

Szymon Grygiel

## The body and sanctity: The case of nineteenth-century Russian spiritual elders

Inspiration for the present study comes from a fragment of Dostoevskii's *Brothers Karamazov* set in a nineteenth-century Russian monastery, where the monks and visitors assemble at the coffin of the venerable Starets Zosima (a spiritual elder who has just passed away) in eager expectation of a miracle about to happen. However, much to their disappointment, a smell of decomposition begins to come from the coffin and is taken by those present as God's sign that the deceased is not a saint. Father Iosif's argument to the contrary, that "the incorruptibility of the bodies of the just [is] not a dogma of the Orthodox Church" (Dostoevskii, 2009, p. 422), is not well-received among those assembled in the old man's cell, and they begin to attribute negative features to the dead monk.

It is astonishing that a somewhat similar situation should occur before the canonisation of Starets Seraphim of Sarov in 1903, only just over two decades after the publication of *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–1880). The fact is confirmed by a statement from Metropolitan Antonii of St Petersburg on his remains, issued in view of the scandalous controversy whether the decision to officially recognise his sainthood was right, considering the state of preservation of his relics seventy years after his death. Originally published in the Petersburg daily *Novoe vremia* (New Times), the text appeared in Polish on 7 July 1903 in *Gazeta Polska* (The Polish Gazette).<sup>1</sup>

This resemblance between fiction and history inspired me to investigate the means of sacralisation and desacralisation of the body in selected texts concerning nineteenth-century

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<sup>1</sup> See *Gazeta Polska*, 7 July 1903, 183, p. 2.

Russian spiritual elders, or *startsy*.<sup>2</sup> It is not my intention to take issue with the criteria of sainthood in Eastern Orthodoxy (see Charkiewicz, 2010a, pp. 109–122; Przybył, 2006, p. 204). Rather, the aim of this article is to consider examples of references to the body that are used to create or negate the image of holiness. With a view to this, I discuss three conditions of a holy man's body: in his lifetime, shortly after his death and as relics of a saint.

The nineteenth century saw a revival of the institution of *starchestvo*, spiritual eldership, one drawing on the tradition of the Desert Fathers and hesychasm (Gr. *hesychia*, tranquillity of the soul; see Przybył, 2006, p. 95), a contemplative stream which arrived in medieval Rus' from the monastic community of Mount Athos (see Ochał, 1994, p. 254). In this case, the Russian word *starets* means "a spiritual elder", who does not necessarily have to be "an old man" (Piekarska-Winkler, 2003, p. 123). The figure who played an instrumental role in this revival was Starets Paisius (Velichkovskii) living in Moldavia, whose Church Slavic translation of *The Philokalia* (a collection of texts concerning the Jesus Prayer practised by the *startsy*) was published in 1793. The *starets*, a spiritual guide usually living in a hermitage located in the vicinity of a monastery, was elected from among the monks. Most often, he was not an ordained priest but a *skhimnik*, a monk following a strict ascetic rule (Ochał, 1994, p. 256; Piekarska-Winkler, 2003, pp. 123–125).

The two most important centres of Russian *starchestvo* in the nineteenth century were Sarov Monastery (with the most renowned *starets*, St Seraphim, who died in 1833) and Optina Monastery near the town of Kozelsk. The role of the latter as a major spiritual centre goes back to the visit by Bishop Philaret (Amphiteatrov) of Kaluga in 1819 and his decision to build a *skit* (a lonely hermitage for monks seeking ascetic life filled with prayer) in the vicinity of the old monastery. It was shortly afterwards that a group of monks arrived in Optina from the Roslavl forests to begin construction works on the site. The late 1820s, when Father Leonid became the first Starets of Optina, opened a new chapter in the history of the monastery, one characterised by its openness to laymen (Kamiński, 2014, pp. 69, 71). The site became a destination for pilgrims from different social backgrounds, including the most

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<sup>2</sup> The questions relating to a holy man's body in his lifetime are discussed on the basis of *Starcy Pustelni Optyńskiej* by Ireneusz Cieślík (Cieślík, 2012), *Starczestwo: Kierownictwo duchowe w Rosji w XIX wieku* by Andrzej Kamiński (Kamiński, 2014), a brief biography of Starets Seraphim by Ioann Kologrivov (Kologrivov, 2008; original edition in Russian: Kologrivov, 1961), the volume entitled *Święty Serafim Sarowski: Żywot i pouczenia* (1999), and texts written in the nineteenth century: *Ogień Ducha Świętego* (Św. Serafin z Sarowa, 2008) (English edition: "The Conversation of St Seraphim with Nicholas Motovilov," 2003), and *Opowieści pielgrzyma* (1999) (English edition: "The Way of a Pilgrim," 2003). The second part of the article, concerning the body of a holy man shortly after his death, considers Dostoevskii's *Brothers Karamazov* (Book 7, Chapter 1: "The Breath of Corruption"). Devoted to relics, the final part analyses the coverage of the canonisation of Starets Seraphim of Sarov in the Polish press.

prominent intellectuals, such as Nikolai Gogol, Fedor Dostoevskii and Lev Tolstoi.<sup>3</sup> Personal contact with the *startsy* was particularly important for the Russian Slavophiles, a movement which searched for irrational elements of Russian spirituality that distinguished Russia from Western Europe, and found them at Optina. A prominent member of the movement, Ivan Kireevskii, provided Starets Macarius with assistance in publishing activity. What added to the air of mystery around the monastery was certainly its location. Sketching a romantic picture of the area, Orlando Figes notes the impact of the surroundings on the pilgrims:

The monastery was cut off from the modern world, inaccessible by railway or by road in the nineteenth century, and pilgrims who approached the holy shrine, by river boat or foot, or by crawling on their knees, were often overcome by the sensation of travelling back in time. (Figes, 2003, p. 295)

People arrived to see the *startsy* to “receive the word” (Cieślík, 2012, p. 13), one that most often was supposed to help them in a difficult life situation. The opponents of *starchestvo* considered their practice of “reading the heart” (cardiognosis) a heresy consisting in abuse of the sacrament of confession, which could result in tension between the elder and his brethren.<sup>4</sup> Such a situation finds its reflection in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

In the final years of the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church reviving after the trauma of the communist period recognised *starchestvo* as an inherent part of its tradition. This found its expression in the canonisation of Starets Ambrose of Optina in 1988; other spiritual elders from this monastery were declared saints eight years later. In this context, it is worth noting Jarosław Charkiewicz’s comment that canonisation does not mean the beginning of a cult of a particular person, but its official recognition (Charkiewicz, 2010a, p. 156). Indeed, this was the case of the *startsy* of Optina, whose cult had developed much earlier.

A discussion of issues relating to the body in the context of Eastern Orthodox monasticism would not be possible without making a reference to the views of the ancient Desert Fathers, ascetic theoreticians and practitioners who had a fundamental impact on the perception of the body in Orthodox Christianity. There are two major streams when it comes to their approach to the body. The first of them, represented by St Anthony the Great (died

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on the role of Optina Monastery in these writers’ lives, see Ochał (1994, pp. 258–266) and Cieślík (2012, pp. 149–156).

<sup>4</sup> In one of such cases, Starets Leonid was suspended by the bishop of Kaluga (see Cieślík, 2012, pp. 18–19, 80–82).

in 356), and inspired by Plato's vision of the body as the prison of the soul, perceived ascetic practices as a rejection of the physical nature of the body and all its needs. Fiercely condemned, the flesh was seen as the enemy of the perfect soul, and contempt for the body was tantamount to the elevation of the soul. In the second, less radical stream, ascetic practices, invariably including humility, did not aim to waste the body but to achieve a state of internal freedom by overcoming its desires (Łeńska-Bąk, 2008, pp. 72–84). The views of nineteenth-century Russian spiritual elders mostly drew on the latter tradition.

## A holy man's body in his lifetime

An interesting motif which appears in texts devoted to nineteenth-century Russian spiritual elders is their childhood illness and miraculous healing. In one of such examples, the seven-year-old Prokhor (later to become St Seraphim) fell from a bell tower and did not sustain any injuries (*Święty Serafim Sarowski*, 1999, p. 10). Also, when he was a young man, he was miraculously healed of a severe illness which had dragged on uncured for three years: the Virgin Mary appeared to him and relieved him of his pain and suffering (Kologrivov 1961, p. 387; Kołogriwow, 2008, p. 9). Prokhor explained his reluctance to resort to medical care as follows: "I have entrusted myself (...) to the True Physician of soul and body, our Lord Jesus Christ and His All-Pure Mother" (*Święty Serafim Sarowski*, 1999, p. 15).<sup>5</sup> A similar motif can be found in the life of St Ambrose of Optina. In this case, his illness also provided him with an impulse to make a promise of monastic life (Cieślik, 2012, p. 109). It follows that the bodies of future saints are presented as ones protected by God from an early age, but they are not attributed supernatural or miraculous powers at this stage.

It also is worth noting the attitude of the *startsy* to bodily sickness. Interestingly, St Ambrose observes that "[i]t is good for a monk to have passed through illness. When he is sick he ought not to strive to be cured completely, but only by half" (Cieślik, 2012, p. 113).<sup>6</sup> Sickness, just like mortification of the flesh, enables those suffering to maintain distance from earthly life. This, however, does not mean the rejection of the body, but putting it to use as a means of achieving spiritual values. Another example here is that of Starets

<sup>5</sup> English translation of St Seraphim's comment: *Repose of the Venerable Seraphim the Wonderworker of Sarov*, retrieved 20 July 2017 from <http://en.pravoslavie.ru/75700.html> (translator's note).

<sup>6</sup> English translation of St Ambrose's comment: *The Venerable Fathers of Optina Hermitage: Spiritual disciples of St. Paisius (Velichkovskii)*, retrieved 20 July 2017 from <http://stpaisiusmonastery.org/about-the-monastery/life-of-st-paisius/optina-elders/> (translator's note).

Macarius. As analysed by Andrzej Kamiński, in his letters to two young nuns (one of whom was his niece) Macarius, acting as their spiritual guide, points out that illness has a positive impact on inner life. In addition, he observes that the illness of one of them did not come by accident but was an act of providence, as Christ “sent (...) a bodily illness to purify her spirit”. Macarius sends his sympathies and assures her that it was God Himself who gave meaning to her sickness (Kamiński, 2014, pp. 166–167). The holy man did not approve of voluntary practices aiming to adversely affect one’s own physical condition. In a letter to his niece, he stresses that he would find it quite upsetting if she did not take proper care of her health (Kamiński, 2014, p. 127).

The attitude of spiritual elders to sickness can be summarised by a general observation made by the German theologian Walter Nigg, who comments on an exceptional significance of pain and suffering in Orthodoxy as follows: “Russian Orthodoxy perceives suffering not only as painful punishment. For the Orthodox, its meaning is far greater and even amounts to a healing experience, which attributes positive value to the act of providence” (quoted after Kamiński, 2014, pp. 101–102). However, longing for sickness can certainly depend on its gravity. Ridden with illness and approaching his death, Starets Leonid “asked his brethren to pray for him so that God would put an end to his suffering” (Cieślik, 2012, p. 83).

As recorded in *The Conversation of St Seraphim with Nicholas Motovilov*,<sup>7</sup> the Starets of Sarov believed that “[t]he true aim of our Christian life is to acquire the Holy Spirit of God”, and considered fasting to be only one of the means to achieve it (“The conversation,” 2003, p. 267). Indeed, stories about his life feature a number of severe ascetic practices which he followed:

His only food was stale bread, which was brought to him at certain times, and vegetables, which he grew and prepared himself. Later, instead of them he only had a bitter herb called *snitka*. He did not eat anything at all on Wednesdays and Fridays. (...) [He lived] without fire or light, even in most severe winters. He only allowed himself for a short sleep on the bare floor. (Kołogriwow, 2008, pp. 11–12).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Originally published in Russian by Sergei Nilus seventy years after the death of Starets Seraphim, just before his canonisation in 1903 (see Notatka Sergiusza Nilusa in Św. Serafin z Sarowa, 2008, pp. 99–101). English translation, see “The conversation” (2003).

<sup>8</sup> The original quotation in Russian reads: “Pitalsia on odnim cherstvym khlebom, dostavliavshimsia emu v opredelennye sroki da ovoshchami, kotorye on sam vyrashchival i prigotovlial. Vposledstvii on i ovoshchi perestal est’ i pitalsia odnoi gor’koj travoi – ‘snitkoj’. Po neskol’ko dnei v nedelii, v osobennosti po sredam i piatnitsam, on ne el voobshche nichego. Nesmotria na takoe slaboe pitanie, on dnem zanimalsia tiazhelym trudom drovoseka ili chteniem, a nochi posviashchal molitve i razmyshleniiu, bez osveshcheniia i bez ognia, dazhe v samye surovye zimy; spat’ pozvolial sebe lish’ samoe korotkoe vremia, priamo na golom polu” (Kologrivov, 1961, pp. 388–389) (translator’s note).

In addition to this, he kept silence for a thousand days, spending most of his time kneeling on a rock to resist temptations of evil, and wore a heavy iron cross on his neck for ten years. He was also attacked by a group of robbers and remained bent over for the rest of his days as a result of sustained injuries. All these elements are important in shaping the image of holiness associated with bodily hardship. A bent-over body symbolises humility, which was supposed to be the essence of Russian spiritual elders' attitude to life. It can be assumed that the social impact of visual images of Starets Seraphim,<sup>9</sup> which were circulated among the Russian peasantry, was quite considerable. In his study of Russian internal policy and social movements, the Polish historian Ludwik Bazyłow mentions the journals of the local and national politician Aleksandr Savelev, according to which his icons were a common sight in peasant cottages (Bazyłow, 1966, p. 279). It is also worth adding that on instructions from Tsar Nicholas II, Russian soldiers fighting in the war with Japan received various icons, including the icon of St Seraphim (Nichols, 1992, p. 222; Witte, 1921, p. 130). In the context of Russian defeats, this practice provoked a bitter comment from General Mikhail Dragomirov: "We are attacking the Japanese with icons (...) while they use bullets against us" (Witte, 1921, p. 130).

An interesting fragment of St Seraphim's conversation with Motovilov, in which both of them experience a visitation from the Holy Spirit, points at another important question: they can feel divine presence with their senses – touch, smell and sight. Hence, a pleasant warmth protects them from the winter's cold, and extraordinary fragrance is described by Motovilov as follows:

There is nothing on earth like this fragrance. When in my dear mother's lifetime I was fond of dancing and used to go to balls and parties, my mother would sprinkle me with scent which she had bought at the best fashion-shops in Kazan. But those scents did not give out such fragrance! ("The conversation," 2003, p. 276)

Sensations experienced by Seraphim and Motovilov belong to the heavenly rather than earthly realm, as confirmed by the words of the holy man: "No pleasure of earthly fragrance can be compared with that which we now feel, for the fragrance of God's Holy Spirit surrounds us" ("The conversation," 2003, p. 276). Seraphim tells his disciple that the connection between the feeling of presence of a divine person and sensual experience is reflected in an Orthodox prayer: "Warm me with the warmth of Thy Holy Spirit!" ("The conversation," 2003, p. 277). The use of metaphorical language relating to sensual experience amplifies

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<sup>9</sup> It is quite likely that they pictured him in the situations mentioned above, see illustrations in *Święty Serafim Sarowski* (1999, pp. 17–18).

the feeling that God's working is real. United with the soul, the body comes to be included in the sacred: man reaches the state of theosis.<sup>10</sup>

Texts describing Russian spiritual elders often mention their radiant faces as a characteristic feature of their appearance, one that has a great impact on the observers, and associate it with the working of the Holy Spirit. For instance, Motovilov is unable to fix his eyes on St Seraphim's glowing face: "I cannot look, father, because lightning flashes from your eyes. Your face is brighter than the sun and my eyes ache in pain!" ("The conversation," 2003, p. 274). Interestingly, this feature might be related to the strength of the body: the weaker it is, the stronger its radiation. In another example, Ireneusz Cieřlik quotes Archpriest Pavel Levashev's recollection of one of his visits to Starets Joseph (Ambrose of Optina's disciple and successor) lying on his deathbed: "I could not take my eyes off such a wonderful sight and it might have been ten times that I said my goodbyes to the Starets, because I kept looking at his glowing face, shining with an angel's smile and the light of another world" (Cieřlik, 2012, p. 145).<sup>11</sup>

Another issue to be noted here is the psychosomatic aspect of the Jesus Prayer, a devotional practice consisting in multiple repetition, over and over again, of a simple formula invoking the name of Jesus and involving appropriate breath control. The aim is to reach the state of "unceasing prayer" with, ultimately, no words uttered at all (Przybył, 2006, pp. 105–106). Learning and practising the Jesus Prayer is the subject of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the anonymous story of a religious pilgrim's experiences encountered as he seeks guidance from a *starets*, most likely written between 1885 and 1861 (Galiński, 1999, p. 7). The teaching of his unnamed spiritual guide finally brings the desired result and, having got accustomed to saying the prayer, the Pilgrim enthusiastically describes his feelings as follows:

My only desire was to go on with the Jesus Prayer, and no sooner had I started it than I felt joyfully relieved. My lips and my tongue recited the words without any effort on my part. I spent the whole day experiencing great happiness and a complete detachment from earthly things, as though I were living on another planet. ("The way of a pilgrim," 2003, p. 291)

<sup>10</sup> "Theosis, or divinisation, is a key concept of Orthodox theology, assuming a possibility of union with God already here and now, as summed up in St Athanasius of Alexandria's maxim: 'God became man so that man might become God'" (Przybył, 2006, p. 94).

<sup>11</sup> The original quotation in Russian reads: "Ja ne mog otorvat'sia ot stol' chudnogo videniia i raz desiat' proshchalsia s batiushkoj i vse smotriel na ego blagodatnyj lik, ozarenyj angelskoj ulybkoj i etim nezemnym svetom (...); Archpriest Pavel Levashev quoted in: E. Filiakova, *Startsy i predskazateli Optinoj pustyni* (Moskva: Ripol Klassik, 2008), p. 38; retrieved 10 July 2017 from <https://profilib.com/chtenie/71169/elena-filyakova-startsy-i-predskazateli-optinoy-pustyni-38.php> (translator's note).

Continuous repetition of the formula a sufficiently great number of times aims to develop the ability to perform the ritual unconsciously. Eventually, the worshipper does it automatically and experiences a sense of loss of control over his or her body.

## **A holy man's body shortly after his death**

"I expect brickbats from the critics" – this provocative statement from Dostoevskii's letter (21 August 1879) indicates that the writer was perfectly aware that his text was rather controversial. Writing from Ems, where he stayed to improve his ailing health, he informed Konstantin Pobedonostsev (the Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod) that he had finished Book Six of *The Brothers Karamazov*, entitled "The Russian Monk". The letter also reads: "I wrote this book for *the few*, and consider it the culminating point of my work" (Dostoevskii, 1991, p. 134, italic original). In another letter to Pobedonostsev, the writer complains about the science-ridden mind and nihilism of the times and explains that his intention was to make Starets Zosima's teachings stand in opposition to these ideas, which he has always tackled in his works: "I in fact intended the reply to all this *negative side* to be in Book 6, 'The Russian Monk' (...)" (Dostoevskii, 1991, p. 154, italic original). Creating Zosima as the embodied ideal of humble Christian life based on forgiving one another, Dostoevskii was aware of the risk of making his character unrealistic. Stressing his attachment to the principles of literary realism, he explains this to Pobedonostsev as follows:

And here in addition there are the requirements of artistry: it has been necessary to present a modest and sublime figure, while his life is full of comicality and is sublime only in its inner sense, so that because of artistic requirements, I was forced to touch on the most banal aspects in the biography of my monk so as not to violate artistic realism. (Dostoevskii, 1991, pp. 154–155)

Most likely, this passage refers to Alyosha Karamazov's written account of Starets Zosima's life. It is quite certain, however, that "the most banal aspects" of his life story are most visible in "The Breath of Corruption", the first chapter of the following book of the novel ("Alyosha"), presenting the events of the holy man's funeral.

Having finished Book Seven in September 1879, the writer sent it for publication with the conservative journal *Russkii Vestnik* (The Russian Messenger), where his works appeared

in instalments. In his letter accompanying the proofs, Dostoevskii asked the editor-in-chief Nikolai Liubimov to protect the text from excessive changes on the grounds of offending public morals:

I implore you, Nikolai Alexeevich, not to cut out anything from this book. And besides, there's no point, *everything is in order*. There's just one little word (about the body of a dead person): *started to stink* [*provonial*]. But it's said by Father Ferapont, and he can't talk any other way, and even if he could say *started to smell* [*propakh*], he wouldn't; he'd say *started to stink*. Allow that to pass, *please*. There's nothing else. Except, perhaps, the purgative. (Dostoevskii, 1991, pp. 159–160, italic original)

Dostoevskii's excuses continue further down in the letter, where he adds "one small nota bene just in case":

(...) please don't imagine that I could allow myself, in a work of mine, even the slightest doubt about the miraculous power of relics. The matter concerns only the relics of the deceased monk Zosima, and that's quite another thing. A commotion like the one depicted by me in the monastery once occurred at Mount Athos and is narrated in brief and with touching naivete in *The Wanderings of the Monk Parfeny*. (Dostoevskii, 1991, p. 160)

As freedom of speech in tsarist Russia was severely limited, writers could face repercussions for the views they expressed in their works. The best example here is the case of Lev Tolstoi, who was excommunicated for, among other reasons, his novel *The Resurrection*, in which he portrayed the Orthodox Church and the tsarism as allied agents of oppression of the Russian people, both of them filled with greed and hypocrisy (see Szkłowski, 1963/1967, pp. 677–679). In this context, it is hardly surprising that although Dostoevskii was known for his reverence for the Orthodox faith, he thought it right to add "one small nota bene just in case" in order to explain to the conservative circles of the *Russkii Vestnik* that the "scandal" he pictures (to use Mikhail Bakhtin's term)<sup>12</sup> is his rendition of a story described by a monk from Moldavia.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Without going into the details of profound literary analyses offered by Michail Bakhtin in his *Problems of Dostevsky's Poetics*, I only quote a brief characteristics of his category of carnivalised world, most visible in Dostoevskii's "scenes of scandal and catastrophe": "Here everything is unexpected, out of place, incompatible and impermissible if judged by life's ordinary, 'normal' course. It is absolutely impossible to imagine such a scene in, say, a novel by Leo Tolstoy or Turgenev. This is no grand drawing room, it is the public square with all the specific logic of carnivalised public-square life. And finally one must mention the extraordinarily vivid carnivalistic-menippean coloration of the scandal scene in Father Zosima's cell (*The Brothers Karamazov*)" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 146).

<sup>13</sup> For a biographical note of Monk Parthenius, see <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/46149.htm>. For Parthenius's account of his travels as Dostoevskii's inspiration, see (Ziolkowski, 1988, pp. 157, 163).

The impact of the state of a holy man's body shortly after his death on its desacralisation is discussed on the basis of "The Breath of Corruption" (*The Brothers Karamazov*, Book 7, Chapter 1). The interpretation offered below attempts to go beyond that of the narrator, who believes that the "scandal" involving "unseemly disorder" among the monks and visitors after the discovery of the smell of decomposition coming from Starets Zosima's coffin was caused by "the deeply rooted hostility to the institution of elders as a pernicious innovation" and "jealousy of the dead man's saintliness" (Dostoevskii, 2009, p. 420).

The gathering of monks and laymen around Starets Zosima's coffin in expectation of a miracle about to happen takes place according to an established Orthodox tradition holding that the death of a holy man is accompanied by miraculous events attributed to his dead body, which does not undergo decay and in some cases even gives off pleasant fragrance, a sign of God's grace to the deceased (cf. *Święty Serafim Sarowski*, 1999, p. 21; Dostoevskii, 2009, p. 419).<sup>14</sup> Among those present are also the sick expecting to be healed.

In this context, what can be used as a promising line of interpretation is an important observation made by Mircea Eliade: "When no sign manifests itself, it is *provoked*. (...) A sign is asked to put an end to the tension and anxiety caused by relativity and disorientation – in short, to reveal an absolute point of support" (Eliade, 1959, pp. 28–29, italic original). In the absence of a sign from heaven, the living endow death with significance and ascribe meaning to the stench of putrefaction, a natural feature of a dead body, interpreting it as a sign of providence. Reaction to the unconscious fear of death manifests itself in seeing it as God's intervention: "It shows God's judgment is not as man's", "(...) what was there to decay?", "It must be a sign from heaven" (Dostoevskii, 2009, p. 421).

<sup>14</sup> Louis-Vincent Thomas observes that "the smell of the body, the absence of signs of decomposition, and, even more so, the 'sweet' fragrance of some corpses acquired magical and religious significance" (Thomas, 1980/1991, p. 72). Cezary Wodziński writes about extraordinary signs accompanying the deaths of "holy fools" (*iurodivye*; singular: *iurodivyi*) as follows: "It happens that the death of a *iurodivyi* is accompanied by other miraculous signs, such as 'unusual fragrance spreading throughout the entire town' at the moment of the repose of Isidor of Rostov, or – as is more often the case – heavy storms with thunder and lightning of extraordinary intensity. (...) Of course, somewhat different storms arrive shortly after the burial, the 'storms' of miracles and miraculous healings" (Wodziński, 2009, p. 71). An interesting example of conflict between sanctity and the decay of the body is the case of St Paraskeva of the Balkans, who died in the eleventh century. According to the account of her life authored by the Bulgarian Patriarch Euthymius of Turnovo (1385), the saint was buried in an unmarked location near the sea. Sometime later, a stylite living in the area complained about the rotting smell of a sailor's body which had washed up on the beach and asked for it to be buried. In the course of their work, the diggers came across St Paraskeva's body, which was in perfect condition. Unaware of the significance of their discovery, they buried the sailor together with the saint. At night, the most pious of them, George, had a vision: he saw an empress sitting on a throne of light surrounded by glowing soldiers, one of whom ordered him to immediately bury the saint in an honourable location. The radiating lady, who turned out to be St Paraskeva herself, also talked to George, stressing that she could no longer stand the smell of decay. On the next day, her body was transferred and has performed a great number of miracles, healing the blind, the lame and the mad, ever since (Detelić, 2010, pp. 95, 101).

In Orthodoxy, death is a threshold beyond which man receives his reward or punishment (Belyaeva, n.d.). The way Zosima's dead body is treated amounts to a reversal of this eschatological pattern. The Starets is judged not in heaven, but on earth, which is also where he receives his symbolic punishment: since he fails to meet the criterion of sainthood, which for most of those assembled is that the corpse should not emit the smell of decomposition, his body is desacralised. The French anthropologist Louis-Vincent Thomas aptly observes that "the discourse of the corpse (...) is aimed at the living" (Thomas, 1980/1991, p. 58), which leads us to the conclusion that judgment on Zosima's body is in fact to serve those assembled in his cell.

Drawing on an idea proposed by Thomas (1980/1991, p. 51), it can be observed that the living have power over the dead body. The decaying corpse stirs illusions among those who met the deceased when he was alive and now manipulate the status of his remains. Indeed, the desacralisation of Zosima's body enables those assembled to discredit his life: "He followed the fashionable belief, he did not recognise material fire in hell", "He was not strict in fasting, allowed himself sweet things, ate cherry jam with his tea, ladies used to send it to him", "He abused the sacrament of confession" (Dostoevskii, 2009, p. 423). It is particularly the second of these comments that seems to suggest a picture of a lecherous ("ladies"), greedy ("cherry jam") and, most importantly, sinful mortal rather than a saint. Making such remarks is possible only when his body has been desacralised.

The circumstances of Starets Zosima's death make his greatest adversary, the *iurodivyi* Father Ferapont, a "holy fool" and a crazy ascetic relentlessly tracking the works of Satan, arrive at Zosima's cell. Tetchy, barefooted, girt with a rope and clanking the iron chains he wears, he makes his sudden appearance the very moment one of the monks thinks about him, as if it were some kind of pre-arranged telepathic sign. His arrival stirs emotions of the assembled crowd against the deceased Starets. He is certainly the one who cannot afford to beat about the bush. His assessment of the situation is straight and simple: "he has begun to stink". "My God has conquered!", shouts Ferapont "falling face downwards on the ground" and sobbing like a child. Touched by the scene, the sympathetic crowd seeking a new holy man who would replace the defamed Zosima finds him in the person of Father Ferapont: "'This is the one who is a saint! This is the one who is a holy man!' some cried aloud, losing their fear. 'This is he who should be an elder' (...)" (Dostoevskii, 2009, p. 427). The new point of support is in place, the fear has been conquered.

## The body of a saint as holy relics

In order to analyse the means of sacralisation and desacralisation of a holy man's relics, I consider the coverage of the canonisation of Starets Seraphim of Sarov in the Polish press. It needs to be noted that the material in question mostly includes telegram bulletins from the official Russian news agency and contains a strong propaganda message.

Following the examination of miraculous healings performed by Seraphim of Sarov and his relics, on 15 February 1903<sup>15</sup> the Holy Synod announced the decision to officially recognise him as a saint. His remains were to be laid in a shrine that was provided by Nicholas II.<sup>16</sup> The tsar had been instrumental in hastening the canonisation process, which went ahead in spite of the initial reservations of the Holy Synod (Freeze, 1996, p. 317).<sup>17</sup> Along with his family, he was present already at the opening of Seraphim's coffin and donated twenty thousand roubles to the monastery on this occasion.<sup>18</sup> Thomas aptly sums up the mechanism of using relics for political advantage: "Holy relics (...) provide support for local authority and speak the language of order and balance. (...) In all this, the person of a saint is only a distant and faded instrument veiled in symbols attributed to the deceased" (Thomas, 1980/1991, p. 119).

At this point, it is worth quoting a somewhat ironic comment from Ludwik Bazyłow, according to whom the tsar's intention was "to stage a show which would strengthen faith among the masses, most importantly in rural areas, and 'consolidate the union of tsar and people'" (Bazyłow, 1966, p. 279). Indeed, canonisation ceremonies were a carefully staged spectacle, including even the construction of a replica of Seraphim's cell (see the caption under an illustration in *Święty Serafim Sarowski*, 1999, p. 20). According to a news report published in *Słowo* (The Word), welcoming arches made of straw, with farming tools used as ornaments, were erected along the route taken by the tsar and his family from Sarov; peasant cottages were decorated with flags and kerchiefs.<sup>19</sup> In view of the simplicity of the whole exercise, combined with fraudulent evidence presented while drafting a list of Seraphim's miracles, Bazyłow writes that "in Russia the occasion was mocked rather than respected,

<sup>15</sup> All dates given in this article follow the Gregorian calendar (New Style).

<sup>16</sup> See *Gazeta Polska* 16 February 1903, 46, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Sergei Witte (1921, pp. 204–205) recalls that he personally heard from Pobedonostsev the details of his conversation with the imperial couple concerning their instruction to proceed with the canonisation of Starets Seraphim as soon as possible.

<sup>18</sup> See *Gazeta Polska* 19 November 1903, 317, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> See *Słowo* 3 August 1903, 175, p. 3.

which made the effect quite far from ‘consolidating the union of tsar and people’” (Bazyłow, 1966, p. 279). Apart from the social perception of the ceremonies held in Sarov in summer 1903, the canonisation of St Seraphim was an important means of reviving the myth of the Holy Rus’, the key element of Nicholas II’s propaganda (Nichols, 1992, p. 212). In reply to the radicalisation of the Russian public at the beginning of the twentieth century, the tsar used the remains of the Starets of Sarov for ideological purposes.<sup>20</sup>

Moving on to the descriptions of the canonisation ceremony, it is important to note that one of those carrying the saint’s coffin was the tsar himself,<sup>21</sup> which sent an important propaganda message presenting Nicholas II as a servant of the Orthodox faith humbly paying his respects to the Starets of Sarov. This move certainly made a considerable impact on the assembled pilgrims, whose number according to a Russian news report published in the Polish press was estimated at over three hundred thousand.<sup>22</sup> The sight of the tsar holding the weight of the coffin on his shoulders sent a clear message which could be easily understood by simple peasants, who demonstrated a distrust of abstract concepts typical of official religious and political doctrines, but at the same time readily followed practices involving external manifestations of religiosity.<sup>23</sup>

There is a clear resemblance between the descriptions of the crowd’s reaction to the sight of the coffin containing St Seraphim’s remains (“Having seen the coffin, the crowds of people fell face downwards on the ground, many among them crying”)<sup>24</sup> and the sight of Nicholas II leaving Sarov (“When His Majesty walked through the forest and among the people on his way back from the spring, the entire enormous crowd fell on their knees, shedding tears of joy and happiness”).<sup>25</sup> Indeed, subordination of the Orthodox Church to the state – which involved sanctification of the tsar and became increasingly stronger ever since Peter the Great (when the government-run Holy Synod took over control of the Church

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the political aspect of canonisations conducted under Nicholas II, see (Freeze, 1996, pp. 308–350); apart from the canonisation of St Seraphim, the author also presents those of St John of Tobolsk and St Patriarch Hermogenes, interpreting them as operations aiming to revive the religious legitimisation of tsar’s power in the face of the social crisis in Russia.

<sup>21</sup> See *Kurier Warszawski* 2 August 1903, 211, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> See *Słowo* 1 August 1903, 174, p. 4. Ludwik Bazyłow believes that the figure was overestimated (Bazyłow, 1966, p. 280).

<sup>23</sup> “The religion of the peasants was a long way from the bookish Christianity of the clergy. Being illiterate, the average nineteenth-century Russian peasant knew very little of the Gospels, for there was no real tradition of preaching in the countryside. (...) He vaguely understood the concepts of heaven and hell, and he no doubt hoped that his lifelong observance of the Church’s rituals would save his soul. But other abstract notions were a foreign land to him” (Figs, 2003, p. 323). For more information on the specific nature of peasant religiosity in nineteenth-century Russia, see Piekarska-Winkler (2001, pp. 124–127).

<sup>24</sup> See *Kurier Warszawski* 2 August 1903, 211, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> See *Słowo* 3 August 1903, 175, p. 3.

from the abolished patriarchate of Moscow) – was reflected in the consciousness of the Russian people. A news report published in *Gazeta Handlowa* (The Commercial Gazette) reads that “it is impossible to describe the enthusiasm of the believers at the sight of the Divine Father-Emperor nearby”.<sup>26</sup> Explaining this phenomenon, Boris Uspenskii and Viktor Zhivov write that “with the abolition of the patriarchate the monarch assimilated the patriarch’s functions, and this directly influenced his image. (...) If at first the perception of the monarch as the image of God derived from literary sources, we may surmise that it gradually became a fact of religious consciousness” (Uspenskii & Zhivov, 2012, pp. 43, 47).<sup>27</sup>

Another factor at play that might have had an impact on even stronger association of the monarchy with the Church in the consciousness of the Russian people was the doctrine of “Orthodoxy – Autocracy – Nationality”,<sup>28</sup> elaborated by Sergei Uvarov (died in 1855), the long-serving minister of education of the Russian Empire under Tsar Nicholas I. With a view to saving Russia from social revolutions, which repeatedly brought turmoil to Western Europe ever since the French Revolution, Uvarov claimed that profound attachment of the Russian people to Orthodox faith provided a guarantee of effective state authority, and saw a harmony between tsarist autocracy and the Church as the sole condition of proper development of the Russian nation (Pawelczyk-Dura, 2012, pp. 195–196).<sup>29</sup>

It appears that during the canonisation ceremony in Sarov the physically present figure of the tsar was worshipped to the same extent as the remains of St Seraphim. I am not in a position to decide how far the reports reflect the actual reactions of those assembled, and how far they might be biased to glorify the tsar.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See *Gazeta Handlowa* 3 August 1903, 174, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Uspenskii and Zhivov provide examples in support of their view (which can also be confirmed by descriptions of the peasants’ reaction to the sight of Tsar Nicholas II quoted above): “The incident that Catherine II describes in a letter to N. I. Panin of May 26, 1767, is indicative: ‘In one place along the route peasants brought candles to be put in front of me, but they were sent away’ (Solov’ev, 1962–1966, vol. 14, p. 52). Apparently the peasants thought of Catherine as a living icon. In his memoirs V. A. Rotkirkh testifies to the same attitude. Here some soldiers, responding to a greeting from Nicholas I, crossed themselves devoutly ‘as if church bells had summoned them to Matins’; later, travelling by rail with Alexander II, the same author had the opportunity to observe how railway workers greeted the tsar’s train by the trackmen’s huts: ‘the railway men and their entire households crossed themselves and bowed down to the earth to their earthly god’ (*Russkaia starina* 19:1889, April, p. 52) (Uspenskii & Zhivov, 2012, p. 47).

<sup>28</sup> The doctrine was later known as the “theory of official nationality” (see Pawelczyk-Dura, 2012, p. 195).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Freeze (1996, p. 315).

<sup>30</sup> For the sake of comparison, it is worth quoting Lev Tolstol, who warned Nicholas II about the illusion that enthusiastic welcome he received from the Russian people proved their love to the monarch (letter to Nicholas II of 16 January 1902): “Don’t believe that this is an expression of devotion to you – they are crowds of inquisitive people who would run just the same after any unusual spectacle. Often these people whom you take to be expressing their love for you are nothing more than a crowd gathered together and organised by the police and obliged to represent themselves as your devoted people (...)” (Tolstol, 1978, p. 610). A fragment of this letter appears in Nicholas II’s diary (see *Pamiętnik Mikołaja II*, 1990, pp. 65–66).

Another element to be taken into consideration is the feast attended by the tsar, his family and high state and church officials, which was part of the celebration. Sharing a meal involved a symbolic act of alliance of the throne and the altar, confirming that the two spheres were inseparable. The transfer of Starets Seraphim's relics, which had taken place ten days before the main canonisation ceremony, can be treated as his second funeral; his remains were laid in a shrine that was a gift from Tsar Nicholas II (see *Święty Serafim Sarowski*, 1999, p. 29). In view of the strongly rooted tradition of sharing food on ancestors' graves, the feast in Sarov can also be interpreted as a delayed wake, whose importance was all the greater for the fact that the imperial family was present.

The *Gazeta Kaliska* (The Kalisz Gazette) brings a news report on the miraculous powers ascribed to the holy relics, manifesting themselves in their healing function. The publication might have aimed to provide an immediate justification of the canonisation, just before the official celebration:

An immense crowd at the spring. Miracles repeat every week. A twelve-year-old deaf and dumb boy was healed on the third day. A three-year-old boy who had been blind from his birth regained his sight, and a deaf and dumb girl began to talk in the presence of all those assembled. The cases of healing are confirmed by officers on duty and witnesses from among the people. (...) Tremendously hot weather. A thirty-year-old woman had her hand healed. A crawling man began to walk.<sup>31</sup>

As it turned out, it was also the imperial couple who experienced the holy man's miraculous power. At night, Tsarina Alexandra had a bath in the spring from which St Seraphim had used to drink in his lifetime. Having expected a male child in vain, Nicholas II and Alexandra were convinced that it was the bath in the healing spring that enabled them to conceive Tsarevich Alexei (born in 1904) (see Witte, 1921, p. 205).<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, the event was not without its problems. More detailed information concerning the controversy surrounding Seraphim's canonisation (which Bazyłow writes about only in passing) can be found in Warsaw newspapers from the period.<sup>33</sup> As

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<sup>31</sup> See *Gazeta Kaliska* 30 July 1903, 209, p. 3. For more on the pilgrims who gathered in expectation of miraculous healing, see Freeze (1996, p. 325).

<sup>32</sup> The bath in the spring in Sarov was suggested to Alexandra by the French charlatan Philippe, whose role at the imperial court resembled that later played by Rasputin (Price, 2011, pp. 354, 360).

<sup>33</sup> This controversy is also mentioned by Richard Price, who writes that immediately after the opening of the coffin the Holy Synod issued a statement saying that incorruptibility of the body was not a prerequisite of sainthood. Price observes that the fact of decomposition of St Seraphim's remains "provided ammunition for the sceptics". Unlike Bazyłow, however, he argues that the controversy surrounding his canonisation, fuelled by opponents of the Church and the Tsar, did not

mentioned above in the introduction, *Gazeta Polska* of 7 July 1903 brings a statement from Metropolitan Antonii of St Petersburg<sup>34</sup> published in *Novoe vremia* (New Times), an influential daily issued in the Russian capital. Translated into Polish and quoted at length, the text informs the public about a mysterious “anti-Orthodox association” active in St Petersburg and disseminating leaflets calling for the examination of Starets Seraphim’s remains.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the materials were a result rather than the cause of broad controversy over this question: “Regardless of these leaflets, there has been much fatuous talk about the relics of Starets Seraphim even among educated people of sound judgment and belief”. Dismissing the authors as ignorant troublemakers, Metropolitan Antonii explains that he would not see it fit to address the public if it was not for the “unseemly mention of the contents of the coffin” made in the leaflets. The hierarch openly admits that “the coffin contains the skeleton of the Starets, clearly visible under the mouldy remnants of a monk’s gown. The body has undergone decomposition. The bones, the hair and the beard are preserved intact”.<sup>36</sup> Quoting Professor Evgenii Golubinskii – a renowned Church historian who calls “unreasonable” those who are convinced that immunity to decay is an indispensable attribute of holy relics – Metropolitan Antonii stresses that incorruptibility of the body is an additional rather than essential criterion of sainthood: the key factor at play is the miracles performed by the saints through their relics regardless of their actual state of preservation.<sup>37</sup> His public statement also aimed to improve the status of the only physical remains of Starets Seraphim, i.e. his bones. This reflects an Orthodox belief that human strength and power is in the bones rather than the flesh (Popov, 1997, after Charkiewicz, 2010b, p. 11).<sup>38</sup> Decomposition is a natural process and

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affect public enthusiasm, as the number of pilgrims who arrived in Sarov was higher than expected (Price, 2011, p. 349). Gregory L. Freeze, in turn, writes about disagreement between members of the commission of the Holy Synod established to draft a list of miracles performed by Seraphim. The conflict concerned the question whether the fact of decay of his remains should be made public. The first draft of the report not only did not include this information, but also “created the misleading impression that Serafim’s remains were intact” (Freeze, 1996, p. 320).

<sup>34</sup> Metropolitan Antonii led the canonisation ceremony in Sarov.

<sup>35</sup> Metropolitan Antonii’s statement and the measures taken against the “anti-Orthodox association” it mentions are briefly discussed by Gregory L. Freeze. According to police reports, the organisation planned to publish a series of illegal pamphlets and distribute them among the pilgrims in order to disrupt the ceremony and discredit Tsar Nicholas II (cf. Freeze, 1996, pp. 321–322).

<sup>36</sup> See *Gazeta Polska* 7 July 1903, 183, p. 2. Interestingly, Freeze mentions that even long after the event conservative members of the clergy criticised Metropolitan Antonii for disclosing the details concerning the state of preservation of St Seraphim’s body to the public (Freeze, 1996, p. 322, note 56).

<sup>37</sup> “The proof of sanctity of saints is the miracles that occur by their coffins or relics, regardless of whether the body is intact or the only surviving remains are the bones” (*Gazeta Polska* 7 July 1903, 183, p. 2).

<sup>38</sup> The original quotation in Russian reads: “(...) sila, krepost’ chelovecheskogo tela, po obshchemu uvezhdeniiu, zakliuchaetsia immeno v kostiakh cheloveka, a ne v ego tele (ploti)” (Popov, 1997) (translator’s note).

can only be prevented using special means of conserving the body. In view of the need for saints among the believers (and their rulers), the absence of signs of decay cannot be considered a prerequisite for sainthood.

It is quite certain that people in modernising societies question the reality of the sacred. They identify it with political and religious authority and want to unmask the symbols of the old feudal order. Louis-Vincent Thomas aptly observes that “relics, even in terms of ideological support, become less popular in societies which have written records of their origin and overcome their fear of death by indulging in the pleasures of consumerist culture and by belief in technocracy” (Thomas, 1980/1991, p. 120). In Russia, the most radical symptom of this desire to unmask became apparent in the aftermath of the October Revolution. As part of their general anti-religious policy, in early March 1919 the Bolsheviks launched a campaign aiming to ridicule the Orthodox faith by opening reliquaries and exposing the saints’ relics as frauds.<sup>39</sup> Importantly, the operation failed to make a desired impact on the rural population. Richard Pipes quotes an old peasant who summed it up as follows: “Our holy saints disappeared to heaven and substituted rags and straw for their relics when they found that their tombs were to be desecrated by nonbelievers. It was a great miracle” (Pipes, 1995, p. 346).

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Selected texts concerning Russian nineteenth-century spiritual elders contain references to the body in a number of contexts. Firstly, the body plays a significant role in creating their image of holy men in their lifetime: accepting a reasonable intensity of prolonged bodily sickness makes it easier for monks to maintain distance from earthly life; the need to constantly experience the misery of human condition is reflected in practices of mortification of the flesh; the Jesus Prayer with its psychosomatic aspect is a means to sensually experience the presence of the Holy Spirit with touch, smell and sight.

Secondly, considering a holy man’s body shortly after his death, in Dostoevskii’s *Brothers Karamazov*, the corpse of Starets Zosima who has just passed away is desacralised on

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<sup>39</sup> In 1919, Patriarch Tikhon quoted Metropolitan Antonii’s statement published in *Novoe vremia* (1903) in a bid to prevent the Bolsheviks from opening the reliquary containing the remains of St Sergei of Radonezh. He tried to convince them that the Church does not consider incorruptibility of the body a prerequisite for sainthood, hence the campaign of opening reliquaries was entirely pointless (Freeze, 1996, p. 322, note 56).

account of the smell of decomposition, which is interpreted as God's sign that the deceased is not a saint. This, in turn, enables the living to discredit his life.

Finally, regarding the body of a saint as holy relics, early August 1903 saw the canonisation ceremonies for Starets Seraphim of Sarov. Held amid mounting social tension in the country, the event was organised under strict orders from Nicholas II and attended by the tsar himself. The saint's relics were instrumentally used to legitimise the existing union of the throne and the altar. The message was stressed by a feast held in the vicinity of the holy man's shrine and attended by state and church officials. In order to consolidate people's allegiance to the ruling dynasty, the remains of St Seraphim were also used as a means of propagating the myth of Holy Rus', an idea of harmony between the tsar (the defender of Orthodox faith) and his God-abiding people, propagated by Nicholas II. Owing to a general belief that decomposition of the body rules out sainthood of the deceased, the state of St Seraphim's remains raised a great controversy on the eve of his official canonisation, stirred by an anti-Orthodox association aiming to discredit the Church and Nicholas II, the initiator of the event. In his statement on this dispute, Metropolitan Antonii of St Petersburg explained that the actual state of preservation of the body was not the key criterion of sainthood, and that holy relics included first and foremost the bones of the deceased and, apart from them, also the objects associated with him or her. As can be seen, relics can be sacralised (by attributing miraculous healing powers) or desacralised (by questioning their holiness), depending on the interests of the group which manipulates their status.

*Translated by Piotr Styk*

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## The body and sanctity: The case of nineteenth-century Russian spiritual elders

The article considers references to the body appearing in selected texts concerning nineteenth-century Russian spiritual elders (*startsy*), and discusses three conditions of a holy man's body: in his lifetime, shortly after his death and as relics of a saint. The body plays an important role in creating the image of holiness of the *startsy* in their lifetime. In the chapter "The Breath of Corruption" of Fedor Dostoevskii's *Brothers Karamazov*, the sacred status of Starets Zosima's dead body is cancelled by the crowd's interpretation of putrefaction of his body as a sign of God's judgment refuting the holiness of the deceased monk. This, in turn, enables them to discredit his life. As in Dostoevskii's novel, the dead body of Starets Seraphim of Sarov became a subject of dispute shortly before his canonisation in 1903. Drawing on the general belief identifying putrefaction of the body with the profane, a Petersburg anti-Orthodox association sought to discredit the Russian Orthodox Church by demanding that Seraphim's coffin should be reopened. In his statement on the dispute, Metropolitan Antonii of St Petersburg argued that incorruptibility of the body was not an essential condition of sainthood. During the canonisation ceremony, the relics of Saint Seraphim were used by the state power to strengthen the bond between Tsar Nicholas II and the people.

### Keywords:

*Startsy*; Optina Pustyn; St. Seraphim of Sarov; Starets Zosima; Nicholas II; relics; Fedor Dostoevskii; body

## Ciało i świętość. Przypadek XIX-wiecznych świętych starców rosyjskich

Artykuł rozważa odniesienia do ciała pojawiające się w wybranych tekstach dotyczących XIX-wiecznych rosyjskich świętych starców. Zostały w nim omówione trzy stany ciała świętego: za życia, tuż po śmierci oraz w postaci relikwii. Ciało odgrywa ważną rolę w kreowaniu obrazu świętości starców podczas ich życia. W rozdziale *Odór trupi* w powieści *Bracia Karamazow* Fiodora Dostojewskiego sakralny status martwego ciała starca Zosimy zostaje unieważniony przez zgromadzony tłum poprzez zinterpretowanie gnicia ciała jako wyroku bożego przeczącego świętości zmarłego. Dzięki temu możliwa jest dyskredytacja osoby starca za życia. Podobnie jak w powieści Dostojewskiego ciało zmarłego mnicha stało się przedmiotem sporu niedługo przed kanonizacją starca Serafina z Sarowa w 1903 roku. Powszechność poglądu utożsamiającego gnienie ciała z *profanum* sprawiła, że zwalczający prawosławie petersburski związek domagał się ponownego otwarcia trumny Serafina z Sarowa, chcąc podważyć wiarygodność Rosyjskiej Cerkwi Prawosławnej. Głos w sprawie szczątków starca zabrał metropolita Petersburga Antoni, przekonując, że nienaruszalność zwłok nie jest koniecznym warunkiem świętości. Podczas uroczystości kanonizacyjnych adorowane relikwie św. Serafina zostały

wykorzystane w służbie władzy państwowej w celu wzmocnienia więzi pomiędzy carem Mikołajem II a ludem.

**Słowa kluczowe:**

*Starczystwo; Pustelnia Optyńska; św. Serafin z Sarowa; starzec Zosima; Mikołaj II; relikwie; Fiodor Dostojewski; ciało*

**Note:**

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