

THE DIALOGUE OF ELDER SOPHRONY WITH HIS GENERATION WITHIN HIS BIOGRAPHY OF SAINT SILOUAN

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The Saints are the continuation of the epistle of the Word of God to their generation. Having trodden the path of Christ to the end, they received knowledge of the mysteries of His Kingdom. For this reason, in their own person, the word of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, which was given as the power of God for the renewal of the world and which testifies to the truth of His Resurrection, is 'known and read' experientially. Saint Sophrony was a pioneer in the way he wrote the life of Saint Silouan, and also an equally genuine descendant of Holy Tradition. Elder Sophrony describes the life of the Saint and analyses his teaching, while at the same time maintaining a dialogue with his time, not only in the style, structure and mode of expression, but rather in opening new horizons for the dark impasses of tribulation wherewith this world is stricken. God bestowed upon Saint Silouan a pure and simple word of life in a direct, concise manner, and chose his disciple, Elder Sophrony, who had followed the path of the Saint and was vouchsafed similar experiences, to transmit this word and shed light on it for the people of an age which has been conquered by a wisdom deprived of all wisdom and by intellectual pride. The dialogue of these holy men with their generation had its beginning in a monastic cell or in a dark cave, where, for long years, with uncontainable weeping, they let rivers of tears flow for the fate of a humanity which ignores or is indifferent to the love of its Creator and Father, walking with steadfast steps towards self-destruction, in time and, alas, in eternity as well.

*'Israel fought with God and which of us does not so fight. The world even to this day is plunged in despair, nowhere is there any solution... Our spirit would have a direct dialogue with Him, the One Who called me from nothingness.'*¹

Christ is the 'sign' of God for all generations. When the Jews erroneously asked the Lord for a 'sign from heaven',² he set forth the 'sign of Jonah'³ that foreshadowed his death and Resurrection that would give life and salvation to all mankind.

¹ See Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *On Prayer*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Tolleshunt Knights, Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 1996), 127.

² Luke 11:16.

³ Ibid., 11:29–30.

In the Person of Christ, through his life and example, an answer was given to every question and tragic impasse of man. The descent of Christ into the nethermost parts of the earth and his ascent above the heavens became the source of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit,⁴ which were poured out like rain from heaven 'on all flesh'.⁵ Christ is the Apostle sent from heaven and the 'faithful high priest',⁶ the Epistle of God to man which came of its own accord for the lost sheep. Man is also an 'epistle known and read of all men',⁷ which either gives a 'savour of life'⁸ witnessing to the truth of Jesus Christ and glorifying God, or a 'savour of death', a cause to blaspheme his holy Name.

The 'sign' of Christ is divine and hence it 'shall be spoken against'⁹ by the men of this world, whose 'heart is waxed gross, and whose ears are dull of hearing, and whose eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and the Lord should heal them'.¹⁰ Those who 'have ears to hear'¹¹ receive the gift of the Holy Spirit with gratitude and, though limited by the poverty of human language, they proclaim 'the wonderful works of God'¹² that he has done for their soul.¹³

In every generation the disciples of Christ were his faithful friends, who believed in his word, who suffered and reached the threshold of death for the truth of the Gospel. Yet they saw the miracle of God in their life, and experienced the passage from sombre darkness into 'His marvellous Light',¹⁴ and, as perfect imitators of Christ, they became themselves a 'sign' of God for their generation and manifest examples of his spotless love in a world sunk in the darkness of ignorance, even ignorance of the existence of this love. Saint Sophrony writes: 'What I went through is incised as it were by a sculptor's chisel, on the body of my life, and it is this that enables me to speak of what the right hand of God has done for me.'¹⁵ The Saints gained the pledge of victory over death for themselves and at the same time they imparted hope and the light of faith to many of their contemporaries, raising them from the slow death of despondency.

The Saints are the continuation of the epistle of the Word of God to their generation. Having trodden the path of Christ to the end, they received knowledge of

⁴ See Eph. 4:8–9.

⁵ Joel 3:1; Acts 2:17.

⁶ See Heb. 2:17.

⁷ See 2 Cor. 3:2–3.

⁸ See *ibid.*, 2:15–16.

⁹ Luke 2:34.

¹⁰ See Matt. 13:15.

¹¹ See Mark 4:9; 4:23; Luke 8:8; 14:35.

¹² Acts 2:11.

¹³ Ps. 66:16.

¹⁴ Cf. 1 Pet. 2:9.

¹⁵ Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *We Shall See Him as He Is*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Tolleshunt Knights, Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2004), 10.

the mysteries of his Kingdom.¹⁶ For this reason, in their own person, the word of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, which was given as the power of God¹⁷ for the renewal of the world and which testifies to the truth of his Resurrection, is 'known and read' experientially. 'The Saints never say anything of themselves...They only say what the Spirit inspires them to say.'¹⁸ They speak 'of that which they have actually seen, of that which they know'.¹⁹ Their word, their teaching and their supernatural way of life is the visitation of God in each generation that through them answers its burning questions and reveals the mystery of the love of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Saint Sophrony writes about Saint Silouan:

The thought occurs that in the person of Staretz Silouan God was giving the world a fresh example, a fresh statement, of the boundlessness of His love, so that through him, too, men, paralysed by despair, might find fresh courage. In the words of Saint Paul, 'Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting'.²⁰

Chronologically, our generation is closer to the Second Coming of the Lord than any previous generation and, therefore, it is burdened by greater afflictions and has greater need of deliverance than any other. The more evil increases, the more the end of the entire universe draws nigh and the more suffocating become the tight coils of despondency and despair. The word of our contemporary Saints is like 'a light that shineth in a dark place, until the great and terrible²¹ day of the Lord dawn, and the day star arise in our hearts'.²² Through their testimony, the men 'whose hearts are failing them for fear, look up and lift up their heads' because it is the only thing which imparts hope that 'our redemption draweth nigh'²³ and rekindles the faith and the gift of many for salvation. Through the words of the Saints, a new perspective opens up and afflictions and sorrows cease to oppress man because he is now established on a different foundation. The Saints declare that 'we continue in suffering only until we have humbled ourselves',²⁴ and that 'the Lord sends affliction that we may perceive our weakness and humble ourselves, and for this humility receive the

¹⁶ See Luke 8:10.

¹⁷ 1 Cor. 1:18.

¹⁸ Cf. Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Tolleshunt Knights, Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 1991), 57.

¹⁹ Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, 358.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30; 1 Tim. 1:16.

²¹ Joel 2:11.

²² See 2 Pet. 1:19.

²³ See Luke 21:26–28.

²⁴ *Saint Silouan*, 288.

Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit all things are good, all things are joyful, all things are well'.²⁵

Saint Sophrony was a pioneer in the way he wrote the life of Saint Silouan, and also an equally genuine descendant of Holy Tradition, as it is expressed in the Gospel of Saint John the Theologian, in the synaxarion of Saint Anthony the Great written by Saint Athanasios and in the life of Saint Symeon the New Theologian written by his disciple Nicetas Stithatos. Commenting on the excellent presentation of the lives of the holy Fathers by their disciples, Saint Sophrony himself observed that it requires a Saint to write the life of another Saint, to sketch his spiritual portrait,²⁶ otherwise it is simply one more novel appended to literature. Having known from within the things he writes about, Saint Sophrony speaks 'strange words, strange dogmas, strange teachings'.²⁷ Revealing ultimate truths 'about the word of life' which he has 'seen, heard, touched',²⁸ he makes evident that 'as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are the ways of the Lord higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts'.²⁹

As Father Antonios Pinakoulas has excellently shown in his article 'The Life of Saint Silouan the Athonite',³⁰ Elder Sophrony describes the life of the Saint and analyses his teaching, while at the same time maintaining a dialogue with his time, not only in the style, structure, and mode of expression, but rather in opening new horizons for the dark impasses of tribulation wherewith this world is stricken. God bestowed upon Saint Silouan a pure and simple word of life in a direct, concise manner,³¹ and chose his disciple, Elder Sophrony, who had followed the path of the Saint and was vouchsafed similar experiences, to transmit this word and shed light on it for the people of an age which has been conquered by a wisdom deprived of all wisdom and by intellectual pride. Saint Sophrony writes: 'The Staretz' sacred, plain teaching, because it is so simple, is beyond the understanding of many and so I have decided to add my own arid, distorted comment, presuming no doubt erroneously, that in so doing I may help someone to understand who is used to a different style of life, of expression'.³²

From the first lines of the book, Saint Sophrony causes the reader to thirst and seek for the great and eternal purpose which God has set forth for man through the manner in which he portrays Saint Silouan. The form that both the writings of Saint Silouan and Saint Sophrony take often develops as a dialogue. The question is set out and the answer is given in a perfect way, 'not after man'.³³ It might either concern

²⁵ Ibid., 305.

²⁶ Ibid., 4.

²⁷ See the Lauds of the Matins of Pentecost.

²⁸ See 1 John 1:1.

²⁹ See Isa. 55:9.

³⁰ *Σύναξη* 102, Ἀπρ.-Ἰούν. 2007, 64-75.

³¹ See Isa. 10:23 (LXX).

³² *Saint Silouan*, 119-120.

³³ See Gal. 1:11.

problems of everyday life, like smoking,³⁴ or crucial questions, existential and unanswerable with the mind of man, such as 'How do the perfect speak?'³⁵ 'What is truth?'³⁶

The core of the book of Saint Silouan and the main point of reference throughout all his teaching, his prayer, his repentance, is the experience of the divine vision that he had in the beginning of his monastic life, when, while plunged in extreme despair, he saw in the place of the icon of the Saviour, the Living Christ. Through this Theophany, 'his soul knew her own resurrection'.³⁷

Though the writer, Elder Sophrony, limits his role to that of a postman or a 'compositor printing someone else's text',³⁸ who transmits to his contemporaries the word given from above to his Father in God, confessing that 'the present book contains no ideas of his own',³⁹ he is nevertheless himself a bearer of the experience of the soul's regeneration. When he was a young painter in Paris he experienced the unfading Light shining round about him one Holy Saturday and it remained with him for three days, so he knew in his flesh that 'Christ is risen and there are no dead left in the tombs'.⁴⁰

What both these giants of the Spirit have in common is their point of departure in writing. Saint Silouan 'lived the great tragedy of the fall of man. He shed spiritual tears, compared with which man's ordinary weeping is nothing'.⁴¹ 'He was consumed with deep pity'⁴² and shed blood⁴³ praying for all the peoples of the earth. He wrote hoping that through his word 'even one soul may come to love the Lord, and be turned to Him by the fire of repentance'.⁴⁴ Elder Sophrony also writes that during his years of ascetic labour in the desert of the 'terrible Karoulia', 'his suffering for the world over the events of our age increased'.⁴⁵ He was 'possessed by the vision of hell here, in history'⁴⁶ and 'in despair he surrendered himself to prayer for mankind'.⁴⁷ When he wrote his spiritual autobiography and passed down to 'near and distant

³⁴ *Saint Silouan*, 70.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 57, 78.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 110–11.

³⁷ Cf. *Saint Silouan*, 34.

³⁸ *Saint Silouan*, 230.

³⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 257.

⁴⁰ See Saint John Chrysostom, 'Εἰς τὴν ἀγίαν καὶ λαμπροφόρον ἡμέραν τῆς ἐνδόξου καὶ σωτηριώδους Χριστοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν, Ἀναστάσεως', in Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *We Shall See Him as He Is*, 178.

⁴¹ *Saint Silouan*, 216.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 228.

⁴³ See *ibid.*, 236.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 280. In another place he writes: 'I write the truth out of love for the people over whom my soul grieves. If I should help but a single soul to salvation, I will give thanks to God', p. 341.

⁴⁵ Cf. *We Shall See Him*, 105.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, 105.

brethren'⁴⁸ that which was 'concealed with great zeal from alien eyes until then',⁴⁹ Elder Sophrony had the same hope as Saint Silouan, namely that 'his confession might help even just a few of those wearied by suffering to find a better way of confronting their own ordeals'.⁵⁰ His wish was to offer nourishment that can fill those who hunger during the famine of the last days, 'the famine of hearing the word of the Lord'.⁵¹ The dialogue of these holy men with their generation had its beginning in a monastic cell or in a dark cave, where, for long years, without even turning their gaze to discern whether it was day or night, with uncontainable weeping, they let rivers of tears flow for the fate of a humanity that ignores or is indifferent to the love of its Creator and Father, walking with steadfast steps towards self-destruction, in time and, alas, in eternity as well.

As Saint Sophrony gives his testimony about his Father in God, having himself had similar experiences and having attached himself to him with the sacred and unbreakable bonds of spiritual sonship, he reveals him to be a great sign and event for his time. The life of the Saint, which 'outwardly presents little of interest',⁵² his simple and modest words, as well as the way in which they were passed down to the Church by his disciple, our Elder, provide answers to burning issues with great clarity, even from the first lines of the book, and indicate a way to break out of impasses that cannot be overcome by human strength.

The main evils, which are a common feature of our time and from which flow a myriad of others, are pride and self-love, the darkening of the mind and its captivity by the spirit of wickedness, despair, and the multitude of involuntary sufferings which accompany it, the love of pleasure which has been developed into an art, and finally despondency and total spiritual paralysis.

Through the fall of Adam, the spirit of the enemy invaded with power into man's life, defiling his mind with the tendency to set his throne above the throne of the Most High God, the same tendency for which Lucifer himself was cast out of heaven and from an angel of light was brought down to become the prince of darkness. His fall into the depths of the abyss was like lightning,⁵³ and from there henceforth 'as a roaring lion he walketh about, seeking whom he may devour'.⁵⁴ In our time, selfishness and pride are conscientiously cultivated from a young age as signs of psychological health. Self-will, which according to our Fathers causes man to sink into perdition, is considered a characteristic of a strong personality and the root-cause of progress in this world which 'lieth in wickedness'.⁵⁵ As Saint Silouan writes, 'The

⁴⁸ *We Shall See Him*, 166.

⁴⁹ Archimandrite Sophrony, *Ὁψόμεθα τὸν Θεὸν καθὼς ἐστὶ* (Ἑσσεξ Ἀγγλίας: Ἱ. Μ. Τιμίου Προδρόμου, 2016), 12.

⁵⁰ See *Ὁψόμεθα τὸν Θεὸν καθὼς ἐστὶ*, 12.

⁵¹ See Amos 8:14. *On Prayer*, 105.

⁵² *Saint Silouan*, 9.

⁵³ See Luke 10:18.

⁵⁴ 1 Pet. 5:8.

⁵⁵ 1 John 5:19.

ailing soul is full of pride, while the soul that is well loves the humility that is taught her of the Holy Spirit, and if she does not know this, she reckons herself the worst of human beings.⁵⁶ Saint Sophrony describes the character of contemporary culture as ‘individualistic’, observing that in all its fields, especially in science and in art, ‘geniuses are acclaimed as originators of one or another particular style... But individuals *en masse* live in a state of decline and ineludible tragedy. The cult of decline leads to alienation from God... Contrariwise, an assembly of personae is the “salt of the earth, the light of the world”’.⁵⁷

God ‘first loved us’⁵⁸ and his love was manifested ‘to the end’.⁵⁹ He sets out as a condition to become his disciples, hatred for everything created that can hinder love for Him, hatred even for something as holy as family, even for ‘our own life’.⁶⁰ For whomsoever tastes the sweetness of His mighty love, to respond to it with love unto self-hatred becomes an imperative urge. ‘It was given to Staretz Silouan effectively to experience this love. In response he conceived love for Christ, and over long years continued in extraordinary ascetic struggle to ensure that no one and nothing should deprive him of this gift’.⁶¹ For Saint Silouan, who by the prayers of Saint John of Kronstadt had felt ‘the flames of hell roaring around him’ even before he became a monk,⁶² hatred for anything that separated him from his beloved Lord was a natural reaction. Being a ‘valiant soul, he unwearyingly continued to seek ever more fulness of prayer... until his desire not to spare himself, to detest and destroy his own life, was implanted deep in his being’.⁶³

Saint Sophrony writes that it was given to Saint Silouan to discover the truth that ‘the root of all sin, the seed of death, is pride’⁶⁴ and to his agonising question ‘What must I do that my soul may grow humble?’, the word of the Lord, ‘Keep thy mind in hell and despair not’, gave him ‘means that were unusual, incomprehensible, to all appearances cruel’,⁶⁵ but which led to ‘rest in God’.⁶⁶ He accepted this word with gratitude and did not conceal the saving energy that it bears from the people whom he loved and for whom he prayed ‘weeping in sorrow’.⁶⁷ Elder Sophrony describes pride as the greatest ‘uncleanness’⁶⁸ and the ‘dark abyss’⁶⁹ which obstructs the way to the unfading Light of the Kingdom of love. Discerning pride in ourselves ‘fills us

⁵⁶ *Saint Silouan*, 299.

⁵⁷ Cf. *We Shall See Him*, 205; Matt. 5:13–14.

⁵⁸ 1 John 4:19.

⁵⁹ John 13:1.

⁶⁰ See Luke 14:26.

⁶¹ *Saint Silouan*, 3.

⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, 21.

⁶³ See *ibid.*, 206.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 460.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 385.

⁶⁸ See *We Shall See Him*, 29.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

with grief at every level of our being'.⁷⁰ Elder Sophrony himself confirms that the only 'fire able to melt the heart that has turned to stone in its convulsions of pride'⁷¹ 'and to extinguish the working of the passions in us is self-condemnation to hell-fire with anger and abhorrence against ourselves'.⁷²

Through the Fall, a disastrous splitting of man's personality took place. The mind and the heart were separated, and in our times, when a multitude of images are presented before our eyes with vertiginous speed, the captivity of the mind by the spirit of wickedness is unprecedented. Being dispersed in all creation, the mind is darkened, and the imagination grows in excess, dividing man from God as his attention is distracted from the memory of eternity. The children of this age take refuge in fantasy for inspiration and comfort in all the sorrows that come upon them. In the first stage, the imagination draws the mind to 'worship the creature more than the Creator',⁷³ but then, as a potential bearer of demonic energy,⁷⁴ it gradually enslaves man and leads him even to pathological states, which are presented as evidence of intellectual and artistic genius. The children of God, however, as is shown in the example of Saint Silouan, derive inexhaustible inspiration and spiritual courage unto death through the spiritual remembrance of the benefits which the Lord 'has wrought and still works upon us',⁷⁵ and through the calling to mind of the 'gentle gaze of the joyous, all-forgiving, boundlessly-loving Christ'.⁷⁶ They avoid even that kind of imagination which is the work of the mind that 'ponders the solution of some problem or another', and which 'is of immense significance in human culture',⁷⁷ lest it hinder them from 'offering their first thought and their first energy to God'.⁷⁸ In this way the mind remains fixed and 'in humility contemplates the Lord, having no other thoughts'.⁷⁹

In our times, the passions of dishonour have been cultivated into an art, and that which is against nature is presented as natural to man even from a tender age. Love of pleasure paralyses the powers of the soul and deadens her to such an extent that she is unable to attain to the spotless love of Christ, inasmuch as it extinguishes in the heart the memory of this 'greater love', as well as the desire for it. Even among the faithful the question arises about the way of confronting the temptations which relentlessly attack contemporary man from all directions.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 165.

⁷¹ See *ibid.*, 49.

⁷² See *ibid.*, 80.

⁷³ Cf. Rom. 1:25.

⁷⁴ 'The world of the human will and imagination is the world of mirages. It is common to man and the fallen angels, and imagination is, therefore, often a conductor of demonic energy'. *Saint Silouan*, 158.

⁷⁵ See the Anaphora of the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁷⁷ See *ibid.*, 155.

⁷⁸ See *ibid.*, 155.

⁷⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 153.

In his book, Saint Sophrony reveals the wondrous world of the deep heart and the true reality of passionlessness, which remains incomprehensible to the world. As a young novice, Saint Silouan fell once into a carnal thought and after his spiritual father advised him in confession never to let his mind linger on such suggestive ideas, for the remaining forty-six years of his monastic life he never ‘indulged in a single dissolute imagining.’⁸⁰ Saint Sophrony analysed the evolution of thought with scientific precision, how the mind descends first into the natural heart and later ‘into those depths that are no longer of the flesh,’⁸¹ where it contemplates the splendour of God and of man’s being. In the deep heart, man ‘sees that the existence of mankind is not something alien and extraneous to him but is inextricably bound up with his own being.’⁸² He accurately defines the arduous yet wondrous work of ascetic vigilance, through which, if we are to explain it in conventional terms, power is given to man to control the depths of his subconscious.⁸³ The heart ceases to be a mere fleshly organ. Its true value as a spiritual phenomenon, as the centre of life, comes to the fore. It is within its bowels that the warmth of love for God begins and from there it is imparted to the whole man, even to his body, which thus becomes dead to the passions. Elder Sophrony explains with great clarity that the only way to avert sin is through an inner attitude of the mind established through prayer in the deep heart⁸⁴ where warfare is waged with every kind of temptation. In the ascetic labour of vigilance, the man of faith conquers the root, his fleshly heart, and from there becomes the conqueror, king, and sovereign of all his nature. Even through only a little contrition and sorrowful love, all the thoughts and every movement of the heart are clearly discerned and controlled. The spiritual victory over the passions takes place in the heart of man and it is there that the salvation of the world is achieved. ‘The real life of the Christian is lived in this deep heart, hidden not only from alien eyes but also, in its fulness, from the owner of the heart himself. He who enters these secret recesses finds himself face to face with the mystery of being.’⁸⁵

If we are to gain the victory of passionlessness, which leads to the peaceful harbour of the Lord Jesus, we must become friends of the Cross, we must experience pain and go through suffering with ‘rivers of waters that run down our eyes.’⁸⁶ When in accordance with the word of Christ to Saint Silouan, we condemn ourselves to hell, the evil spirit is unable to follow us in our descent and our heart is delivered from the power of the enemy. The struggle occurs on a different level from that of the ordinary, and consists of ‘humbling ourselves’⁸⁷ so as to attract the grace of the Holy

⁸⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁸¹ Ibid., 47.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ See *ibid.*, 141.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 137–142.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁶ Cf. Ps. 119:136.

⁸⁷ *Saint Silouan*, 425.

Spirit, whose sweetness is indescribable and incomparable with any carnal pleasure.⁸⁸ 'When the soul is contemplating her beloved Lord, the world is left behind, and the soul does not care to let her thoughts rest on it, for there is not sweetness therein.'⁸⁹

In sketching the personality of Saint Silouan, Saint Sophrony opens before our eyes the view of the true man as *hypostasis*, depicting the original beauty of man created in the 'image and likeness' of God⁹⁰ with 'a heart fashioned in unique manner',⁹¹ enlarged 'fourfold'.⁹² He proclaims with conviction that the 'normal religious state for the human spirit'⁹³ is not a utopia; it is that kind of prayer when the mind is indissolubly united with the heart and all man's being turns like a 'tight knot'⁹⁴ towards God and reaches up to him with irresistible love. In this natural religious state, man bears in his deep heart a spiritual and divine sensation.⁹⁵

In our times, an attempt is being made to define man's being and to understand the difference between the person and the individual. Saint Sophrony begins the introduction to his book with the paradoxical phrase, 'There lived a man in the world',⁹⁶ not just a lump of flesh, but a person with a deep heart, 'a man of godly desires'. With a spare few words he leads us into the mystery of the person, of the man 'over whom there is joy in heaven'⁹⁷ for 'that he is born into the world'⁹⁸ and who is an event even for his Creator Himself. Saint Silouan 'prayed long and his tears were unrestrained: "have mercy upon me"', and when the Lord was well pleased to visit 'his soul grown weak from despair', 'he tirelessly bore witness that God is love, love immeasurable, love incomprehensible'.⁹⁹

When like Saint Silouan, after much suffering and deep mourning, in a paroxysm of repentant prayer face to Face, man is reborn from above, and in the depths of his being 'a wondrous flower blossoms—the person—the hypostasis'¹⁰⁰, he then becomes the 'target of God'.¹⁰¹ His gaze is continually turned to the Face of the Lord, and whether he prays, or works, or walks or rests, he converses and even quarrels with him, not for the satisfaction of his vanity, but for the sake of the salvation of the whole world. He beseeches the merciful Lord to grant that all the peoples of the earth might know him in the Holy Spirit,¹⁰² while he strives to fathom the mystery of

⁸⁸ See *ibid.*, 343.

⁸⁹ See *ibid.*, 504.

⁹⁰ Gen. 1:26.

⁹¹ See Ps. 32:15 (LXX).

⁹² See Luke 19:8.

⁹³ *Saint Silouan*, 133.

⁹⁴ *We Shall See Him*, 162. 'The whole of me — mind, heart, even my body contracted into a single tight knot'.

⁹⁵ See Prov. 15:14 (LXX).

⁹⁶ *Saint Silouan*, 1.

⁹⁷ See Luke 15:10.

⁹⁸ John 16:21.

⁹⁹ See *Saint Silouan*, 1.

¹⁰⁰ *We Shall See Him*, 186.

¹⁰¹ Job 7:20.

¹⁰² See *Saint Silouan*, 274.

the judgements of his chastening, as revealed in the Person of the Only-begotten Son of God, so as to love him more deeply and follow him more faithfully.

As in the Holy Trinity each *hypostasis* is perfect God because he bears the fulness of the Divine Essence and of the Divine Energy, so also the true man, according to the image and likeness of God, is a bearer of a fulfilled *hypostasis*, because, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, he was given to discover the consubstantiality of mankind, embracing in his heart all human beings from the first to the last, and interceding for them before God. This is the universality of Christ, diametrically opposed to the man which is the product of the internet, who, though he is informed about whatever happens at the other end of the world and keeps in contact electronically with a multitude of people of different nationalities, has, however, lost the inheritance of any kind of tradition and has allowed his heart to become atrophied, unable to have genuine contact with God and man.

Saint Sophrony writes about Saint Silouan that 'he began to understand the commandment, "Love thy neighbour as thyself" as something more than an ethical imperative. In the word "as" he saw an indication, not of a required degree of love but of an ontological community of being'.¹⁰³ Furthermore, love for one's neighbour, the conviction that 'our brother is our life',¹⁰⁴ becomes a criterion of the authenticity of the love for God. 'The second commandment affords us the means whereby to check how truly we are living in the true God'.¹⁰⁵

In our time, 'because iniquity abounds, the love of many has waxed cold'.¹⁰⁶ In spite of all the impressive development of means of communication, contemporary man finds himself severed from God and imprisoned in his ego, so that he experiences bitter loneliness which cools his heart and makes it iron.¹⁰⁷ A little before he proceeded to his inconceivable sacrifice, the Lord warns us that 'without Him we can do nothing',¹⁰⁸ and that 'if a man abide not in Him, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned'.¹⁰⁹ On his own, without the renewing of God's life-giving breath, man is nothing, 'he is earth, and sinful earth'.¹¹⁰

The heart is quickened through faith 'which worketh by love'¹¹¹ in the word of Christ and above all through the invocation of his Name, 'which is above every name and before which every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth'.¹¹² Calling unceasingly upon him, with acute pain

¹⁰³ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 371.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 117.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Matt. 24:12.

¹⁰⁷ See *Saint Silouan*, 275.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. John 15:5.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 15:6.

¹¹⁰ See *Saint Silouan*, 435.

¹¹¹ Gal. 5:6.

¹¹² Cf. Phil. 2:9.

of heart, we confess our spiritual poverty which, being a true and humble attitude, attracts the Spirit of God to impart to us the blessedness of communion with him in his blessed Kingdom.¹¹³ Unceasing presentation before God ‘in fear and love’¹¹⁴ fills all the valleys of the soul and ignites in the heart the fire which the Lord came to send upon the earth,¹¹⁵ annihilating any need for fences of protection and created substitutes.

Worldwide sin ‘grieves the Holy Spirit,’¹¹⁶ who has perceptibly withdrawn his grace from the world. Hence the psyche of contemporary man has weakened and the tragedy of war, of terrorist acts, of diseases and the multitude of involuntary sufferings have brought despair, faintheartedness, and the worst of the passions: despondency, which leads to total spiritual paralysis. Elder Sophrony defines despondency as the lack of care for our salvation.¹¹⁷ The other passions wage war against us in an obvious way, and when we wrestle against them we may gain spiritual gifts and precious knowledge, whereas despondency, on the contrary, comes upon us insidiously. The paralysis that it brings about ‘comes little by little like some kind of sleep, without provoking any sense of fear.’¹¹⁸ For this reason it literally slays the *hypostasis* of man. The most perfect expression of despondency and despair are the words of the Apostle about those who believed not in the Resurrection: ‘Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.’¹¹⁹

The personalities and the words of these two men of the Spirit, our holy Fathers Silouan and Sophrony, constitute the opposite extreme to the plague of despondency. Saint Silouan is described as a man of ‘insatiable spiritual thirst’¹²⁰ and whatever subject he may refer to in his writings, he tirelessly returns to ‘seeking in tears’ the gentle gaze of the Lord Jesus that, from the moment of its encounter, deeply wounded his heart for ever. ‘My soul yearns after the Lord and I seek Him in tears.’¹²¹ ‘My soul languishes here on earth and longs after the things of heaven.’¹²² ‘There is nought on earth can satisfy the soul that has come to know God. She longs continually for the Lord, and, like a child that has lost its mother, cries: “My soul yearns after Thee, and I seek Thee in tears”’.¹²³ Saint Sophrony also writes about his ‘unceasing agony of the soul’ and ‘dreadful torment’ provoked by the awareness of how far he was from God. He describes his inconsolable mourning: ‘... as soon as I would return to my

¹¹³ See Matt. 5:3.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Saint Silouan*, 178.

¹¹⁵ See Luke 12:49.

¹¹⁶ See Eph. 4:30.

¹¹⁷ See Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου, *Οικοδομώντας τὸν ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ μέσα μας καὶ στοὺς ἀδελφούς μας*, Τόμος Α' (Ἐσσεξ Ἀγγλίας: Ἱ. Μ. Τιμίου Προδρόμου, 2013), 192.

¹¹⁸ Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου, *Οικοδομώντας τὸν ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ*, Τόμος Α', 193.

¹¹⁹ 1 Cor. 15:32.

¹²⁰ Cf. *Saint Silouan*, 1.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 272.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 504.

cell, even before I would close the door, weeping took hold of me. At times, the pain because of my separation from God thrust me to the floor and in the quietness of the night I would continue for hours shedding tears and lamenting for my inexpressibly great loss.¹²⁴

The spiritual thirst of Saint Silouan was already manifest from his early childhood. To the doubtful thoughts about the existence of God sown in his soul by an itinerant bookseller, he reacted with an inner decision to 'go all over the world looking for God'.¹²⁵ Of a truth, he compassed all the earth of his heart so as not to leave there any 'high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God',¹²⁶ neither any dark corner which would be unbefitting for a dwelling-place of his Spirit. When Saint Silouan saw Christ in the Holy Spirit, the flame of his longing blazed forth and ever since, face to Face with the Lord, he interceded for the salvation of the world. Elder Sophrony describes Saint Silouan as a man whose inner tension never slackened¹²⁷ and whose 'long life of spiritual struggle, especially after that night of supernatural conversation in prayer, was wholly devoted to the search for humility'.¹²⁸ Saint Sophrony himself also experienced profound grief of the spirit at the awareness of his separation from God as 'an agony, whose pain is sharper than a knife'.¹²⁹ 'In a transport of repentance', and striving to resume the original dialogue between God and man in Paradise, which began with the question 'Adam, where art thou?',¹³⁰ he was given 'the experience both of hell and of resurrection'.¹³¹ The vision of the holiness of the humble God Christ made his longing 'for forgiveness and reconciliation'¹³² and likeness with him in his humility¹³³ 'like a deadly thirst'.¹³⁴ Just as it happened with his Father in God, when he was in the blackness of the abyss a ray of the uncreated Sun broke through comforting his grieving soul,¹³⁵ and he was overcome by an unbearable thirst for the salvation of man.¹³⁶

For Saint Sophrony, although the answer to insufferable tribulations passes through the strait and narrow way, it is nevertheless very simple: 'Outside Christ, without Christ, there is no resolving the tragedy of the earthly history of mankind'.¹³⁷ He himself for decades suffered intensely from the nightmarish sight of fratricidal conflicts. He wrote: 'At times I am ready to roar with pain like a wild beast and I feel

¹²⁴ Ὁψόμεθα τὸν Θεόν καθὼς ἐστι, 169.

¹²⁵ *Saint Silouan*, 10–11.

¹²⁶ See 2 Cor. 10:5.

¹²⁷ Cf. *Saint Silouan*, 39. See also p. 24.

¹²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 210–11. The conversation referred to was when he heard the word 'Keep thy mind in hell...'

¹²⁹ Cf. *We Shall See Him*, 32.

¹³⁰ Gen. 3:9.

¹³¹ *We Shall See Him*, 45.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 154.

¹³³ This Chapter is omitted in the English edition. See Ὁψόμεθα τὸν Θεόν καθὼς ἐστι, 380.

¹³⁴ *We Shall See Him*, 154.

¹³⁵ See *ibid.*, 67.

¹³⁶ Ὁψόμεθα τὸν Θεόν καθὼς ἐστι, 382.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 30–31.

like a tiny creature maimed by a car. I crawl around like that weak creature, writhing with pain, far from the paths of men'.¹³⁸ However, he had learned to understand that all the suffering and pain he experienced became a reason for turning to God and he advocated to transform its energy into a dialogue with the Lord, who alone is 'able to save from death',¹³⁹ so as to rise from the psychological level to the ontological. In this way every crisis can become the beginning of a great regeneration and even sin can turn into a springboard for eternal life. 'When, however, the pain of the heart reaches the limit of our physical endurance, then the invocation of the Name of Jesus Christ brings the *peace* which preserves man alive'.¹⁴⁰

As Saint Silouan writes, 'all men desire peace but they do not know how to attain it'.¹⁴¹ The world has become the eye-witness of a multitude of crimes in the name of justice, equality, and peace. Rights are continuously spoken about, and yet the world is crushed by the impossibility to fulfil these principles. Many children of Western culture are attracted by the enticing atmosphere of Eastern religions and, seeking for a spiritual dimension to their lives in reaction to the nightmarish reality which surrounds them, they take refuge in different forms of oriental meditation. Saint Sophrony himself ventured onto this path in his youth, until the Lord 'turned and looked upon him'¹⁴² and revealed to him the unshakable truth of the Sinaitic revelation.¹⁴³ For his erring on alien paths, he 'wept bitterly' for years, considering it as suicide on the spiritual level and as betrayal against the Fatherly love. The children of the Kingdom do not merely seek to put off sin and every negative energy, but also to put on Christ,¹⁴⁴ by preserving a continually increasing and never slackening relationship of love with his Person. God is not an abstract idea, some impersonal existence, but the very Creator and Saviour of the world: he who for our salvation 'made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant'¹⁴⁵ and filled all creation even to the abyss of hell with the grace of his presence; he 'which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled';¹⁴⁶ he who feeds us unto life eternal in every Liturgy with his most pure Body and most precious Blood.

Saint Sophrony places the question of justice and peace on a different basis in a very vivid way by depicting the image of the inverted pyramid of the being of all humanity. The solution to every problem is given in the Person of Christ.

¹³⁸ Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου, *Τὸ Μυστήριον τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Ζωῆς* (Ἑσσεξ Ἀγγλίας: Ἱ. Μ. Τιμίου Προδρόμου, 2011), 417.

¹³⁹ Cf. Heb. 5:7.

¹⁴⁰ Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου, *Τὸ Μυστήριον τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Ζωῆς*, 417.

¹⁴¹ *Saint Silouan*, 312.

¹⁴² Cf. Luke 22:61.

¹⁴³ Exod. 3:14.

¹⁴⁴ See Col. 3:9–10.

¹⁴⁵ Phil. 2:7.

¹⁴⁶ 1 John 1:1.

Without denying the fact of inequality, 'He turns the pyramid upside down'¹⁴⁷ so that its summit is now at the bottom, there where he alone, who 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many'¹⁴⁸ bears 'the burden, the sin of the whole world "being made a curse for us"'.¹⁴⁹ 'At the base of the overturned pyramid—the unfathomable base which is really the summit—is ... the Christ crucified in love for the world. And there we remark a quite especial life, a quite especial light, an especial fragrance'.¹⁵⁰ It is there that the justice of the Lord is to be found, which is expressed by his words on the Cross for those who condemned him to death and blasphemed against him: 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do',¹⁵¹ as well as by the petition of his first luminous imitator Stephen at the moment when they were stoning him to death: 'Lay not this sin to their charge'.¹⁵² There, at the bottom of the inverted pyramid, all those who, like unto our Fathers, have unconditionally surrendered to the 'good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God',¹⁵³ and dared with courage to walk the way downwards, have tasted of the peace of Christ 'which passeth all understanding'.¹⁵⁴

Saint Silouan 'prayed long and his tears were unrestrained'.¹⁵⁵ In our age, the sense of time oppresses modern man who seeks automatic and rapid results even in spiritual life. In the sight of the Lord, who, in exchange, offers eternity to his creature, 'a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past'.¹⁵⁶ Time and eternity belong to him and he expects man to redeem all the time of his temporary life and, with unrestrained zeal, to turn it into 'the accepted time of repentance'.¹⁵⁷ In order to prompt us in this work, the Lord grants the gift of his grace and then withdraws it, so as to intensify our quest and determination to belong only to him, whether we feel the joy of his proximity or are plunged into the aridity of his absence. As a good Father, he allows suffering, injustices, and temporary pain for his children, for his desire is to give them 'exceeding great and precious promises',¹⁵⁸ granting instead of temporary, eternal things. However, being most of the time separated from God and captive to the fear of death, man perceives time as an enemy, which leads him closer and closer to that which he considers to be the end.

Saint Sophrony sensed that it is possible to consider 'obviously inconsistent the idea that man for a certain while may existentially be introduced into eternal life'.¹⁵⁹

¹⁴⁷ *Saint Silouan*, 237.

¹⁴⁸ Matt. 20:28.

¹⁴⁹ See *Saint Silouan*, 238. Gal. 3:13.

¹⁵⁰ *Saint Silouan*, 239.

¹⁵¹ Luke 23:34.

¹⁵² Acts 7:60.

¹⁵³ Rom. 12:2.

¹⁵⁴ Phil. 4:7.

¹⁵⁵ *Saint Silouan*, 1.

¹⁵⁶ Ps. 90:4.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. 2 Cor. 6:2.

¹⁵⁸ 2 Pet. 1:4.

¹⁵⁹ *Saint Silouan*, 145.

Nevertheless, he had the boldness not to conceal the real truth from his contemporaries. As Saint Silouan expresses it, during a vision of God 'the world is quite forgot'.¹⁶⁰ Elder Sophrony explains that 'eternity is not an abstraction..., but is God Himself in His own Being'¹⁶¹ and so 'we are eternal in so far as we are in God', specifying that 'in so far is meant here, not in a quantitative sense but applies to the nature of the gift granted by God'.¹⁶² The man who received such grace, which is always preceded by 'suffering, repentance which comes from the deep heart and scalding tears',¹⁶³ proves existentially that in the age of the Kingdom to come 'there should be time no longer'¹⁶⁴, for upon him 'the ends of the world are come'.¹⁶⁵

Returning from such living experience of eternity, man finds in his heart 'new feelings and new thoughts about God and the world'.¹⁶⁶ For this reason Elder Sophrony did not consider theology as a sum of dry academic knowledge, but the narration of an encounter with the Holy of Holies and a state of the spirit. 'It is one thing to believe in God, and another to know Him',¹⁶⁷ Saint Silouan would say. The Lord Jesus, who showed us the Father¹⁶⁸ and sent the Comforter unto us¹⁶⁹ is the source of all authentic theology and the Saints who 'live, yet not they, but Christ liveth in them',¹⁷⁰ become partakers of his theology and bearers of dogmatic knowledge. 'Is there any sense in splitting theological hairs over the nature of the Trinity if a man has not within himself the holy strength of the Father, the gentle love of the Son, the uncreated light of the Holy Ghost?'¹⁷¹ Moreover, Saint Silouan set forth as an infallible criterion of the presence of the Holy Spirit, on a personal, but also ecclesiastical and dogmatic level, the fruit of genuine communion with God, which is love for enemies. This commandment to love one's enemies is altogether unattainable by human powers alone. However, we can see by contrast that the Church as a whole is clearly a bearer of the grace of the Holy Spirit, because she bears in her bosom souls who, having fulfilled their hypostatic principle, are filled with love for those who wrong them and offend them, even for their enemies, and this itself shows that the Church possesses the truth.

To the burning question posed by science and philosophy, but also by every man at one moment in his life, 'what is truth', there is no answer, Elder Sophrony assures us, for the correct question is rather 'Who is truth,' and the Lord answered

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 149.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 146.

¹⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, 147.

¹⁶³ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Rev. 10:6.

¹⁶⁵ 1 Cor. 10:11.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. *Saint Silouan*, 149. See also *We Shall See Him*, 17.

¹⁶⁷ *Saint Silouan*, 87.

¹⁶⁸ See John 14:9.

¹⁶⁹ John 16:7.

¹⁷⁰ See Gal. 2:20.

¹⁷¹ *Saint Silouan*, 186.

it by saying 'I am'.¹⁷² 'Truth is not a theoretical pattern or some abstract formula, but life itself, "I am" (John 8:58; Exod. 4:14)'.¹⁷³ Christ's revelation to Saint Silouan was a personal encounter, through which he knew the divinity of the Lord, he knew that the Holy Spirit exists and all his being was transformed by the fire of His love. Saint Sophrony draws attention to the fact that every course of rational research leads inevitably to pantheism, whereas 'God as "WHO" can be known only through communion in being'.¹⁷⁴ Against the inquisitiveness and highly scientific formation of our time, Saint Silouan opposes 'the Great Science' of 'for ever humbling ourselves',¹⁷⁵ through which we become partakers of the supracosmic victory of Christ.

In humility and in the surrendering to the will of God lies also 'the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free'.¹⁷⁶ It is common for the thinking of this world to confuse freedom with licence. Saint Silouan wrote, 'We believe that true freedom means not sinning, in order to love God and one's neighbour with our whole heart and our whole strength. True freedom means constant dwelling in God'.¹⁷⁷ Sin enslaves the soul and darkens the mind, while self-condemnation to hell brings contrition, overcomes enemies, delivers from sin, leads to longed-for humility, and makes man a partaker of the Holy Spirit; it grants the grace of adoption, giving birth no longer to slaves of the passions, but to the children of God who continue rejoicing even in 'the burning fiery furnace', because they abide steadfastly 'in the courts of the Lord', in the house of the Heavenly Father. The pure and wounded heart, which turns with fear and gratitude to the Lord, attracts his gaze, and the tender Light of his Countenance, and the beauty of his spotless love, attracts man in his turn, who, delivered from the law of sin, becomes of his own will captive to the splendour of our God. Christ said: 'My Father... gave them me... and no man is able to pluck them out of my hand'.¹⁷⁸ Saint Sophrony said that this is a prison where we go willingly, for we are prisoners of Christ to the extent that we can no longer go anywhere else. We yearn to fulfil our kinship with our Father. The soul who condemns herself as worthy of hell and surrenders to the will of God becomes courageous and ready to endure every kind of misfortune.¹⁷⁹ She frees herself from the judgments of this world, not because she is indifferent to the conscience of the neighbour, but because she stands before the Judgment Seat of God. In fact, she is delivered from God's judgment also,

¹⁷² John 14:6.

¹⁷³ *Saint Silouan*, 112.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 437.

¹⁷⁶ Gal. 5:1.

¹⁷⁷ *Saint Silouan*, 65.

¹⁷⁸ John 10:29; *Οικοδομώντας τὸν ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ*, Τόμος Α', 252–53.

¹⁷⁹ 'Homily 2' in Saint Gregory Palamas, *The Homilies* (Waymart, USA: Mount Thabor Publishing, 2009), paragraph 20, 13–14. See Mic. 7:9.

for the Lord does not judge twice.¹⁸⁰ In this way, having his soul continually in the hands of the Lord,¹⁸¹ man preserves peace of soul and body.¹⁸²

According to Saint Silouan, for every decision that needs to be taken, for every act to be accomplished, the criterion is prayer, which is the expression of love for the Lord. If untroubled prayer does not harmonise with an undertaking, it is 'better not to start' it, as the Saint answered to the shopkeeper who was praising the benefits of smoking.¹⁸³ Prayer provides the measure for fasting and abstinence¹⁸⁴ and is a scrutiny of thoughts. Whatsoever harmonises with prayer does not oppose the flow of the grace of the Spirit, whereas the thought which cannot be joined to it, however apparently good, must be stumbling somewhere.¹⁸⁵ Prayer for the whole Adam, though it may seem unfulfilled, is nevertheless energy which preserves the world from destruction.¹⁸⁶ 'When there are no men of prayer on the earth, the world will come to an end and great calamities will befall: they have started already.'¹⁸⁷ With unshakable trust in the goodness of the Lord, Saint Silouan gives hope even in case of disasters that afflict a whole city or country: it is enough if all repent and with a strong cry of prayer take refuge in God.¹⁸⁸

Far away from the world, either in their monastery on Mount Athos or in the desert, our Fathers give the solution to the now urgent issue of the ecological crisis, the violation of the natural resources, the passionate consumption of creation. As a way of life, asceticism makes use of the goods of creation, but does not abuse them. Elder Sophrony said that when man limits his needs to the absolutely necessary, he receives in exchange the luxury of time to work on his heart, cleanse it and build it as a temple so that it can accommodate Christ, 'the King of kings and the Lord of lords'.¹⁸⁹ With moving sensitivity, Saint Silouan speaks about respect for every creature of God. 'The Spirit of God teaches the soul to love every living thing so that she would have no harm come to even a green leaf on a tree, or trample underfoot a flower of the field'.¹⁹⁰ At the same time, though, he clarified that worship is owed only to the Creator, not to creatures, and he considered attachment to animals as a transgression of the commandments, since it disturbs the uninterrupted memory of God. 'Harm done unnecessarily to an animal—to plant life, even—gainsays the law of grace. But attachment to animals likewise goes against the Divine commandment,

¹⁸⁰ Cf. 1 Cor. 11:31. Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *On Prayer*, 52.

¹⁸¹ See Ps. 119:109.

¹⁸² Cf. *Saint Silouan*, 335.

¹⁸³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁸⁴ 'After meals we should feel like praying — that is the measure of moderation.' *Ibid.*, 326.

¹⁸⁵ See, for example, Saint Silouan's thought about the sinlessness of the Mother of God, 392.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 225–26.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 408.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 425. 'If a people or a nation are in tribulation, all must repent, and then God will set everything right.'

¹⁸⁹ 1 Tim. 6:15.

¹⁹⁰ *Saint Silouan*, 469.

since it diminishes love for God and one's neighbour. Anyone who genuinely loves mankind, and in his prayers weeps for the whole world, cannot attach himself to animals.¹⁹¹

Like unto his Father in God, Saint Sophrony became a sign for his time. The first page of his book about Saint Silouan expresses, on the one hand, the cry that he himself raised to God for years on end, but at the same time the cry of every man crushed by tribulations and pain: 'Wherefore art Thou so indifferent to my pain?... I cannot fathom Thee'. Each one of his books is a dialogue with a world which lies in the pit of destruction and wrestles with God in despair. Our time is deceived by the conviction that it can give answers based on reason to matters that are incomprehensible, not of this world. Furthermore, our generation witnessed the absurdity of two world wars and of unprecedented atrocities. As an offspring of his own time, Saint Sophrony had merged since his youth with the current of its struggle with God. However, although this struggle was prolonged until the end of his life, it was changed into a charismatic relationship with God. He experienced in the depths of his being that 'our God is a consuming fire'¹⁹² and that 'it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God'.¹⁹³ 'How many times did my soul hang in terrible fear suspended over the abyss like a small helpless being!... I twisted and turned, struggling to tear myself from His holy hands'.¹⁹⁴ However, when the 'dread of eternal damnation converted the whole of him into prayer', his spirit could contemplate not only the reality of 'the sombre regions of hell, but also of heaven illumined by the uncreated Light'.¹⁹⁵

In his prolonged and agonising struggle with God, the Lord was always victorious, but this gave birth in his heart to 'the unspeakable joy of being vanquished'.¹⁹⁶ Through his lived experience he was able to sketch out for his contemporaries 'the knowledge of the ways of salvation', that is found in surrendering into his holy hands.

Like the word of Saint Silouan, nothing can confine or constrain Saint Sophrony's word. He speaks about perfection and presents as 'false humility'¹⁹⁷ the thought that the great gifts of God surpass our endurance. Nevertheless, his word unceasingly brings consolation by opening endless horizons of wonderment before our eyes. Saint Sophrony takes the role of a guiding star that indicates the way to the unfading Light of the day without eventide, of which we have been called 'to become for all eternity the habitation'.¹⁹⁸ Having lived the charismatic mindfulness of death, through which he felt to his very bones the vanity and corruption that reign in the

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 96.

¹⁹² Heb. 12:29.

¹⁹³ Heb. 10:31.

¹⁹⁴ *We Shall See Him*, 142.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 143.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 84.

¹⁹⁷ See Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), *Truth and Life* (Tolleshunt Knights, Essex: Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2014), 125.

¹⁹⁸ *We Shall See Him*, 127.

created world, 'in its "negative" aspect, profound being was uncovered in him'.¹⁹⁹ The ardent prayer, which this wondrous mindfulness of death engendered in him, 'snatched him to its bosom' and 'drew his spirit away from worldly attractions', it delivered him from any attachment and clasped him close to the Eternal,²⁰⁰ whose desire is that all may be saved.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 13.

²⁰⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 16–17.

²⁰¹ Cf. 1 Tim. 2:4.