evil deed that we do. Could it really be hard for the Antichrist to summon a spirit and ask where someone is located? It will be easy for him to ask. He will not need to pursue us for that. For the Antichrist, it is not important to know where a person is or what he is doing but what is important is that the person makes an agreement with him-that a union is made. And he will blackmail with the help of hunger. Therefore, trading will be outlawed and the idea will be simple: if you don't worship me, I will starve you. This is the logic, understand?

And there is a deceitful substitution in this case-a substitution which sectarians made. The idea that INN and biometric passports, as well as passports in general, are the stamp of the Antichrist comes from schismatic environs. It was schismatics who thought this up about passports: first Russian schismatics of the Old Rite then *beguny* (there was such a sect as Yuri Valeryevich said). The idea concerning INN came from Seventh-Day Adventists. In the 1970s, one of the Adventist preachers saw a "vision" where a spirit revealed to her that INN is the stamp of the Antichrist; do you see from what kind of turbid source all these ideas come from?

Why does Satan propagate all of this? So that when the real Antichrist appears all those people who are afraid to accept the stamp will happily receive the real stamp, because they will seek the stamp there where it isn't. They will look for the stamp in some sort of technical means which the Antichrist doesn't need at all. The devil wants to prepare people so that when the real enemy comes they won't be afraid. St. Hippolytus says the following, "What will the person say who accepts the stamp of the Antichrist? He will say, 'I renounce God, the Creator of heaven and earth, His Only Son Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Church and give myself to you.'" You can see that St. Hippolytus was correct. The main thing with which the Antichrist seizes his own in our times is with denial of the creation of the universe. Is evolution nothing other than the preparation for the coming of the Antichrist? Of course, theistic evolution is especially that preparation. When one affirms that God created with the help of evil and death, this leads to the

Antichrist. The affirmation that Christ is not the only way to God is the way to the Antichrist. The affirmation that outside of the Church there is salvation is the way to the Antichrist. The affirmation that we should make our home on the earth is the way to the Antichrist-as the Apostle Paul says, when they will say peace and safety, then comes destruction [I Thess. 5:3]; all of this is the way to the Antichrist. In ideology is the way to the Antichrist and not in technology. Here is truly a demonic substitution: to substitute technological systems for the question of an actual agreement. I will say that in the spiritual sense, many people now have agreed with the ideas of the Antichrist. The idea that there is one God but many paths to Him is certainly an idea of the Antichrist. But no one writes against it; no one fights against it. They fight against those things which have long ago become out of date. They say that there is allegedly a computer “beast” in Brussels, have you heard? But, forgive me, a computer “beast” made in 1976 is less powerful than mine which is lying right here. Even the recording device in your hands is more powerful than that computer which, allegedly, enveloped all of humanity. And some people are still frightened by these old things. This is simply folly of people who have fallen into *prelest*. And the reason for this is very simple: if you notice, the more someone begins to be involved in battle with INN or biometric passports the more uneasy, irritated, malicious, and aggressive they become. Can this be from the Holy Spirit? Is the Holy Spirit the God of disorder? As the Apostle Paul said, *God is not the God of disorder but peace* [I Cor. 14:33]. I have not yet seen one quiet and calm person who actively fights against the INN. They are all hysterical. There was one authoritative archimandrite in a large monastery, I won’t name him so as not to defame him, who actively fought against the INN and, as a result, he went out of his mind, literally. He began to run around the monastery naked yelling nonsense and ended up in a mental institution. Such is the spiritual obscuration which completely damaged a person. We have had people who started to withdraw to caves. Do you know about the Penza story? It is all a result of the very same *prelest*. Can that be from God? No, that is from satan. It is from satan particularly because the devil wants to fool people. He has fooled them so that they forgot about Christ and remember only the devil. You spoke of Fr. Paisius and I remember a story which I know first hand. In the 1980s, certain pilgrims came to Elder Paisius of the Holy Mountain and began to question him when the Antichrist would come. And he answered them, “Why? Are you anxiously waiting for him?”

Stanoje Stankovic: One more question about the spiritual life. What is necessary in order to resist modern temptations? Particularly which virtue is most important?

Father Daniel: Trust in God alone is most important. If we do not have trust in God, then our prayer turns into a torturous rule. A spiritual father turns into a psychoanalyst. Everything else becomes only empty development. We need to trust God personally. We must remember that we are under the care of God and He is with us. God truly holds us in His Hands. And no one can separate us from Him; as the Apostle Paul says, *Who shall separate us from the love of God?* [Rom. 8:35] Truly, if we are with God, all the remaining virtues will be formed. Prayer will become communion with God Who is with us. Obedience will become the ability to hear His Holy Word-to make it out in the uproar of this world. Obedience to a spiritual father will become the ability to see within him a living icon of Christ and the consideration, through him, of the Lord. A spiritual father is one who is leading to God but not one who is standing and humiliating the spiritual child. It is the same with humility. Humility is not saying that one is a bad person, stupid, or not able to do anything but it is the ability to understand that one cannot do anything without God yet with God they can do very much. By the way, humility has another side: daring,

when a person recognizes what talents God gave him and for which he then will have to answer. Meekness will be connected at the same time with courage because meekness without God is cowardice but with God is courage. And it is the same in everything. Therefore, we must walk before God at all times, both modern and ancient, always.

Stanoje Stankovic: What attitude do Russian Orthodox people have toward Serbian saints: Holy Hierarch Nikolaj (Velimirovic) and Abba Justin (Popovic)?

Yuri Maksimov: St. Nikolaj of Serbia and Abba Justin Popovic are the most beloved, most well-known Serbian saints, as well as the most well-known Serbs of the 20th century in Russia. Knowledge of them began with a small translations, but the hearts of Orthodox people in Russia responded so lively to the word of the Holy Spirit that was in the works of those two Serbian ascetics that publishers, seeing such great interest, began to translate and publish more and more of their books. Now, if you go into a bookstore in Russia you will see a multitude of books from St. Nikolaj and Abba Justin. Moreover, if you look at modern Orthodox writings you will see quotes in them from St. Nikolaj and Abba Justin. This is an offering of the Serbian Orthodox Church that the Russian Orthodox Church accepted and now continues to accept with love and thankfulness. They both have very great authority in Russia, and I think this is also because St. Nikolaj had a particular talent of explaining difficult things simply and to explain it such that it would be dear to the hearts of modern man. Furthermore, he did not set forth a condensed or trimmed-down version nor primitive things but explained the very depths of our faith. And, therefore, love for him and his authority is very great, of course, which is understandable. The interest in the heritage of Serbian ascetics has led to the translation and publication of other books of Serbian Orthodox writers, including modern theologians that are still living. But, as far as I know, not one of them is even close in popularity among Russians as those two pillars. And this is because reading a text of St. Nikolaj we feel how it touches our souls.

Father Daniel: I would like to add something. The fact is that the first translations of St. Justin were versions in 1970s *samizdat*. And then the *samizdat* versions done about 1982-1983 were able to achieve one important thing. We have to remember that ecumenism was characteristic in the Soviet period. We know that Orthodox Churches participated in it and that even hierarchs did, hoping that the only enemy was materialism (that idol) and that it would encourage the overcoming of the disagreements between Orthodox, Roman-Catholics, and others. This, of course, was a mistake. And particularly St. Justin's work *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism* in many ways changed the views of very many people who now practically formulate church life in Russia. This not only concerns theologians and hierarchs; truly that book had the effect of a bomb. I will say that, in my experience, simple people love St. Nikolaj very much, while St. Justin, in many ways, helped to change the outlook of people of a, so to say, theological disposition. In many respects particularly that stimulus which St. Justin gave in his work against ecumenism encouraged the re-evaluation of that phenomenon and led to the fact that now very little ecumenism remains in the Russian Church. In Russia, ecumenism is despised. Most people, even those who are involved in ecumenism, have to constantly justifying themselves, which was not the case previously. In the 1970s, ecumenism was accepted as completely normal. Now it is looked upon as shameful, even by those who are involved in it. And here, truly, is the merit of St. Justin. First was Justin and then later they began to publish St. Hilarion (Troitsky) and other authors. But a beginning was laid specifically by St. Justin.

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[Serbian Conversations, Part 1](#)

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The following is the first part of a translation I've slowly been working on in my web-log absence. It is one of the last interviews that Fr. Daniel Sysoyev gave.

Serbian Conversations

Father Daniel Sysoyev and Yuri Maximov

“Shining as a star”

A few words about Father Daniel Sysoyev from Yuri Maximov

Late on the night of November 19, 2009, Fr. Daniel Sysoyev was killed in the Church of the Apostle Thomas on Kantemirovskaya in Moscow. An unidentified person in a mask entered the church and shot him point-blank.

I knew Fr. Daniel for ten years-since October 1999, when we met each other at a conference where we both spoke. He called me the night before, and on the day of the conference I saw a man walking in front of me in a riassa and immediately understood that it was the very same Deacon Daniel Sysoyev with whom I had spoken on the phone.

There was something similar in his voice as well as walk which expressed his uniqueness and allowed one to unmistakably recognize him in a crowd, even from behind and even to an unfamiliar person.

In one of his interviews shortly before his death, Fr. Daniel said that “we need to walk before God as He said of Enoch, ‘he walked before God and God took him.’ That walking before God is the root of missions.”

To shortly describe Fr. Daniel, he walked before God. And although that, in the first place, is the state of a soul completely directed to God, it even found its expression literally in his walk, not even mentioning his actions and words.

He walked with a light step, like a person who knows where he is going and why, one who is calm in the present and that does not worry about the future because he has entrusted all his cares to the Lord, Who is as close to him as a Loving Father.

During the ten years that I knew him, many times Fr. Daniel said that he wanted to die as a martyr. I am afraid that now those words will sound completely different than when he said them. When he talked about martyrdom there was neither gloomy solemnity nor unhealthy ecstasy. He would say it simply and with joy, and I, hearing this, would feel the same awkwardness and perplexity that I felt when I read in the epistles of St. Ignatius the Godbearer of his fervent desire

to suffer for Christ. One and the same spirit was in the one and the other, and I understood neither of them.

I recall how a few years ago when we were in Macedonia I brought Fr. Daniel to the amphitheater in the ancient city of Bitol. Here, during the time of the Roman Empire, they fed people to wild animals for the delight of the crowds of pagans. On the sides, there remained two small rooms, in which the animals were kept before being let into the arena, and, in the center, there was a box the size of a man, from which the condemned would come out to his torment. It is certainly true that several martyrs of the early Church accepted death for Christ in such a way in that amphitheater. I said to Fr. Daniel, "Look, Father, you can stand there where the martyrs stood before going to their *podvig*." And he went into that dark box. I remember how he stood there and gazed into sky.

Probably with the same concentrated peacefulness he was looking at his own murderer. I confess that I have thought about whether or not batushka was afraid at the final moment because I would be afraid. Therefore, I asked the one eyewitness that saw the murder with his own eyes what Fr. Daniel was doing when, leaving the altar, he saw a man in a mask with a pistol in his hand. I was told, "He was walking towards him. Right towards him."

Father Daniel Sysoyev was born January 12, 1974, and was baptized when he was three years old. He was raised in a religious family. I remember how he told me of his cherished memories from childhood: how his mother would read him the lives of saints before bed.

Batushka treated the faith with consciousness and seriousness from a young age. According to him, from the time he was twelve, if his parents demanded something of him out of principle he asked for a Biblical foundation for it and if he received it then he would carry out the demand unquestioningly. In this is already reflected his principle desire: to know the will of God always and for everything and to follow it. He preferred God to anything else and preferred the will of God to any other will.

I know many good priests in Russia, but here I have never met a person who would love God as intensely, fervently, and selflessly as did Fr. Daniel. Not long before his death, I found myself at one of batushka's catechetical talks, and I thought that only a deeply loving person can, without stopping, talk for two and a half hours about God and only about God and to speak in such a way that the people listen the whole time without stirring.

During Soviet times he already sang on the kliros, and, after finishing school, in 1991 he entered Moscow Theological Seminary. He would say to me that he had always wanted to be a priest and imagined himself as nothing else. That desire was born in him in childhood, when he underwent a clinical death and saw an angel, who returned his soul back into his body.

In 1995, Fr. Daniel got married, finished seminary, and was ordained into the diaconate. From that moment his extensive preaching and missionary activity began and he taught the Law of God to the upper classes at the Yasenevo Orthodox Gymnasium. One incident sticks out in my mind from his accounts about that time. One day he gave the topic "What will remain after I am gone? What will I take with me when I die?" to his students for an essay. Several parents came to him in indignation, "How can you give such topics to kids? You shouldn't remind them about death."

To this he answered, “So your children are immortal?” Fr. Daniel was convinced that as none of us can avoid death, we need to properly prepare for it, for which a Christian has everything that is necessary, and the earlier we start preparing, the better.

Starting in 1996, Fr. Daniel led missionary discussions at the Krutitsk representation church working with Fr. Anatoly (Berestov) in the St. John of Kronstadt Pastoral Center. He met and spoke with members of various cults, preaching to them and converting them to Orthodoxy.

Besides Fr. Daniel, I have known no one who could boldly confront any audience and begin a conversation with a person of any religious view and always have something to say of substance. He was a true missionary, loved to tell people about Christ, and loved when, from the lamp of his soul, others would light up with the flame of evangelical joy.

Batushka highly revered his heavenly protector, the Prophet Daniel, and namely from him received his missionary aspirations, as he told me himself. At one time, reading the book of Daniel, batushka was struck by the words, *And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever* (Dan. 12:3). “And I thought,” he said, “how wonderful that is, to shine as the stars.”

I know that he prayed the Jesus Prayer, considered it very important to commune often, having prepared as is necessary, and constantly read the Bible, which, it seems, he knew a considerable portion by heart. Prayer, the Eucharist, and the Word of God were for him the three most important foundations for missions.

In his life he baptized more than 80 Muslims and turned to Orthodoxy around 500 Protestants. Father Daniel went to Protestant gatherings and preached about Orthodoxy on the foundation of the Bible and participated in public disputes with Old Ritualists and neo-pagans, but above all he became well-known as a missionary among Muslims and a polemicist with Islam.

He received letters and calls with threats from Muslims. A year and a half before the murder, Muslim journalist Halida Hamidullina requested the public prosecutor to open a suit against Fr. Daniel for inciting inter-religious and inter-ethnic hatred. The prosecutor refused the suit, but in Islamic mass media a full campaign of libel was undertaken; Orthodox people do not know about that as, understandably, they are unfamiliar with Islamic mass media.

Not long ago, just three days before the murder, Fr. Daniel was driving me home and we laughingly remembered life ten years ago. Fr. Daniel said that, of all religions, Islam had always been the one least interesting to him, and he did not plan at all to study it. I also reminded him of an old conversation we had when we were returning from Krutitsky representation church and he became glad when he found out that I was writing apologetic articles in answer to Islamic criticism. He said, “Well, this is good, that means that I won’t have to deal with it.” But the Lord, first, through one confluence of circumstances, then through something else arranged it so that he happened to come into contact with Muslims or the subject of Islam, and Fr. Daniel went forward where the Lord was indicating. This was the most important for him.

Fr. Daniel graduated from the Moscow Theological Academy in 2000 having successfully defended his dissertation, “The Anthropology of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists.” Later this was published as a book. He also wrote a number of other books. *A Walk*

with a Protestant in an Orthodox Church is a unique work in which, on the basis of the Bible, is explained the arrangement and furnishings of an Orthodox church as well as Orthodox worship. *Chronicle of the Beginning* and *Who is Like God or How Long was a Day of Creation* are devoted to, as he himself said, the defense of the Patristic teaching on the creation of the world. In these books, Fr. Daniel explains why an Orthodox Christian cannot adhere to the theory of evolution.

Marriage with a Muslim is dedicated to one of the most painful issues in the co-existence of Christians and Muslims in our country. The impetus for this book began when, on the website Orthodoxy and Islam a section was opened for questions to a priest, where one could ask Fr. Daniel questions. I was amazed with the abundance of letters we received from baptized women who either planned on marrying a Muslim and were asking if that is permissible according to the Church or had already entered into marriage with a Muslim and who were having various problems and were looking for advice. In addition, in Fr. Daniel's pastoral ministry he had happened to meet such Russian women who, under the influence of such a marriage, had renounced Christ and converted to Islam, and then, having had lots of difficulties in a Muslim marriage and having realized their error, with batushka's help, repented and returned to the Church. All of this induced Fr. Daniel to write a book in which he exhaustively looked at this issue, reminded people that, in accordance with the rules of the Church, it is inadmissible for an Orthodox Christian to marry a person of another faith, and also gave concrete advice on problems that arise if such a marriage, nevertheless, has taken place. He also wrote a booklet similar in content called *Married to an Unbeliever?*

In addition, Fr. Daniel published a book called *Why are you still not baptized?* in which he examined the typical objections against baptism that one hears from everyday people. For those who are baptized but unchurched, he wrote a booklet called *Why One Should Go to Church Every Sunday*. For churched people, Fr. Daniel, together with me, wrote *On Frequent Communion*. Not long before his death, he said to me that his most cherished book was *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, which is compiled of his Biblical homilies that he gave for many years, explaining the Scriptures on the foundation of the Holy Fathers' commentary.

Finally, his last book was *Instructions for the Immortal or What to do if You Have, Nevertheless, Died*. In it he wrote the following words, "The very best death for a Christian, of course, is that of martyrdom for Christ the Savior. It is the greatest death that, in principle, is possible for a person. Some people sent condolences to Optina Monastery after the murder of three monks but, for a Christian, martyrdom, actually, is supreme joy. In the Ancient Church, no condolences were sent when someone was killed somewhere. All the churches immediately sent congratulations. Can you imagine congratulating someone with the fact that they have a new intercessor in Heaven! A martyric death washes away all sins apart from heresy and schism..."

Very many, even among those who were not in agreement with him about some issues, were surprised at and admired his courage. Not long ago, after the funeral, an acquaintance priest called me and said that he saw a video in which Fr. Daniel stands in an auditorium full of Muslims and from the podium he joyfully tells them about Christ and about how Islam, rejecting the God-Man Christ, cannot be true religion. "I just can't comprehend," he said to me, "What a heart one must have to simply go and stand among them and speak."

The video about which he spoke was filmed at the first debate with Muslims. Some Orthodox were not happy with the fact that Fr. Daniel took part in those debates; however, the initiative was not his. Muslims had publicly invited him, and how could a witness of Christ refuse to give an answer for his hope? [1 Peter 3:15] His refusal would have been for them an argument in their propaganda for Islam.

Father Daniel later told me that he was sure that after that first debate he would be killed, and the evening before he felt great fear and worry. During the night he had a vision: He saw himself standing before a labyrinth made up of pebbles, the kind that there are in the north. Walking through the labyrinth in a circle he came to the center where there was an altar, on which laid a sacrifice which had just been killed. He understood that it was an altar of Satan and a sacrifice to him. Father Daniel was gripped with anger and knocked over the altar with his foot. Immediately appeared Satan himself in the form of a joker in a fool's cap such as is on playing cards. His eyes were filled with wild hatred and he jumped on Fr. Daniel. Batushka started to pray, "Most Holy Mother of God, protect me!," "Saint Nicholas, help me!," as well as to other saints, and then something like an invisible wall appeared so that Satan jumped at him but was not able to reach him and bounced back time after time. Seeing this, batushka allowed in a vain thought and at that very moment Satan broke through the invisible wall and grabbed him by the throat. Father Daniel cried out, "Most Holy Mother of God, forgive me, I've sinned, save me from him!" Satan then disappeared and Fr. Daniel heard, "You will not lose but neither will you win," concerning the upcoming debate.

"And that's how it happened," Fr. Daniel said to me. He added that after this vision he completely stopped fearing Muslims and their threats, as, after seeing Satan himself and his powerlessness before God, it is impossible to be impacted by any human evil which is always inferior to Satan's evil.

During the second debate I, together with Fr. Oleg Stenyaev, was an aide to Fr. Daniel. It seemed to me that the debate went well (although, of course, it could have gone better). It is noteworthy that after this debate several Muslims who had helped organize the debates converted to Orthodoxy.

Being himself half Tatar (on his mother's side), Fr. Daniel paid particular attention to spreading and strengthening Orthodoxy among the Tatar people. He was the first and, it seems, only priest who, with the blessing of his bishop, began to regularly serve molebens partially in the Tatar language for Orthodox Tatars. He also, with his own money, published a prayerbook in Tatar. Together with his aides, he preached at Sabantuy (a Tatar national festival) and at the Tatar cultural center. In Egypt, he preached for hours to his Muslim guide and on television he argued with mufftis about faith.

He acquired a scandalous fame among Muslims, which alarmed and discomfited some Orthodox but not Fr. Daniel. He said that his fame helped in his mission and that was the truth. For, those Muslims who had even a small interest in Christianity learned just who to go to, and they did not err as they were always met by Fr. Daniel with love and had all their questions answered. There were a few Muslims who, having come to him in order to convert him to Islam, as a result were baptized by him.

Among those who call themselves Orthodox, I have met such strange people who say that Fr. Daniel should not preach to Muslims, that one must respect their religion, and that there is no benefit from his preaching. But Fr. Daniel thought, as did the Lord, the Apostles, and all the saints, that one must respect mistaken people but not their mistakes. Truth is one, that which contradicts and negates truth is a lie, and respect for a lie is contempt for the truth. Those who are indifferent to truth cannot understand this simple fact, and, therefore, they did not understand Fr. Daniel, although they might have been obliged to him for their life. Batushka managed to turn to Christ a number of Wahhabi's, including one Pakistani, who planned on becoming a suicide-bomber, and one woman who had the same plan. Would it really have been better if Fr. Daniel had not preached to those people and they, continuing their previous plans, had blown up an airplane, building, or subway car, maybe even one in which one of Fr. Daniel's critics had been in?

With even more success, Fr. Daniel preached to Protestants. When he, with the blessing of Metropolitan Vladimir [Ikim, Metropolitan of Tashkent and Central Asia], came to Kyrgyzstan together with his missionaries and began to visit Protestant meetings and convert them (even their pastors were among those who were united to Orthodoxy) so that the local leaders of the sects, not being able to oppose his words, made the decision to not allow meetings until Fr. Daniel had left the country. Thus, they tried to prevent him from preaching at their meetings by canceling the meeting itself.

Father Daniel also concerned himself with missions throughout the whole world. He and I traveled two times to Macedonia to preach there among the local schismatics. He also looked into the question of how to preach to Catholics in Western Europe and South America. In December 2009, he had hoped to travel to Thailand to preach in the northern regions. Being a missionary, he loved other missionaries very much and tried to become acquainted with all those who preached Christ, and he helped very many. He donated money for building a church in Indonesia and for educating Orthodox children from poor families in Zimbabwe and was a host to Chinese, Thai, and even Native American Orthodox. With the blessing of Patriarch Alexey II, Fr. Daniel established a school for Orthodox missionaries. In addition, he taught missiology at Nikolo-Perervinsk Theological Seminary.

What is striking is that his active missionary activity did not at all inhibit his parish work and responsibilities. In 2001, he was ordained a priest and in 2006 he built a small wooden church in the south of Moscow in the name of the Apostle Thomas (of which he was the dean). He eventually wanted to build a large basilica in honor of his patron saint, St. Daniel, at the same place. As he told me, the idea to build a basilica came up when he was visiting the Church of St. Demetrius in Thessaloniki.

Every Thursday Fr. Daniel led Bible studies, explaining one chapter from both the Old and New Testaments in the light of the teaching of the Holy Fathers. Every Friday he led catechetical classes, which every adult wanting to be baptized had to attend, and every Sunday he taught Sunday school for children. Wishing that people would better understand the church services, he published texts of the All-Night Vigil and Liturgy, established a rotation of people to hand them out before every service, and also introduced congregational singing. As a result, the parishioners were grateful to be able to finally understand the meaning of what was being sung in church.

Batushka served very concentratedly, especially in his final year, and loved to preach. At the service he would preach two or three homilies.

One of my friends, an altar server in Fr. Daniel's church, told me not long before batushka's death that he was amazed how, without holding anything back nor with mercy for himself, Fr. Daniel gave himself to other people, especially his parishioners.

He truly did not spare himself. I remember how one day he broke his leg and he was not given a replacement priest. Fr. Daniel, then, with his leg in a cast, went himself and served in spite of the pain. All his parishioners and acquaintances remember Fr. Daniel as cheerful, but few know how often he endured pain and sickness, especially severe headaches and heart pain. Batushka, however, did not show his suffering and was always attentive to the multitude of parishioners, listening to them and giving them advice.

It must be said that batushka never imposed, as a dictator, his views on those around him. He always listened to objections if they were actual and often corrected his views if he saw that they did not coincide with the truth. He often invited me and other people who he trusted to discuss one or another of his thoughts and find out if he was mistaken. If he understood that he was not right then it was not a problem for him to admit it and repudiate his mistake because he valued truth more than his own thought and respected every person around him.

Another particularity, which many thought was one of his faults and which actually originated from his ardent love for the truth, was the categorical manner in which he expressed his ideas. With every issue, batushka strove to reach the truth and if he was able to get to it, he expressed that truth directly and with certainty. In our politically-correct world, such straightforwardness was similar to an acute ray of light piercing through the dark. That honest abruptness appealed to some but for some, on the contrary, it repelled them.

Fr. Daniel was an upright and honest person. He was one of those people that in need one would only need to ask and he would definitely not be refused. For me he was an icon of a priest. All that he did he dedicated to Christ and did in His name.

I also have many personal memories. I remember him visiting me when I was in the hospital, how he brought his daughter, Dorothea, to show me when she was just two or three days old, and how he taught me how to drive a car.

I recall our travels and especially the one to Serbia, from which we returned just a week before his martyric death. During that trip he confessed to me that when it is particularly hard for him or when life's circumstances seem unbearable, he always felt like he was in an enormous hand, which was leading him through all the troubles.

The final day of Fr. Daniel's life began with the liturgy which he served and during which, naturally, he communed. Then he baptized a child and united to the Orthodox Church a man who had converted from occultism. A few hours later, as usual, he lead a Bible study, after which he spoke with everyone who desired until late. Finally, when hardly anyone was left in the church, he went into the altar to hear the confession of a spiritual child. At that time the murderer burst into the church and began to shoot and yell, "Where's Sysoyev?" Without fear, Fr. Daniel came out of the altar to meet him and accepted a martyric end for Christ.

I remember that batushka many times talked about how the Gospel readings read at the church services are not accidental and that they always turn out to be, to our amazement, timely and appropriate.

On the day of his death, the Gospel reading contained the following words of the Lord, “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. ... Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. [Luke 12:4, 8]

As His Holiness, Patriarch Kirill said in his condolences on the death of Fr. Daniel, “The Lord called to Himself His faithful servant, having given him the possibility to be a confessor of faith and martyr for the work of spreading the Gospel.”

Introduction to the conversations

About a week before the tragedy in the Church of the Apostle Thomas, Fr. Daniel and I travelled around Serbia. It was his first trip to that Orthodox country and it quite impressed and fascinated him. I remember how happy he was when we, just having landed, visited Krushedol Monastery, where lie the relics of St. Angelina, the patron saint of his youngest daughter. I remember how he insisted that we visit Sremski Karlovci, a beautiful little European city, which, it seems, has hardly changed in the last hundred years. I remember how at night we wandered around Kalemegdan, the Belgrade fortress, and, under a drizzling rain, went down to the church, leaving behind the towers and walls glowing against the dark sky.

During that trip, Fr. Daniel and I gave two interviews. The first was by the invitation of Ms. Jana Todorovic for the “Church” program of November 11, 2009, on Radio Belgrade 2. We were interviewed by Dushanka Zekovich. Afterwards she gave Fr. Daniel a disk with a recording of the interview. Father Daniel offered it to me and said, “If you want it, take it. I used to keep such things but then stopped.”

I took the disk and when I got home I put it together with my other presents from Serbia. And a week later shots were heard in the Church of the Apostle Thomas and Fr. Daniel was no longer among us: he accepted a martyric death for Christ and went to that Celestial Fatherland to which he strove his whole life.

After the burial of my cherished spiritual friend, with whom I was acquainted more than ten years, I found that disk and typed out our interview, which is one of his last, given eight days before his murder. And I myself was surprised at how closely it relates to that which happened. There were two main topics in the interview: Orthodox missions and the death of a Christian. It is striking how Fr. Daniel talked about this with joy and confidence as though he was speaking of it already from the other world, as an eyewitness.

We gave the second interview on the same day in the evening to Stanoje Stankovich of Svetosavlje.org. We were interviewed in a room in the parish house of the majestic Church of St. Savva, where we had been graciously invited to stay, with the blessing of Bishop Atanasije of Hvosanski.

That which Fr. Daniel said in the interview could probably be called a type of summation. He set

forth the system of missions and catechism which developed from his wide-ranging practical experience and familiarized the Serbian readers with a look at the modern condition of Orthodox missions, formed upon the foundation of interaction with other missionaries of our Church. He also gave spiritual advice to missionaries, analyzed mistakes and problems, spoke of the Biblical foundation of missions, and responded to the opponents of missions. In addition, there was, naturally, a look at other contemporary challenges which the Orthodox Church is confronting.

And, of course, as in the other interview given on the same day, like a premonition was talk of death, which is “not over the mountains but over the shoulder,” and for which we must always be prepared.

For which he was fully prepared.

“And angels carry us on their wings to Heaven...”

Dusanka Zekovic: Today our guests are Fr. Daniel Sysoyev, writer, missionary, and dean of the Church of the Apostle Thomas in Moscow, and Yuri Maximov, a professor at Moscow Theological Academy, which is in the Monastery of St. Sergius of Radonezh. The first question is for Mr. Maximov: What is the current situation of inter-religious dialogue in the space of Great Russia, especially between Orthodox Christianity and Islam?

Yuri Maximov: In Russia, Muslims make up 9% of the population and they are of very different types of people. In history and in the present, relations between them and Orthodox people were both good and bad. You are aware that in recent years there were two major conflicts in the Caucasus: the first and second Chechen wars. At first, the situation was very similar to that in Kosovo, and it is not necessary to tell in detail to Serbs what that means and what suffering it brings. And although we won the second Chechen War and Chechnya remained a part of Russia, the relationship between Orthodox and Muslims sometimes becomes strained. Of course there are different types of Muslims and here, in my opinion, is a type of rule: If a Muslim is not that educated in his faith, then he is more likely a good person, but if a Muslim relates seriously to the source of his faith and studies its instructions and tries to put them into practice, then often it is particularly from such people that extremists come. That is a question and a challenge: how should we live in a world with such people? And how can the Church respond to that challenge? The Lord made it such that they live in those lands and we live together with them. It is impossible (and unnecessary) to relocate them or remove them in some other way. The Lord opens us up another way: to preach the Gospel to them and make them Orthodox Christians. For example, Fr. Daniel Sysoyev, who is here with us, at one time converted a woman to Orthodoxy who was being prepared to become a suicide bomber. But she was baptized and became a good Christian, who does not feel anger to anyone and does not plan to blow up anyone. Such an amazing miracle does the Lord perform: a way thanks to which our enemies can become our brothers. We try to preach to Muslims and many of them respond and become Orthodox.

Dusanka Zekovic: The next question is for Fr. Daniel. When we in Serbia speak about Russia, we speak of it before perestroika and after perestroika. Tell us, please, what presently, after those changes, is the spiritual reality in Russia?

Father Daniel: I think that currently a stratification of society is taking place in Russia. Some

people choose Orthodoxy while others, knowing of Orthodoxy, reject faith and reject Christ. This is the type of division taking place, such as there was not before, during the time of perestroika. One of the main positive changes in the life of the Church is that it began to actively be involved in missionary activity.

Dusanka Zekovic: What is implied by missionary activity? Here in Serbia, people of other faiths say that the Orthodox Church is static, that it is insufficiently missionary, and that it participates too little in people's social problems.

Father Daniel: When we talk about the fact that the Church must be missionary, we remember that the Savior Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, commanded all Christians to preach the Gospel to all people without exception. And, therefore, the Church is obligated to take the Word of God to all people. The Church must be active and not static, and that which is happening in the Russian Church is evidence that it is returning to its apostolic roots. Hundreds of priests and lay persons of our Church preach on the streets, go to the meetings of sectarians, and go to mosques and many then turn to Christ. I think that all of the Orthodox Churches must go and proclaim the Gospel to people. We should not be content with what we already have. Christ has very many sheep which we still have not found. Right now I have studying at my parish a family of Muslims from the Caucasus who wants to be baptized and they said to me, "Why did not you, Orthodox priests, come to our ancestors? Why did they not know about this truth? Why did we never hear about it in Dagestan?"

It often seems to us that we cannot do anything, but this is not so. The Orthodox Church can and does do very much for conversions. Some say that the Lord Himself leads people into the Orthodox Church. Yes, the Lord Himself leads people but through us, and if we lead a person to baptism then we cover a multitude of sins as the Apostle James said. We receive an enormous award in the Heavenly Kingdom if we turn people to repentance. Furthermore, when the Church preaches the Gospel to those outside itself, even to those of other nations, then the Church itself is rejuvenated, strengthened, and flourishes because the Holy Spirit then gives it strength in order to carry out missions also among its own people.

Some say, "First convert your own people then go to others," but the Lord did not say that. If we have a neighbor who is a Muslim, Catholic, or Protestant why are they still not Orthodox? For we know that outside the Church there is no salvation, and those people, if they do not come into the Orthodox Church will perish forever, they will go into the eternal fire. We had an issue with Chechnya and some ask, "How can we preach to Chechens?" But I say that a Chechen who finds Christ becomes a better Christian than a normal person from a traditional Orthodox family. I had an acquaintance who was a Chechen Wahhabite and he came to me to convert me to Islam. We decided to examine where the truth is. Over the course of two months I told him about Christianity and afterwards he asked me, "And why haven't you offered to baptize me?" I said, "If you believe you can be baptized," and he was baptized. His name is now Alexander.

Dusanka Zekovic: What is the Church's solution for the social problems in Russia, which, I think, it has in common with those in Serbia? For we know that many have become very rich, unjustly rich, and, on the other hand, there are many poor people. A person is not just a soul but also a body, so how do we help poor people? Is it missionary activity to turn to some rich person and convince him to help the poor?

Father Daniel: Of course, every priest comes in contact with both very rich people and very poor people. And, truly, missions in the Church also includes social help. In Moscow there is a hospital which the Church maintains with the help of, among others, the wealthy. There are several dozen Orthodox orphanages in Russia. The Church looks after hospitals; every hospital in Moscow has Orthodox volunteers. And in many ways, thanks to the Moscow priest Fr. Arkady Shatov, very many rich people help the poor. There is a complete system for such help. In addition, all the nursing homes are looked after by the Church. Many of our volunteers visit the poor. And, of course, the Church opposes injustices which take place in society. Both Patriarch Alexey and Patriarch Kirill have many times asked the rich to support the poor, and their request was heard. As a result, thanks to the Church, many people receive help, necessary for the body.

Dusanka Zekovic: Before me is a book of Fr. Daniel Sysoyev which is named *Instructions for the Immortal, or What to do if You Have, Nevertheless, Died*. Tell us, father, what are those instructions?

Father Daniel: The Orthodox Church not only knows that the soul of man is immortal but also knows how death happens, how to correctly prepare for death, and what happens after death. I think it is best to start with how to prepare for death. We, all of us, know that we will die, maybe tomorrow. And it is important to have a place to which to go, that we have a house beyond the grave. That house we build with our good deeds. With the help of acts of mercy we transfer treasure to that house. When we are a friend to people, when we ask them for prayers, and, more so, when we turn them to Orthodoxy, then we have people who will be our defenders on that road. Of course, we must perform every deed in the name of Christ or else it will not have any value. But, at the same time, we must strive so that those close to us help us when we die. It is especially important that our relatives invite a priest to visit us before our death. It often happens that someone is dying and their relatives do not even invite a priest to confess and commune them and people leave for eternity without preparation. Therefore, I advise all to include the following clause in their will: "If the heirs did not invite a priest to visit me before death then they do not receive any inheritance."

When a person dies he is met by angels. The angels of God help a person while demons attack him and intimidate him. Two weeks ago I was with a person as they were dying and I saw how demons were attacking him. This is not a joke, it is truly so. Only the Orthodox faith, the power of the cross, and, especially, Holy Communion can protect such a person. Therefore, if after death demons attack you, cross yourself and say "Lord Jesus, help!" and particularly ask the Most Holy Mother of God. She quickly protects from the demons. And then, after death, rise up to heaven, not concerning yourself with the earth, and run quickly to God, then the demons cannot attack you. The demons detain those at the toll houses who are attached to the earth, those who think too much about the earthly. If a person has striven for God his whole life then he will not even notice their attack. But remember that the demons will trick you with the help of the sin of vanity. To Macarius the Great, when he was rising up, the demons said, "you have conquered us! you have conquered us!" But he answered, "Not quite yet," and only when he had entered the gates of paradise did he say, "now I have conquered you with the power of Jesus Christ." Just the same do we need to prepare early and get in the disposition not to boast and be captured there. When you get into paradise, and I want all our listeners to end up in paradise, go to your beloved saints. Therefore, while still on the earth make friends with them, with St. Savva, St. Paraskeva,

St. Nicholas, and, in this case, they may even approach you after death. And then, when you bow down to God, He sends you to look at hell, because often we think that sin is sweet and pleasant, but the Lord says, "Look at how it ends." Therefore, the Church fervently prays for people during the 40 days following their death, because at that time is the final trial for the soul. Close ones can help during this time with both the giving of alms and reading of the Psalter-I think that all our listeners know this but to repeat it is never superfluous. Some of our close ones act incorrectly: they spend too much money on funeral feasts when it would be better to give that money to the poor who would then pray for the reposed. Those whom we have brought to Orthodoxy will, of course, especially pray for us. For example, those former Muslims, Roman Catholics, and Protestants who became Orthodox thanks to us. And angels will carry us to heaven on their wings. Remember that life is a school and paradise is a university. And true life begins after the Final Judgment. Therefore, I hope that we will prepare well to be able to live eternally in joy.

Dusanka Zekovic: And how can one earn paradise?

Father Daniel: Jesus Christ has earned paradise for us. Without the death on the Cross of the Savior, we would all end up in hell. And so all those who are currently unbaptized will end up in hell because they did not receive help from the Cross of the Lord. We receive salvation as a gift through baptism but assimilate it for ourselves, that is, make it our own through good deeds. And we receive strength for good deeds through the Eucharist, which we need to partake of as often as we can-not more than once a day but not less that once a month.

Dusanka Zekovic: Thank you for these instructions for immortality; and now I would like to ask Mr. Maximov about the meaning and necessity of missionary activity in the modern world.

Yuri Maximov: I would like to start with a short story from the ancient life of the Holy Apostle Thomas. It says that when the apostles chose lots for which lands they should go to, the Apostle Thomas picked the lot for India and he was very upset and said, "Lord, anywhere at all, just not India." He did not at all want to go to such a far away, unfamiliar land in order to preach the Word of God. The Lord Jesus Christ then appeared to the captain of a ship, which was going to India, and said, "I am selling you My servant whose name is Thomas." The captain found the apostle and asked, "Are you a servant of Jesus Christ?" "Yes," answered the apostle. And then the captain said, "Your master sold you to me so follow me." So he had to go and, as a servant of the captain, set off for India. In this way, having ended up in India against his will, the apostle began to preach, fell in love with the people, and turned many souls to Christ. This story has something in common with the newest history of the Orthodox Church. In the first thousand years it had many missions, but in the latest hundred years Orthodox Christians preached very little or hardly at all. In the 19th century there were even theologians who wrote as if the Orthodox should not preach to anyone. And look what the Lord did in the 20th century: for absolutely every Orthodox Church, He created such conditions that we were forced to go to other countries. Russians, Serbians, Romanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Georgians, and Orthodox Arabs were all forced, as a result of one or another misfortune or trouble in their homeland, to spread out over the planet. In such a way the Lord acted with us just as He did with the Apostle Thomas.

You have probably heard how in our times Serbian priests in South Africa preached to the local population. There it was such that white people lived separate from black people and even

Orthodox white people were afraid to go to black peoples' areas. But the Serbian priests were not afraid and went to a school where black children studied, told them about Orthodoxy, and after a year and a half the whole school became Orthodox. Officially the director made such a decision, supported by the children and their parents. This is a great work which shows that missions are possible.

It is well known that many people right now are experiencing depression, weariness, and disillusionment with life and its senselessness. This results from the fact that we do not fulfill the commandments of God. Therefore, the power of God and joy of God does not enter into us. But when we begin to carry out the commandments of God, one of which is to preach the Gospel, then enormous spiritual joy and inspiration comes to us. Everyone can verify this with their own experience-If you preach not for your own sake, not for your own vanity, but for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ then you will be given such a joy.

Dusanka Zekovic: With that wonderful call we conclude our conversation with our dear guests, the first of which is the writer and missionary Fr. Daniel Sysoyev, and the second of which is Yuri Maximov, professor at Moscow Theological Academy.

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No comment necessary.

Posted in [Fr. Daniel Sysoyev](#), tagged [Fr. Daniel Sysoyev](#), [Fr. Daniil Sysoev](#) on 26, December, 2009 | [Leave a Comment »](#)

Islamists claim killing of Russian priest

Russian Orthodox believers light candles in memory of slain Orthodox priest Daniil Sysoyev at the murder site in the church where he served, in Moscow, on November 20. An Islamist militant group based in Russia's North Caucasus has claimed the killing of Sysoyev who was an outspoken critic of Islam.

AFP – An Islamist militant group based in Russia's North Caucasus has claimed the killing last month of an Orthodox priest who was an outspoken critic of Islam.

“One of our brothers who has never been to the Caucasus took up the oath of (former independent Chechen president Doku Umarov) and expressed his desire to execute the damned Sysoyev,” said a statement on the Kavkazcenter.com website.

Daniil Sysoyev, 35, was killed on November 20 when masked gunman walked into Saint Thomas's church in southern Moscow and shot him four times.

Doku Umarov emerged as the leader of the remaining active rebel movements in the North Caucasus in 2007 and is considered enemy number one in the region by Russian authorities.

The statement on the Kavkazcenter.com website, which is often used by militants, accused

Sysoyev of writing several pamphlets insulting Islam.

It warned “those in the future who defame Islam and insult the religion of Allah will suffer the fate as Sysoyev.”

Sysoyev, who was criticised by Muslim organisations for his statements on Islam, had reportedly contacted Russian security services several times over threats. [Source](#)

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[Second Priest of the Church of St. Thomas the Apostle in Moscow Attacked](#)

Posted in [Fr. Daniel Sysoyev](#), tagged [Church of St. Thomas the Apostle](#), [Fr. Daniel Sysoyev](#), [Fr. Daniil Sysoyev](#), [Fr. Vitaly Zubkov](#) on 6, December, 2009 | [1 Comment »](#)

On September 5, 2009, at approximately 4 p.m., Fr. Vitaly Zubkov, the second priest at the Church of St. Thomas the Apostle in Moscow (where recently martyred Fr. Daniel Sysoyev served) was attacked by three unidentified persons while he was walking down the street (dressed in his cassock) on his way to serve the Vigil service at his church.

“I fell and they started to kick my legs, and I can barely walk. Then they started to hit me in the head,” said Fr. Vitaly. According to him, the attack was carried out in “absolute silence.” He did not manage to notice if the attackers were in masks. “I cannot say; I was walking, thinking, and praying and, all of a sudden, a blow. To be honest, I didn’t understand,” he added.

...

Father Vitaly connects this incident with the tragedy of not long ago: the murder of his friend, Fr. Daniel Sysoyev. “I think that this is some kind of continuation. Because I spoke on various programs, and my first interview was rather harsh-I was in shock from the loss of a friend,” he said.

On Sunday, Fr. Vitaly served liturgy at the Church of St. Thomas the Apostle. He said that he “did not have such serious injuries” to consult a doctor. [Source](#)

More proof that, if you haven’t been already, you should pray for the safety and courage of our priests.

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[The Final Interview with Father Daniel Sysoyev: Hasten to Heaven!](#)

Posted in [Fr. Daniel Sysoyev](#), [Russia](#), [Translations](#), tagged [Fr. Daniel Sysoyev](#), [Fr. Daniil Sysoyev](#), [patriotism](#) on 28, November, 2009 | [8 Comments »](#)

The following short interview (if one question comprises an interview I will not argue with as that is how it is stated in the original) is from the November issue of “Neskuchnyi Sad,” a popular mission- and social-oriented Orthodox magazine. [Source](#).

Citizens of heaven were what the Christians of the pagan Roman Empire called themselves when the Church was persecuted by patriots of Rome. Today in Russia patriotism still is often opposed to Christianity, although the Church and the State are not fighting one another. Father Daniel Sysoyev of the Church of St. Thomas in Moscow reflects on the situations in which patriotism contradicts Christianity and those in which it supplements it.

Where is a Christian’s homeland, the cares of which his heart must be overflowing with? Where is the place that Orthodox can call home? In recent years, I have heard a lot of discourse on this subject. As a homeland we have been offered Russia, the Soviet Union, and America, the “the land of liberty.” In the name of the people or the state, we are offered to consent to a crime or dedicate our life to the service of the fatherland, the nation. It is suggested that we consider the well being of that land where we were fated to be born or where our ancestors were born to be the greatest value, and we are reproached with the question of why the Church “does not fight for the rights of the people,” or, on the other hand, they write that “the Church always served Russia” (from the banner of a suburban Moscow church). Instead of all of this I suggest to return to words of Scripture which have been forgotten by many, “...here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (Hebrews 13:14). Our only and eternal Homeland is heaven. Our Father lives there, our fellow citizens, the saints, are there, the Church will find there eternal peace after a long war with the devil.

We are not nationalists for in Christ and in His Church there are no nations. As Russians and Tartars and Jews and Americans we have become one new people of the Covenant. We pray and worry so as to lead as many people as possible into the Celestial Home. We are not patriots of the earth, for we remember the words of St. Gregory the Theologian. “And these earthly countries and families are the playthings of this our temporary life and scene. For our country is whatever each may have first occupied, either as tyrant, or in misfortune; and in this we are all alike strangers and pilgrims, however much we may play with names” (Oration 33). We are striving for the New Jerusalem and only with its interests in mind do we bring our actions into correlation.

Uranopolitans are members of the Body of Christ, which exceeds kinship of language and unity according to citizenship by state, and that is why the interests of the Universal Church are more important for us than any remaining interests. Only the one who has become a true citizen of heaven is capable of true freedom, about which the Savior said, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). We are no longer obliged to think in unison with this passing world. We should not consider that society, the nation, or the state is more important than an individual. This is not so; when all the nations disappear, when all the kingdoms of the world collapse, we will live in the flesh in our Homeland. The state is created by God for us and not us for the state. The nations, the result of the condemnation of Babylon, will vanish, but all those people that they are composed of will remain, those whom our Heavenly Father commanded us to love as ourselves.

We honor the authority established by the Creator and follow those laws which do not contradict the will of God, but never will we give it that worship which is only befitting of God.

Only the *uranopolitans* can carry out the commandment of the Apostle Paul: “Rejoice evermore” (I Thess. 5:16). How can the Christian nationalist, Christian patriot, Christian liberal, etc. (in short, all those “Christian and...”) always rejoice? Ideology says to him, “How can you rejoice in God when your people are suffering? The fatherland is in danger, the nation is losing its age-old habitation, the state is violating your rights and you are happy? The only escape for him is to become an *uranopolitan*. Only here is that joy about which the Savior spoke, “I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also... I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you” (John 14:3, 16:22). And then all the troubles of the earth for him will become unimportant. Then, if your people suffer, you will see in it the just hand of God and help those of one tongue as you to find the Punishing and Merciful Judge. But at the same time you will remember that there is only one people to whom you belong in truth: the people of God, a peculiar people, taken out of darkness into the marvelous light of God (see 1 Peter 2:9).

Persecution for a pilgrim-people is natural. For, you know, St. Justin the Philosopher said, “we know that Christians will always be persecuted until Christ returns and frees us.” But the fatherland of the *uranopolitan* is always safe, for who can harm New Jerusalem? And that state in which the *uranopolitan* is wandering, he will defend to the measure that it does not war with God, according to the commandment of obedience to authority (see Rom. 13:1-6). But his heart will not be disturbed, for all that is seen is temporary and the unseen is eternal. In order to please God the *uranopolitan* will defend the weak and will take pity on the insulted. And this not in the name of someone’s rights but in the name of God.

So let us all flee from here. Why should we cling to the perishable? Why should we attach our heart to that which we will abandon forever? Hasten to heaven all partakers of the mystery of Christ. Become citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem. God the Father is waiting for us. Will we really exchange his embrace for the elusive darkness of this age and the delusion of human ideology?

Uranopolitism (from Greek: ουρανός-heaven, polis-πόλις), as used by Fr. Daniel, is a concept which affirms the supremacy of Divine laws over earthly and the primacy of love for the Heavenly Father and His Heavenly Kingdom. The most important kinship, according to *uranopolitism*, is not by blood or country of origin but kinship in Christ. Patriotism (from Greek: Πατριώτης-fellow countryman, πατρίς-fatherland) is love of ones fatherland following from the realization of solidarity of interests of the citizens of a given state or members of a given nation (Dictionary of Brockhaus and Efron).

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[On My Husband’s Death – Matushka Julia Sysoyeva](#)

Posted in [Fr. Daniel Sysoyev](#), [martyrs](#), [Translations](#), tagged [Fr. Daniel Sysoyev](#), [Fr. Daniil Sysoyev](#), [Julia Sysoyeva](#), [new martyrs](#) on 23, November, 2009 | [Leave a Comment »](#)

I am sure that I do not need to acquaint you with the basic fact that Fr. Daniel Sysoyev was martyred on November 19/20. However, I hope to be translating more details about his life (including, as time permits, some of his writings). The following is a note of Fr. Daniel's wife, Julia, which was posted on the website of the [mission center/Church of St. Thomas the Apostle](#). I'm not sure how circulated it is so I'm letting you know that there is a short interview with a priest-friend of Fr. Daniel's at [Pravmir](#). Also, please continue to pray for the repose of Fr. Daniel, for his wife, Matushka Julia, their three daughters: Justina, Dorothea, and Angelina, as well as Fr. Daniel's father, Fr. Alexei, and his mother, Matushka Anna. I think it would also be good to pray for that unfortunate man who killed Fr. Daniel.

Thank you, my dears, for your support and your prayers. This is a pain which cannot be expressed by words. It is that pain which those standing at the cross of our Savior went through. It is that joy which cannot be expressed by words, that joy which was experienced by those who came to the empty Tomb [of Christ].

O death, where is thy sting? [1 Cor. 15:55]

Father Daniel foresaw his death even a few years before what has happened.

He always wanted to be worthy of a martyr's crown and the Lord has given him such a crown. Those who shot at him wanted to spit yet another time into the face of the Church, as they once spit in the face of Christ, but they have not obtained their desire as it is impossible to spit in the face of the Church. Father Daniel went to his own Golgotha right in the church, which he had been building and to which he had been giving all time and energy. He was killed like an ancient prophet, that is, between the altar and the sanctuary, and he was really worthy of being called a martyr.

He died for Christ, Whom he served with all his strength.

He often told me that he was afraid that he would not manage to do the things he wanted, very many things. He hurried. Humanly speaking, he had some extremes and exaggerations, he stumbled and made mistakes, but he did not make mistakes in the main thing; his life was completely dedicated to HIM.

I didn't understand why he hurried. For the final three years he devoted himself to ministry without days off or vacation. I grumbled; I desired, at least sometimes, simple happiness: that my husband and my kids father would be with me and them But a different path had been prepared for him.

He would say that he would be killed. I asked him who would take care of us-me and three kids-when he would leave. He answered that he would leave us in good hands. "I will give you to the Mother of God, she will take care of you."

Those words were forgotten until now. He told me which vestments to bury him in. I joked at the time that we should not talk about that as it is not known who will be burying whom. He said that I would be burying him. One day funerals were brought up in a conversation. I do not remember the whole conversation but I said that I had never been at a funeral service for a priest. And he told me not to worry, that I would be at his.

Now, many words are remembered and their meaning has been found. Now, my perplexity has been resolved and my incomprehension has been dispersed.

We did not say goodbye in this life, or ask forgiveness of one another, or hug one another. It was a normal day: he left for liturgy in the morning and I never saw him again.

Why did I not go to church that day to pick him up? After all, I had thought about it, but I decided that I had to make dinner and put the kids to sleep. Because of the kids I did not go: some Hand did not let me go. The day before I went to the church and picked him up. I felt how the clouds were gathering over us. And the last few days I was trying to be with him more often. The final week I was thinking only about death and life beyond death. I failed to comprehend either of them. On that day, the words “death is breathing down the back of the neck” were daunting me. My heart was feeling so heavy in that last week, as if a many-tonned burden had fallen on me.

I’m not in the least broken. He is supporting me; I feel that he is near. During this time we have told each other many tender words, more than we said throughout our whole life. Only now I understand how strongly we loved each other.

The 40th day after Fr. Daniel’s repose (December 29) falls on the day before his name’s day and the feast day of the future church, Prophet Daniel: December 30. According to an elders prophecy, the church would be built but Fr. Daniel would not serve in it. The second has already been fulfilled.