

Monk Seraphim (Storheim), *The Bishop in the Church: Reminiscences, Reflections, Ruminations: Feed My Lambs, Tend My Sheep, Feed My Sheep*. Self-published, www.scribd.com, 2014.



Reviewed by:
Deacon Stephen Sharman, PhD

Writing about the ministry of Bishops has been an important part of Christian thought since the very beginning of the church. It begins with our Lord's instructions to His Apostles, who were the first Bishops of the Church. See for example Mark 6. 7-13. St Paul continues the theme in his pastoral epistles. See for example 1Timothy 3.1-7. Writers in the patristic age also wrote about the ministry of Bishops. Among them we find St John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, and Gregory Nazianzus, *In Defence of His Flight to Pontus*, in which he attempts to defend his attempts to avoid becoming a bishop. In the Western tradition, with which this reviewer is familiar, we have the commanding figure of Gregory the Great (c.540-604 A.D.), known in the East as Gregory the Dialogist, whose work *Liber Regulae Pastoralis* was required reading for bishops in the medieval West. Indeed, King Alfred the Great of Wessex in England (848-99 A.D.) commanded that this book be translated from Latin into English as a book which he wanted his people to read and know. Another witness to the tradition of writing about the ministry of Bishops was the Venerable Bede (c.673-735 A.D.) whose *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* contains sketches of the lives of good bishops. A second work by him, *Epistola ad Ecgberctum*, contains a description of the work of bishops in the context of a plan for the reform of the English Church. This work deserves to be better known outside the world of specialists in early

English history. And this tradition continues onwards into modern times. As we now see, the Monk Seraphim's book stands within a long and honourable tradition.

Our author makes a valuable contribution to the Orthodox Church's tradition of writing about the ministry of Bishops. He is deeply rooted in the tradition as his quotations from the Bishop-Martyr Ignatius and St John Chrysostom's *Six Books on the Priesthood* demonstrate. He is at home in the tradition and can draw the links between it and the present day situation of the Church. He writes from his own experience of episcopal ministry in the Church. He is familiar with the needs of the Church in the present and addresses them. This reviewer is strongly impressed by the author's insistence that a Bishop must know his people and share their lives. Our author writes with great discretion, always a good quality. He writes with a wider picture in mind. This book is not merely a book about the ministry of Bishops, but a book about Christian life in general. As he writes about Bishops, the author also writes about clergy and lay people. This is perhaps the book's greatest strength. As a reviewer reads his book, he finds delightful digressions. At one time, the author introduces the Bishop's role of leading his people on pilgrimages to holy places. Our author uses interesting similitudes to illustrate his work. In one place, where he is talking about the problems that thoughts cause for prayer, he refers to flies that need to be brushed away. A Canadian reader will enjoy his references to mosquitoes.

The author begins the first part of his book with a study of the Incarnation, "Incarnational Ecclesiology." This is the theological foundation of his book. The Bishop represents Christ in his whole life and especially in the Liturgy. He represents the Christ who took flesh and came and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Then the author presents a series of short biographies of selected bishops, "Arch-pastors who are influencing me personally." It is this part of his book which reminds this reviewer of the Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. Bede also presents a series of biographies of selected bishops although his bishops are scattered through his book and not gathered together in one place as in this book. This reviewer, by training and vocation an ecclesiastical historian, found the biographies of the Bishops to be particularly interesting because they gave glimpses of the history of the Church

in various parts of the world and whetted his interest in learning more. The sections on Archbishop Paul of Kuopio and Finland and Metropolitan Wasili of Warsaw and Poland in particular drew his attention. It would be good to know more about how one nurtured the Orthodox Church in a largely Lutheran country, and the other nurtured the Orthodox Church in a largely Roman Catholic country. The author rightly identifies the important role that previous Bishops may have on the shaping and forming of the ministry of a new Bishop.

The next section is the heart of the book in which the author explores the various ways a bishop represents Christ in His Church. A list of the sub-headings of this section of the book suggests the richness, complexity and completeness of the author's theological reflections. They are: "Preamble about What it is Like to be a Bishop," "Meanings of Words and Some Historical Perspectives," "The Bishop and Tradition," "Serving as a Bishop is a Fearful Responsibility," "The Bishop as Shepherd," "The Bishop as a Father," "The Bishop as a Servant," "The Bishop as Builder," "The Bishop as Teacher," "The Bishop as Example of Repentance," "The Bishop as Example of Forgiveness," "The Bishop as Example of Christian Living and Leadership," "The Bishop's Relationship with Civil Authorities," "The Bishop as Example in Prayer and Intercession," "The Bishop as Example in Prayer and Spiritual Struggle," "The Bishop Re-presents Christ," and "The Bishop Re-presents the Church." Some of these themes are usual parts of a theological reflection on the ministry of a Bishop such as the Bishop as shepherd which reflects Our Lord's words about the Good Shepherd (John 10.1-18). Other themes are new to this reviewer as parts of a theological reflection on the ministry of a Bishop, but they are absolutely right. Throughout his reflections the author stresses the Bishop's responsibility for the care of Christ's rational flock and his relationship with Christ his Lord and he writes always within the context of the Church which is Christ's Body.

Part C of the book is a collection of documents, which illustrate the ministry of Bishops. They are drawn from various sources and ages. Among them are "An Injunction to Every Priest" by St Basil the Great, and "55 Maxims for Christian Living" by Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko.

This is a particularly good book that deserves to be read and studied by all members of the Orthodox Church and especially by Bishops.

About the reviewer: Dn. Stephen Sharman is a deacon at St. Nicholas parish in Narol, Manitoba. He received his PhD from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in 2013. The title of his dissertation was *Visions of Light in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*.