

Letter from Father Seraphim Rose to a Young Seeker Interested in Guénon

Solomonina has shared with me your recent letter to her, and in reading it I sense in you a kindred spirit to whom a word from me might not be in vain.

It so happens that René Guénon was the chief influence in the formation of my own intellectual outlook (quite apart from the question of Orthodox Christianity). I read and studied with eagerness all his books that I could get a hold of; through his influence I studied the ancient Chinese language and resolved to do for the Chinese tradition what he had done for the Hindu; I was even able to meet and study with a genuine representative of the Chinese tradition and understood full well what he means by the difference between such authentic teachers and the mere “professors” who teach in the universities.

It was René Guénon who taught me to seek and love the Truth above all else, and to be unsatisfied with anything else; this is what finally brought me to the Orthodox Church. Perhaps a word of my experience will be of help to you to know.

For years in my studies I was satisfied with being “above all traditions” but somehow faithful to them; I went deeper into the Chinese tradition only because no one had presented it in the West from a fully traditional point of view. When I visited an Orthodox Church, it was only in order to view another “tradition”—knowing that Guénon (and one of his disciples) had described Orthodoxy as the most authentic of the Christian traditions.

However, when I entered an Orthodox Church for the first time (a Russian Church in San Francisco), something happened to me that I had not experienced in any Buddhist or other Eastern temple; something in my heart said that this was “home”, that all my search was over. I didn’t really know what this meant because the service was quite strange to me, and in a foreign language. I began to attend Orthodox services more frequently, gradually learning its language and customs, but still keeping all my basic Guénonian ideas about all the authentic spiritual traditions.

With my exposure to Orthodoxy and to Orthodox people, however, a new idea began to enter my awareness: that truth was not just an abstract idea, sought and known by the mind, but was something personal—even a Person—sought and loved by the heart. And that is how I met Christ. I am now grateful that my approach to Orthodoxy

took several years and had nothing of emotional excitement about it—that was Guénon’s influence again, and it helped me to go deeper into Orthodoxy without the ups and downs that some converts encounter when they are not too ready for something as deep as Orthodoxy. My entrance into the Orthodox Church occurred at the very time I left the academic world and gave up the attempt to communicate the Chinese tradition to the Western world. My Chinese teacher also left San Francisco shortly before this—my only real contact with the Chinese tradition—and in Guénonian fashion he disappeared utterly, leaving no address. I remember him fondly, but after becoming Orthodox I saw how limited was his teaching: the Chinese spiritual teaching, he said, would disappear entirely from the world if Communism endures another ten or twenty years in China. So fragile was this tradition—but the Orthodox Christianity I had found would survive everything and endure to the end of the world—because it was not merely handed down from generation to generation, as all traditions are, but was at the same time given from God to man.

I look back fondly now on René Guénon as my first real instructor in Truth, and I only pray that you will take what is good from him and not let his limitations chain you. Even psychologically, “Eastern Wisdom” is not for us who are flesh and blood of the West; Orthodox Christianity is clearly the tradition that was given us—and it can be clearly seen in the Western Europe of the first ten centuries, before the falling away of Rome from Orthodoxy. But it also happens that Orthodoxy is not merely a “tradition” like any other, a “handing down” of spiritual wisdom from the past; it is God’s Truth here and now—it gives us immediate contact with God such as no other tradition can do. There are many truths in the other traditions, both those handed down from a past when men were closer to God, and those discovered by gifted men in the reaches of the mind; but the full Truth is only in Christianity, God’s revelation of Himself to mankind. I will take only one example: there are teachings on spiritual direction in other traditions, but none so thoroughly refined as those taught by the Orthodox Holy Fathers; and more importantly, these deceptions of the evil one and our fallen nature are so omnipresent and so thorough that no one could escape them unless the loving God revealed by Christianity were close at hand to deliver us from them. Similarly: Hindu tradition teaches many true things about the end of the *Kali Yuga*; but one who were merely *knows* these truths in the

mind will be helpless to resist the temptations of those times, and many who recognize the Antichrist (*Chalmakubi*) when he comes will nonetheless worship him—only the power of Christ given to the heart will have strength to resist him.

It is my prayer for you that God will open your heart, and you yourself will do what you can to meet Him. You will find there happiness you never dreamed possible before; your heart will join your head in recognizing the true God, and no real truth you have ever known will be lost. May God grant it!

Feel free to write whatever is in your mind or heart.