

TRANSFORMING THE MODERN WORLD:

AN INTERVIEW WITH HIS BEATITUDE, METROPOLITAN HERMAN



MONTREAL – In the beautiful province of Quebec lies what His Eminence, Archbishop Seraphim of Ottawa and All Canada called “the heart and mother of Orthodoxy in Canada” – Sts Peter & Paul Russian Orthodox Sobor.

On the weekend of 20-21 October 2007, the Sobor turned 100 years old, and it was for this glorious occasion that His Beatitude, the Most Blessed Herman, Archbishop of Washington and New York, Metropolitan of All America and Canada travelled to Montreal to attend the celebration, and I was blessed to meet him

for the first time. (On the photo: Metropolitan Herman and Rebekah Goodyear; photo taken by Martin S. Paluch, October 2007).

Metropolitan Herman is thoughtful and deeply focused on the faith, and perhaps the two most significant things in his life are spreading the Gospel and instilling a deeper understanding of Orthodoxy in the hearts of all. He has no doubt as to the power of Christ’s message as demonstrated in the divine services. As he himself pointed out to the faithful attending the banquet in his honour in Montreal, “You need only to invite someone to the services once; after they have been to Vespers, their hearts will be filled with the Spirit and they will come again and again.”

Born Joseph Swaiko and raised in Bairdford, Pennsylvania of Carpatho-Russian descent, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman attended St Michael’s Russian Orthodox Church in Curtisville, PA and graduated from high school with

honours. He then attended Robert Morris Business College in Pittsburgh, earning a Bachelor's degree in Business Management and Secretarial Science, and served in Labrador, Canada in the United States Army. Later he studied at St Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary, graduating in 1963 and becoming personal secretary to His Grace, Bishop Kiprian. In March 1964 he was ordained to the holy diaconate and then the priesthood one month later, and became an instructor in Church Slavonic at St Tikhon's. One of his students became his assistant and has remained so for over forty years, and it was this man who informed me that His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman has a strict policy for "complete honesty."

Metropolitan Herman told me he was led to monasticism and the priesthood by "the guidance of my pastor: his recommendation was that I should give my life to Christ and work for His Church. Out of love and respect for him and his discernment, I obeyed his direction."

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman continued to serve and reside at St Tikhon's and worked in many different capacities in the Church through the years. On 10 February 1973, he was consecrated to the rank of Bishop, and served in several departments in the OCA, until finally being elected as Primate on 22 July 2002. He has been our Metropolitan ever since.

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman radiates dignity and commands respect. He is both a pillar of strength and a fair, powerful leader, but what struck me the most about him is his kind, compassionate nature and ability to take time out of his exceptionally busy schedule to talk with the faithful. It was thus that he graciously granted me the following interview, which I will now present without further adieu.

Q. You were born and raised Orthodox, and you once told me in a reply to my letter that you never expected to be "anything more than a simple priest monk." What was it like for you to be made a hierarch and the Metropolitan of the OCA?

A. I accepted it as a life of service to Christ and His Church, as in the words of St Paul: "Neither do I count my life dear to myself so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel by the grace of God" (Acts of the Apostles 20:24).

Q. What in your view has been the most positive event of your reign as our Metropolitan?

A. The incredible number of men being called by the Holy Spirit to serve the Church - all three of our seminaries (St Vladimir's, St Tikhon's and St Herman's) are at record enrollment.

Q. You have travelled a great deal in your work. Would you share some of your favourite memories and experiences?

A. I was blessed to participate in the Millennium of the Rus and the Centennial of St Tikhon's Monastery. I was privileged to celebrate the glorifications of St Alexis, St Maksym and St Raphael. I have met with patriarchs and presidents; I have met Mother Theresa and Chernobyl orphans. I was incredibly moved when I celebrated Liturgy at the Pochaev Monastery with more than 30,000 Orthodox faithful participating.

Q. As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of Sts Peter & Paul Russian Orthodox Sobor here in Montreal, I would like to ask you to say a few words about this church.

A. For a century Sts Peter & Paul Church has been and continues to be a witness to our Lord and Saviour and a beacon of Orthodoxy in Montreal, just as the Church of Antioch founded by the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul was in the first century. My prayer is that it will continue so "until Christ comes again."

Q. How would you define the role of the Orthodox Church in the modern world?

A. The Orthodox Church is the light of faith in the Word of God in the darkness of whimsical opinions, the pillar of morality amidst the quicksand of relativist societies. Our purpose is to transform the modern world, rather than conform to it, as the Scripture tells us.

Q. What would you consider to be the appropriate relationship between the Orthodox and the heterodox?

A. Orthodoxy needs to dialogue with the heterodox - as an opportunity to witness to the faith of the undivided Church "delivered once to the Saints"...and an occasion to invite them to share the life in Christ that is made available to men in His Holy Church.

Q. In your personal view, why choose Orthodoxy?

A. Orthodoxy is the true faith...taught by Our Lord Himself and traditioned to us by the Holy Apostles and their successors...exemplified and epitomized in the lives of the Saints, whom we can and should imitate...and sanctified by the blood of the martyrs for 2,000 years.

Q. In a world filled with multiple Christianities and religions, some might ask, "How do you know you have the True Church?" What would you say to those individuals?

A. Orthodoxy is the revelation of Jesus Christ taught by His very Apostles as it was preserved in the undivided Christian Church of the first millennium. Our Church has not added to that Faith or diminished it in any way - it remains unchanged. Orthodoxy alone has both Apostolic succession in our Bishops and the Apostolic faith of the early Church.

Q. Christ made it clear that the Gospel is for all nations, yet many Christians sadly have racist views. How do we, as Orthodox Christians, repair this damage?

A. We must reach out to everyone in our communities – all races, all nationalities, all ethnic groups – to people of all social, educational and economic levels – as St Paul says: “There is but one Lord...one faith...one baptism...one God and Father of all...”

Q. Many places in the world today still view women as being inferior to men. How would you define the Scriptural and Orthodox view of women and their place in society?

A. Our Lord (and Christianity alone) gave women personhood and the rights of full membership in the Church with sacramental privileges. They are equal with men – but not the same. Wives are partners and helpmates with their husbands in each other’s salvation and the salvation of their children. And women, just like men, are to use their God-given talents to the glory of the Lord and the service of His Holy Church.

Q. As our Metropolitan, I would like to ask you: Is the OCA advancing and growing as you would hope?

A. The OCA must ever more vigorously evangelize our existing communities, reach out to the non-Orthodox, and establish new mission parishes – so that we can continue to grow both spiritually and numerically for the glory of God and the building up of the Body of Christ, His Holy Church.

Q. What in your view sets the OCA apart from other jurisdictions?

A. The OCA does not see and/or treat America as “the diaspora” – rather the indigenous land in which the Church has been planted. The OCA is free to address the issues that challenge Orthodox Christians in America without intervention from abroad. The OCA illustrates what a united Church of all Orthodox Christians can be – one family (of members of Russian, Romanian, Bulgarian and Albanian descent and American converts), one Synod of Bishops, one witness to the truth of Christ in this country.

Q. How do you see the OCA as fully encompassing all three North American nations?

A. Our faithful across the United States, Canada and Mexico are represented in and governed by the Holy Synod of their Bishops. We share common ministries, theological schools and other apostolates wherein Bishops, clergy and faithful work together in the service of Christ, witnessing to Our Lord and Saviour, and encouraging others in all three lands to come to Him.

Q. Finally, in what direction do you see the Orthodox Church in America heading in the next few years?

A. We must continue to work toward one, united Orthodox Church in this country, as it was when St Innocent, St Tikhon and St Raphael worked together more than a century ago. We need to continue to reach out and bring to our Church the non-churched and others seeking the truth of the undivided Christian Faith of the first millennium. We need to promote the establishment of parochial schools, retirement facilities and other such institutions that will fulfill our responsibilities to "the least of the brethren."

I would like to thank His Beatitude for giving me this interview, which in my opinion is quite educational and insightful to the Orthodox Church. We are greatly blessed to be led by such a fine shepherd as our Metropolitan Herman. May he continue to reign in health and salvation. *Eis pola eti Despota!*

by Rebekah Goodyear