



# Archimandrite Constantine Zaitsev: On the “social gospel” of ecumenism

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Concerning the author of the text below, Fr. Seraphim Rose stated: “Archimandrite Constantine Zaitsev of Jordanville was a brilliant thinker who, being fully within the tradition of the Church, was able to see beyond the externals and into the heart of the Orthodox faith, wherein lies its mystical, unseen essence and its living apostolic power.”

The following is excerpted from “ Ecumenism, Communism and Apostasy: The Spiritual State of the Contemporary World” by Archimandrite Constantine of Jordanville:

“The forefront of church-social life is occupied by so-called ecumenism. It’s task is to unify “Christianity” through a horizontal agreement, with a devaluation of any historical churchness. Openly, the task is not posed as one which would give rise to an image of some Super-Church (at least not as early as 1960! - ed). This would scare away everybody and be unworkable in any case: ecumenism has no Church-constructive capabilities. But in a scheme of destruction its opportunities are tremendous. And this all the more is so, since in its destructive activity the ecumenistic movement is leaning on general strivings peculiar to our age.

One can distinguish 2 pernicious ideas here. The 1st is the negation of the Church as an unrepeatable historic entity, as the Body of Christ, with the resultant transformation of churchness into a matter of free agreement inspired by self-willed fancy (the "Relations" document of Crete



comes to mind - G.I.) . The 2nd is the transformation of Christianity into an entity of this world, with the resultant transformation of even its final attainments into something unifying humanity on earth (the "Missions" document of Crete comes to mind -G.I.) , and elimination of the perspective of a twofold Eternity - that of blessedness or damnation...

In the contemporary Protestant world (and elsewhere - G.I.) ... for Christ's sake the Church has to become "contemporary", including within itself all social matters and fusing them...

What remains is an ecumenistic dream resting on human agreement concerning the utilization of various forms of worship of God. A clerical "social-contract"! There is nothing more of Christ in this design, creeping and serpentine in its expressions, whose incomprehensibility is concealed by an outward appearance of good intention...

We have before us an expressive declaration of the Moscow Patriarchate ... which has reached us. What do we read here? "We, the Orthodox Faithful, are expressing tremendous satisfaction that the Soviet government is maintaining those very same positions, carrying through a positive politics of cementing friendly relations between people of the whole world, offering to general consideration ever-new positive positions which could serve as a basis for the creation of common security from armed attacks, as well as from threats to the well-being of humanity from tests of atomic warfare. Human reason, whose power according to Christian conception is in its likeness to Divine reason, through various ways not always logical, comes to healthy reason. And where according to the established conviction of certain people there are no points of contact, the concern for the future fate of humanity which inhabits the earth brings both those whose faith lies in the Providence of God and those who lean only on materialistic conceptions to a common aim. And this aim is to find a common language and full mutual understanding, in order to preserve the human race and direct it into a stage of well-being, created by working in all fields of activity available to humanity. To our great fortune, our government also has this point of view. 'The correct way for questions of peace, both for Christians and atheists, is one: to live in friendship and to do everything in order not to allow the rule of Evil on earth' - these are the words of the head of the Soviet government, N.S. Krushchev (Izvestia, February 25th, 1959)." - (Notice that faith in Christ and repentance are not mentioned as the only conditions which could lead to true peace! - G.I.)

What then is the all-inclusive task for a "sovietified Christian" consciousness? The setting up of a state of well being on earth, realized simultaneously by both the faithful and atheists. But this is precisely the contemporary task of the communists! In addition, for both these and the others there exists a kind of common "evil", opposed to both, with which they are jointing struggling."

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Fr. Seraphim Rose likewise stated (among many other things on this subject matter): "...we have seen a reform of Christianity that does away with the Church as an instrument of God's grace for men's eternal salvation and replaces it with the 'social gospel'."



Metropolitan Augoustinos (Kantiotes) of Florina has this to say on these matters: “Do you not hear the voice of the serpent, seeking to corrupt the minds of Orthodoxy, leading us away from our simplicity? Here is what the serpent says: O, Orthodox Church! Why do you keep your distance? Why are you afraid of me? I am no dragon; I am a sweet angel bearing the message of love. I am not going to hurt you. Keep your dogmas and your traditions. Leave these things to the theologians...I invite you into my room to discuss other matters. Let us make a common stand against hunger, against poverty, against atheism, against communism, against war. Do these matters not move you? Does this proposition not excite you? Come then, let us begin our conversation on high, on the level of ecumenicity, on the level of mutual understanding. You will see just how beautiful our coming together can be!”

And Constantine Zalalas further elaborates that “the dominant trend ... (is) for the various Christian confessions to work (together) so as not to be seen as divided before (the) non-Christians as a result of doctrinal differences and to further show unity by placing a priority on issues of social justice and oppression of social classes. In other words, these Christian denominations said ‘look we cannot get together on doctrine, we cannot resolve our differences, at least let’s put those aside and let’s work together on social issues - on helping the poor, on creating better opportunities for poor nations, and fighting the oppression of social classes.’ But what is wrong with this? ... This steers the missionary and preaching efforts to give 1st priority to the formulation of methods of restoring social injustice as opposed to spreading the truths of the gospel ... The basis and the prospect of contextual theology was the conversion of missions into a “community of churches in mission”. But in Orthodox theology we do not have a “community of churches” - we have the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The appearance of Christian missions emerging from a community of “churches” degrades the One Orthodox Church to one denomination of these many Christian factions. So, it does not reveal the one truth and further degrades missionary work to a sociological instead of soteriological (related to salvation) perspective.”