

## **Personal Reflections on the Life of ST SILOUAN THE ATHONITE (1866-1938)**

### ***Introduction***

The life of every person is a tool of inspiration and education. The content of his/her life is a living learning material from which, I withdraw important lessons for the unending progress of my life. Their biography is full of experiences and revelations that can impress or alarm me, and they may support or change my way of life.

This I perceive when I encounter the life of any human being. Humans are created in the image of the Triune God and destined unto His likeness. In him I see the face of God and from him I learn the Way of God. Thus the academic life of the human being does not interest me, as much as his actual living and deeds are according to His teachings – the teachings of the Holy Orthodox Church. I usually compare the life of the person with their writings and teachings. This is where I find the genuine person and his true faith.

I am so fortunate that the academic life of Simeon Ivanovich Antonov is unknown and that he was almost illiterate<sup>1</sup>. I can therefore meditate on his actual life - a life that is not influenced by academic or philosophical teachings - a pure life that is the result of his natural upbringing, experiences, revelations and his personal actions. His life was simply a “Theology” – the work of the Logismoi of the Theos in him.

### ***Learning from His Early Life***

Simeon was born in 1866 in the village of Sovsk in Russia's Tambov<sup>2</sup> region. He worked as a carpenter like his beloved Lord Jesus Christ. He also served in the army. He was a tall, solid and strong man. He lived a normal life like the other lads of his countryside. He liked drinking, eating and playing the concertina.

A few recorded incidents of his life prior to his entry into Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon in Mt. Athos in the autumn of 1892 taught me big deal of the characteristics of this man's personality and character. He took these characteristics with him to the Holy Mountain. He then worked diligently and unceasingly shaping them to be

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<sup>1</sup> Archimandrite Sophrony, *St Silouan the Athonite*, SVS Press, 1999, p. 263

<sup>2</sup> It is situated 480 km south-east of Moscow. Population: 291,852 (2004 est.). The name "Tambov" originates from a Moksha language word meaning wetland.

acceptable to God in order to acquire and keeping God's grace within him. Simeon was canonized a saint on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1987<sup>3</sup> by the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

A single idea occupied Simeon's since the age of four and stayed with him throughout his life. After he heard a book-peddler negating the existence of God, he said: "when I grow up, I shall go all over the world looking for God."<sup>4</sup> Fifteen years later, he found that there was no need to go anywhere searching for God because he realized that God was already with him – He is Emmanuel. His mind changed just by hearing a peasant woman speaking of the miracles of John Sezenov.<sup>5</sup> He said: "If he [John Sezenov] was a holy man, it means that God is here with us, so there is no point in going off to search for Him."<sup>6</sup> Although Simeon's mind had ceased searching for God elsewhere, he did not cease looking, longing and yearning for God's grace in his inner being once that grace had visited him.

The two above notable incidents in the youthful life of St Silouan form the corner stone of the impact of his life on my learning. They indicated to me that his simple, but persistent force personality, led him to the starting point of his unending living process towards his beloved God. A personality that is embedded in humility, simplicity and the purity of the heart (Archimandrite Sophrony called it "naivety"<sup>7</sup>). His spontaneous reactions showed the agapetical capacity in this man to find God even in a very simple answer from any person.

Simplicity and humility were the first outcomes of my personal encounter with the life of St. Silouan. I learned that searching while being simple and humble will place a person on the starting line of the unending race; searching with egoism on the other hand, will torment and divide the person in different directions, perhaps directing him in the wrong direction. Simplicity and humility will lead to satisfaction and peace. These two characteristics will make you attentive to the whispers of God in His creation and to his tiniest revelations.

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<sup>3</sup> Maxime Egger, *Starets Silouane, un Saint Actuel et Universel*, Conférence prononcée à l'Abbaye de Sylvanès en juin 1995, et publiée dans *Contacts*, no. 171, vol. 47, 3, 1995. Reproduit avec l'autorisation de Maxime Egger. Copied from : <http://www.pagesorthodoxes.net/saints/silouane/silouane-vita.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Archimandrite Sophrony, *St Silouan the Athonite*, SVS Press, 1999, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> 1791-1839.

<sup>6</sup> Archimandrite Sophrony, *St Silouan the Athonite*, SVS Press, 1999, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Yet Simeon was a normal human being. He lived a normal life full of gaiety, temptations and sin. He loved drinking, eating, playing concertina and showing off before girls. He had almost killed one young man, as he was showing off before the girls of the village. While the words of the woman let Simeon *found his faith and clung to the thought of God,*<sup>8</sup> and made him adopt an *unusual frame of mind* that is suitable for monastic life, the normal life made him lose his zeal after only three months. This happens to me every time I get ignited by the inspirational flames of the Holy Fathers and the revelations of God; I fall down again into the pit of my sins and iniquities.

I can relate totally with his early life, but with one difference. I lacked the zeal of “pursuit”. Simeon pursued with diligence and with every opportunity, the single idea of looking for God. I, on the other hand, would neglect and forget it. This single idea remained tickling the life of Simeon and at the first opportunity, he interpreted it through a dream, while I put it aside and covered it with my ignorance.

Simeon’s pursuit looking for God is clear in his interpretation of a dream – *vision* – that was the next incident which made an impact on Simeon’s life and mine too. This dream called him again to the Way of God and taught me to stay attentive and be ready for any revelation because it may be revealed at any time. I have to keep the zeal of pursuit fired in me as it was in Simeon.

One day, Simeon woke up disgusted from dreaming that a snake was crawling down his throat, and he was troubled from hearing a sweet voice saying: “Just as you find it loathsome to swallow a snake in your dream, so I find your ways ugly to look upon.”<sup>9</sup> I would have dismissed this call and related this dream to food digestion and other causes, but the simple minded Simeon attributed it to his unworthiness and his sins. He said: “Now I see how sorry the Lord and His Mother are for people. Imagine – the Mother of God appearing from the skies to show a young man like me his sins.”<sup>10</sup>

The simplicity and humility of Simeon made him aware that he did hear only a sweet voice, but he did not see the speaker – the Mother of God – in his dream. He attributed this to his impurity, and since then *he started to repent, and his resolve to enter a monastery, once he [is] released from the army, returned with double force.*

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<sup>8</sup> All italics are the words of Archimandrite Sophrony, *St Silouan the Athonite*, SVS Press, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Archimandrite Sophrony, *St Silouan the Athonite*, SVS Press, 1999, p.15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

His pursuit to find God, though through a dream, awakened in Simeon to the awareness of his sins. He became conscious and understanding of others' problems and sins. His sense of discernment became very sensitive and his advice proved profitable for all the parties involved in conflicts. His desire for prayer and repentance increased tremendously even before his settlement in the Holy Mountain. He became a wonderer of Mt. Athos while he was serving his military duties.

As a four year old child, Simeon interpreted this dream and the many incidents that happened to him during his entire life. He was like the baby who is searching by the instincts of his heart and in innocence. He was a wanderer of God's wonders listening to God through the simplest signs that crossed him. Isn't his name Simeon, *Shimon* in Hebrew means "He who listens?"<sup>11</sup>

Through these wanderings Simeon learned and supported his experience with the effectiveness of prayer and repentance. One of these wanderings was an incident with a murderer who found peace through prayer and repentance while he was in prison. Simeon did not degrade and ignore the presence of this murderer or did he reject him, but he was impressed by his happiness and peace. He went forth and asked him about the reason for his peace. By this question, Simeon discovered the lesson of his life that he kept for the rest of his entire earthly life repeating and asking for God's mercy. This is another impressive lesson for me too.

***Learning from His Life on Mount Athos (1892-1938):***

Mount Athos did not protect the young novice Simeon from the assaults of his desires. His challenges had not ceased. His life was not an easy life, but a life of fervent and unceasing prayer and repentance. His sin was ever before him as the psalmist has been describing.

From the beginning of this settlement on Mount Athos, Simeon, and I as well, experienced God's grace of repentance. Consequently we learned the joy and the peace that it may bring to the repentant person. Repentance is a relief and an opportunity to begin anew. It is not an end, but an opening door to God's grace that allows the person to discern between God's joy and peace and worldly ones. In repentance, the repentant

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<sup>11</sup> From Shama on שמעון in Hebrew that is transliterated to Sama'an in Arabic.

person will experience the sweetness of God's joy and peace that he desires and yearns to acquire at all times because they are different than the worldly ones.

Sin makes us lose this grace, and here, we rush to repent. "Brother Simeon" rushed to his Spiritual Father to talk to him about the desires of any ordinary man. He wanted to get married after he had chosen willingly to ascend the Mount in order to repent and to acquire the grace of God.

Here, we learn the importance of the Holy Father in the life of any person and the magnitude of simplicity and humility that lead to immediate obedience to suggestive counsel. Brother Simeon began to drive his imaginary thoughts *au fur et à mesure*, once he heard the answer of his confessor. He wanted to acquire again what he had lost; *he had thought that he had come to a haven of salvation, and now suddenly he saw that here [Mount Athos] too, a man might perish.*

His obedience to his confessor made him attentive to the thoughts that seemed ascetic and pious. He acquired the gift of distinction between good and insidious thoughts. Although the insidious thoughts appeared as though they are directing him to a path of righteousness, but he did not listen to them without the blessings of his confessor. His simplicity and humility made him transparent, submitting his will to the will of the confessor.

His pursuit to find God did not cease on the Mount, but rather it increased in the form of an ascetic life that contained fervent prayers, *fasts and vigils, long church offices, frequent confession and communion, reading, physical toil, and the duties of obedience.* The Jesus Prayer enlightened his soul and made him rejoice because he could pray this prayer anywhere and at any time even when he was performing his duties at the Monastery's mill transporting heavy sacks of flour.

After spending three weeks praying the Jesus prayer ardently, and in front of the Icon of the Theotokos, this prayer entered Brother Simeon's heart and continued automatically by itself. This is the second time that the Mother of God had changed the way of his life. The first time was her sweet voice that made him acknowledge his sinning way of life and this time when he received from her the rare gift of the effects of unceasing prayer.

This unceasing prayer gave Simeon inner peace as his obedience to his spiritual father did. Now, he began discerning the difference between real visions and insidious ones.

The effects of the vision of *strange light* compared to the effects of the unceasing prayer (in front of the Icon of the Theotokos) made him aware of the sublime importance of a contrite heart in his life; otherwise vainglory could kill his soul. Instead of being joyful that a light filled his cell, Simeon felt that there was *something wrong*; he had to pray more and harder to regain that experience. In fact, he used to fall asleep for a quarter of an hour while sitting, and then he would stand up to continue his prayer. He *usually slept only an hour-and-a-half to two hours out of twenty-four*.

I can imagine my reaction to finding my room filled with light and thoughts whispering to me: this light *proceeds from grace*. You are a righteous and holy man. The Lord has answered your prayers. I will be filled with honor and glory. My vainglorious soul will detach me from any prayer and any person because I would have considered that I arrived and I need toil no more Woe unto me.

It was not easy for Brother Simeon to confront the insidious thoughts and their temptations. In fact, he *reached the final stages of desperation. He felt utterly forsaken, his soul plunged into the darkness of despondency*. The Lord is not hearing the one who has been looking for Him since the age of four and has shown him His Grace few times.

But the Lord will not forsake his people who long and yearn for him. He reveals himself to the sinners and those who have not yet accepted Him. So, during Vespers *a great light shone about Simeon* and he beheld the living Christ. *He was transported to heaven where he heard ineffable words* and contemplated the *Divinity beyond all earthly vision*.

Another lesson can be drawn from Brother Simeon's dramatic experience. I should not lose hope and be always patient. In other words, I should submit myself to the will of God freely and unconditionally.

Simeon's torments and the shining of the Divine light about him indicate that the spiritual life of the Christian is an unceasing process, but unfortunately, some fall and stop during this process and others continue the pursuit, like Simeon, in order to achieve the fulfillment of that single idea. Simeon was drawn to faith by a *small measure of grace*, but he suffered and strove harder to receive a *larger measure of grace*. He then continued the rest of his life striving for a high level of perfection, and as *he is foreknown by God, received the grace of the perfect*.

As he related the incompleteness of his first dream to his sins (hearing the voice only and not seeing the Mother of God), he related the last experience, the vision of Christ, to complete forgiveness of his sins. He beheld the love of God as he was reconciled to Him. This reconciliation led him to love God and the entire humanity. It made him compassionate of the sins of humanity. He felt pity and prayed for their repentance as well as for his own self.

The experience of God's love allowed him to live *in a state of paschal triumph*. Every thing around him and in him was delightful. But his ascetic life did not cease as a consequence of such visitation. He continued working in the mill, the ascetic strivings and obeying his confessor as if nothing had happened to him.

Although Simeon continued with no changes to his ascetic life, God's grace had dwindled. He feared losing it and his pursuit to search for the reason began with *increasing bewilderment*. The immensity of the earlier vision did not come back to him and his life was a continuity of wrestling with demonist and intrusive thoughts. His life became an alternation between receiving grace and losing it.

But now, this grace is withdrawing from him and he does not know why and how to prevent it from happening. How can he lose such an indescribable experience that no words can utter? Once more, he cried: where art Thou, O Lord...Why have Thou forsaken me? I am praying to you with pure heart, but the devils will not let me. Instruct me. He then heard a voice telling him "*Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not.*"

These words were said to the obedient and humble Simeon. What level of humility is God asking of us? How humble does He want us to become? On the other hand, the words of God are full of hope when our dependency is put on Him. God was saying to Simeon and to us: Do not despair, but continue depending and relying on me and I will give you rest.

Simeon's pursuit to retain the grace of the Unretainable made him despair as his ascetic life was making him worthy of such visions. The dwindling and the withdrawal of grace put him back on track. He had to keep his mind in hell and depend on the Giver and Bestower of Grace and not to his deeds only. His deeds were the fruits of grace and not vice versa. What a wonderful lesson!

He, and I as well, learned that we have to acquire the humility of Christ and not any humility. Humility of emptying one's self by doing the will of God. The Monk Simeon, due to the withdrawal of God's grace, went and searched the scriptures and the teachings of the Church through the writings of the Holy Fathers. It was a step to receive the *light of knowledge* and discover the true humility in Christ.

He now learned his lesson and acquired the light of knowledge. He set *firmly his feet on the spiritual path*. His mind had to stay in hell and despair was not to approach him. In fact, despair left him and *the deep peace of Christ visited him and the Holy Spirit once more gave him the strength of love*. He began to pray for the living and the generations to come instead of those who died. He felt with them because he was a sinner and he prayed for them because he experienced the Divine compassionate love. His brothers became his life. He prayed for their ignorance and he wanted them to experience the Divine love that was missing from their lives. He loved them as he loved Christ.

Love was within him and around him. He contemplated it through his long prayers, although sometimes these prayers were without words, in silence, in peace and in profound tranquility. He was overtaken and bewildered by the Theurgist-God's workings. Monk Simeon's effort of long hours of prayer did not cease, but illness and age altered his habit, though he prayed continually.

Contemplating on my own life comparing it to Simeon's, I find a huge ocean dividing us. While Simeon is in the complete opposite direction, I get flattered easily by the words of human beings and I get quickly offended when I do not receive the proper words of thanks and the adequate acknowledgments. I overlook others because I am pious and know more than them. I judge them and separate myself from them. I even neglect the rules of prayer and almsgiving and I reduce the ascetic life when I receive a grace from God or when I am tired and sick. Pride is always alienating me from my neighbors and when I accept any humiliation for Christ's sake, pride overtakes me once again. My pride does not allow me to experience the joy of tears and of repentance. It stops me from acquiring the consequent effects of God's grace. In conclusion, I do not have the capacity of love towards God as Simeon had. My pursuit towards God is always depending on my needs instead of my yearning and longing for Him because I belong to Him. Woe unto me!



### *Learning from His Conversations*

Staretz' Silouan conversations with people were sweet, loving, caring and in harmony with his actual life. The rank of the person or their spiritual age did not hold him back from conversing with them in awe and respect and in obedience to the teaching of the Church and his experiences. The staretz was simple, direct and humble with those who sought his advice. He conveyed to them the reflection of God's grace. The conversations were the fruit of his experience with God's compassionate love. In fact, they were the words of the Holy Spirit pouring out of his mouth.

I learned from his conversations that I shall seek the words of God and not mine.

I shall be attentive and be a good listener for both the speaker and for the words of God.

I shall be caring for the interests of humanity and not for my own dwelling.

I shall talk *simply and without a trace of vainglory. The perfect never say anything of themselves.*

Being humble by subduing my will is *of greater benefit than any advice.*

I shall *never criticize anyone.*

I shall *preserve the grace given* to me while I am laboring for my earthly need. The preservation of the grace is more important than anything else. This I shall seek first and everything else will be added to me.

I shall keep *Christ's commandment* of love to every person regardless of the benefactor.

I shall pray for people by *shedding blood* like Jesus Christ.

My mind shall  *dwell always in God.* I will acquire inner silence in this manner.

Preaching must be done with love and out of love for God and the person to whom I am preaching because God is love. I shall preach God's words and not mine.

My *freedom* is in *the dwelling in God* and not in sinning. I will be enslaved to sin by not dwelling in God and I will be free when I am enslaved to God because He is the True Freedom and, only in Him, am I free. Humility will free me from passions and *passionate thoughts* and will replace them by compassionate love.

I shall not despair not only because God is with me, but because *it is a blasphemy against God, as if He [is] incapable of saving [me].* I shall have *firm faith in God's mercy.*

I shall seek the spiritual father with humility and awe for guidance, repentance and support. The true contemplation shall be free from any intrusive thoughts. Intrusive

thoughts shall not be allowed to enter my mind deliberately or out of weakness. They shall be fought as they arise.

*The man who prays with a pure mind receives enlightenment from the Lord. The spiritual man will show greater capacities as a scholar than the man less talented spiritually. He sees and understands differently than others. He abides in God and God abides in him. Prayer cleanses the mind and gives it a better vision of all things.*

I shall not start doing *anything which cannot be preceded by untroubled prayer.*

I shall pay little *attention to earthly matters* and give my *first thought to God.*

Reading (spiritual books) and learning are beneficial only if they are accompanied with deeds because some *read nothing but fulfill everything, while others read a lot and fulfill nothing.*

Staretz's Silouan conversations are from the heart of the scriptures. *He spoke out of experience granted from on high. He expressed actual experience and the knowledge of experience, and it was therefore a positive testimony to the realities of spiritual existence.*

#### ***Learning from his Last Days on Earth***

Staretz' Silouan life taught me much more than what was expressed above. These are but small reminders, if I exercise them, may heal my troubled soul. His last days were too an inspiration for me. They show his peace and ease in dealing with illness and death.

One thing was still in his mind. After forty six years on Mount Athos he was still praying to learn humility. He passed away on 11/24 September 1938 while the monks were praying Matins. He was buried on the same day at four O'clock in the afternoon.

#### ***Excerpts from the Writings of Staretz Silouan*<sup>12</sup>**

The writings (reflections and notes) of St. Silouan are simple as was his life. Unfortunately I don't know the language he spoke to dwell into his thoughts in depth without any translation. But while reflecting on his translated words after I read about his life, I can not but confess that his words are peaceful and full of compassionate love. They are the speech of his prayerful soul. They are true theology echoing Evagrius the Pontus' statement: if you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian. His words are genuine expressing a peaceful inner life.

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<sup>12</sup> The excerpts were taken from: Archimandrite Sophrony, *St. Silouan The Athonite* (Crestwood, New York, 1999).

His words are but the fruit of his ascetic life, seeking God's grace and love out of his love for God. Although they were categorized under various titles, each note was encompassing all the categorized and uncategorized subjects. Each note is a book by itself that should be discovered and explored seriously to expound the priceless experiences that he encountered and applied.

### **Yearning for God**

My soul yearns after the Lord and I seek Him in tears. How could I do other than seek Thee, for Thou first didst seek and find me, and gavest me to delight in Thy Holy Spirit, and my soul fell to loving Thee.

I am a sinful man yet I have witnessed the Lord's great love and mercy toward me.

Thy meek and gentle gaze captured my soul.

O Lord, how greatly dost Thou love man!

O Lord, by the Holy Spirit, enlighten Thy people that all may know Thee.

How happy are we Christians! What a God is ours!

### **On Prayer**

He who loves the Lord is ever mindful of Him, and the thought of God begets prayer.

O man, learn the humility of Christ and the Lord will give you a taste of the sweetness of prayer.

We are given churches to pray in, and in church the holy offices are performed according to books. But we cannot take a church away with us, and books are not always at hand, but interior prayer is possible always and everywhere. The Divine Office is celebrated in church, and the Spirit of God dwells therein, but the soul is the finest of God's churches, and the man who prays in his heart has the whole world for a church. However, this is not for everyone. Unceasing prayer is born of love.

### **On Humility**

Humility is the light in which we may behold the light which is God -- in the words of the psalmist: 'In thy light shall we see light.'

O all ye saints, pray for me that my soul may learn the humility of Christ! My soul is eager for it but I cannot learn this humility; I seek it in tears, like a lost child looking for his mother.

O Lord, vouchsafe unto us the gift of Thy holy humility.

The Lord loves us greatly, yet we fall because we lack humility.

One man may suffer much from poverty and sickness but does not humble himself and so his suffering profits him nothing.

The proud man fears obloquy, while the humble man cares nothing.

### **On Peace**

Just as Father John of Kronstadt preserved his peace of soul by praying for the people without ceasing, so we lose our peace because we do not love the people of God.

But if we accustom ourselves to praying eagerly for our enemies, and loving them, peace will always dwell in our souls.

If you renounce your own will, then you have conquered the enemy and your reward will be peace of the soul.

### **On Grace**

Until the advent of grace man lives his life and thinks that all is well and prosperous with his soul; but when grace visits him and dwells with him he sees himself quite otherwise, and it is only when he loses grace again that he realizes his unhappy state.

O Lord, Thou seest how weak is my soul without Thy grace, and nowhere is it at rest. Do Thou, our delight, our Heavenly Father, give us strength to love Thee. Give us Thy holy fear in which the Cherubim tremble and love Thee.

Without grace man is but a sinful clay, but with the grace of God the spirit of man is like unto an angel.

Glory be to the Lord that He gives us to discern the advent of grace, and teaches us to know wherefore grace comes, and wherefore is lost.

Be obedient and sober...think that all men are good and beloved of the Lord. For such humility the grace of the Holy Spirit will dwell in you, and cause you to exclaim, 'How merciful is the Lord.'

### **On the Will of God and on Freedom**

It is a great good to give oneself over to the Divine will. Then the Lord alone occupies the soul. No thought can enter in, and the soul undistracted, prays to God, and is full of love for God even though the body is suffering.

Life is much easier for the man who is given over to the will of God, since in illness, in poverty and persecution, he reflects thus: 'Such is God's pleasure, and I must endure on account of my sins.'

The most precious thing in the world is to know God and understand His will, even if only dimly.

Here is a sign: if you are distressed over anything, it means that you have not fully surrendered to God's will.

### **On Repentance**

Glory be to the Lord that He gave us repentance. Through repentance we shall all, every one of us, be saved.

But if every soul knew the Lord, and how deeply He loves us, no one would despair or murmur against his lot.

To the man who repents, the Lord grants paradise and the Kingdom eternal with himself. The truly repentant man readily bears every affliction – hunger and nakedness, cold and heat, sickness and poverty, humiliation and exile, injustice and slander; for his soul is turned with longing towards God, and he has no care for earthly things but prays to God with a pure mind.

The Lord is quick to forgive the sins of the merciful.

### **On the Knowledge of God**

The Lord loves man and reveals Himself to man, as it pleases Him. And when the soul beholds the Lord's, she humbly rejoices in the Master's compassion. From that hour, her love for her Creator is greater than any other love--though she may see all things and love all men, yet she will love the Lord above all.

We may study as much as we will but we shall still not come to know the Lord unless we live according to His commandments, for the Lord is not made known through learning but by the Holy Spirit.

Though a man be eager to investigate everything he sees on earth and in heaven, if he is not given to prayer and does not know the Lord, or seek to know Him, then when he hears other men teaching of God he says:

'Now, how is it possible to know God? And how is it that you know Him?'

I would reply: 'The Holy Spirit is witness. The Holy Spirit knows, and He instructs us.'

### **On Love**

The soul cannot know peace unless she prays for her enemies. The soul that has learned of God's grace to pray, feels love and compassion for every created thing. And in particular for mankind, for whom the Lord suffered on the Cross and His soul was heavy for every one of us.

O gracious Lord, how great is Thy love for me, a sinner!

Thou didst give me to know Thee.

Thou didst give me a taste of Thy grace.

'O taste and see that the Lord is good,' Thou hast let me taste of Thy goodness and mercy, and insatiably, my soul reaches towards Thee day and night. She cannot forget her beloved Creator, for the Spirit of God gives her strength to love the Beloved.

Love is made known by the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit the souls know peace and loveliness.

What shall I render unto Thee, O Lord, for that Thou hast poured such great mercy on my soul? Grant, I beg Thee that I may see my iniquities, and ever weep before Thee, for Thou art filled with love for humble souls, and dost give them the grace of the Holy Spirit.

### **We are Children of God and in the Likeness of the Lord**

Behold a wonderful thing! Grace gave me to know that all men who love God and keep His commandments are fulfilled with light and are in the likeness of the Lord; whereas those who go against God are full of darkness and in the likeness of the enemy.

Thus sin disfigures a man while grace beautifies him.

### **On the Mother of God**

We cannot attain to the full the love of the Mother of God, and so we cannot thoroughly comprehend her grief. Her love was complete. She had an illimitable love for God and for her Son but she loved the people too, with a great love.

Many are the marvels and mercies that I have witnessed at the hands of the Lord and of the Mother of God but there is naught I can render in return for this love of theirs.

My soul trembles and is afraid when I consider the glory of the Mother of God.

### **On the Saints**

God is glorified in the Saints, while the Saints are glorified by the Lord.

To many people the saints seem far removed from us. But the saints are far only from people who have distanced themselves- they are very close to them that keep Christ's commandments and possess the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The Saints hear our prayers and possessed God's strength to help us. The whole Christian race knows that.

### **Concerning Shepherds of Souls**

The Lord calls His bishops to feed His flock, and gives them freely of the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is said that the Holy Spirit established the bishops of the Church, and in the Holy Spirit they have the power to bind and to remit sins. And we are the sheep of the Lord's flock that He loved unto the end and to whom He gave our holy pastors.

Brethren, let us dwell in obedience to our pastors, and then there will be peace in the world, and the Lord through the Holy Spirit will abide in us.

We must always bear in mind that a father-confessor performs the duties of his office in the Holy Spirit, wherefore we must venerate him.

If a man does not open his heart to his confessor, his will be a crooked path that leads not to salvation; whereas he who keeps nothing back will go straightway to the Kingdom of Heaven.

A confessor should rejoice when the Lord brings him a soul for repentance, and according to the grace given to him, he should heal the soul, wherefore he will receive great mercy from God, as a good shepherd of his sheep.

### **Concerning Monks**

A monk is someone who prays for the whole world, who weeps for the whole world; and in this lays his main work.

Thanks to monks, prayer continues unceasing on earth, and the whole world profits, for through prayer the world continues to exist; but when prayer fails, the world will perish.

Thus has the Holy Spirit schooled the monk to love God and to love the world.

Myself, I am not worthy to be called a monk. I have spent over forty years in the monastery and count myself among those at the start of their novitiate. But I know monks who live close to God and to the Mother of God.

### **Concerning Obedience**

The spirit of obedience is necessary not only for monks but for everyone else, too. Even the Lord was obedient.

He who will bear within him even a small measure of grace will submit himself joyously to all authority.

The obedient man has given himself over to the will of God and has no fear of death, for his soul is accustomed to live with God, and loves God.

### **Concerning Spiritual Welfare**

Every one who follows our Lord Jesus Christ is engaged in spiritual warfare. The saints by long experience learned from the grace of the Holy Spirit how to wage this war.

Blessed are we Orthodox Christians because we live under the protection of God's mercy. It is not difficult for us to wage this war: The Lord had pity on us and gave us the Holy Spirit, Who abides in our Church. We suffer because we lack humility.

While we are on earth, we must learn how to wage war with the enemy. The hardest thing of all is to subdue the flesh for God's sake, and overcome self-love.

### **Concerning Intrusive Thoughts and Delusions**

Beware these two thoughts, and fear them. The first suggests 'You are a saint;' the other, 'You will not be saved.' Both come from the enemy, and there is no truth in them. Instead, think to yourself, 'I am a great sinner but the Lord is merciful. He loves man with a great love, and will forgive my sins.'

Evil thoughts afflict the pride soul, and until she humbles herself she knows no rest from them. The Lord gives the soul understanding to recognize His coming, to love Him and do His will. Fight the enemy with the weapon of humility.

### **Adam's Lament**

My soul wearies for the Lord, and I seek Him with tears.

How should I not seek Him?

'When I was with Him my soul was glad and at rest, and the enemy could not come nigh me.

'But now the spirit of evil has gained power over me, harassing and oppressing my soul, 'so that I weary for the Lord even unto death,

'And my spirit strains to God, and there is nought on earth can make me glad,



‘Nor can my soul take comfort in any thing,

‘But longs once more to see the Lord, that her hunger may be appeased.

**Reminiscences and Conversations**

Glory to Thy compassionate O Lord!

Thou dost give the soul to know Thy love for the creation, and the soul knows her Master and Creator.

The soul is content in the Master. He gives her rest, and the earth is forgotten in God-he who abides in God is not mindful of the earth.

When I lose grace, my soul is exceedingly sad and I exclaim: ‘Why did I transgress and so lose the Lord?’

It is very difficult to live without a staretz. The inexperienced soul does not apprehend God’s will, and endures many afflictions before she learns humility.

*About St. John of Kronstadt*

O noble Father John who intercedest for us,

I give thanks to God that I saw thee.

I give thanks to thee, too, good and holy shepherd, that because of thy prayers,

I left the world and came to the Holy Mount Athos,

Where I have witnessed great mercy at God’s hands.

*About Father Stratonikos*

O, our dear Father Straticonos, prodigious lover of weeping, where are thou now?

Come to us, and we will build thee a cell on the high mountain, and contemplate thy holy way of life,

And according to the measure of our strength imitate thy mighty strivings!

The time of thy tears, O Father, is over.

Now thou dost listen in heaven to the songs of the Cherubim.

Now behold the glory of the Lord, whom thy soul so loved on earth, where aspiring to Him she gave herself over to tears of repentance.

**Thoughts, Advice and Observations on Ascetism**

I write, and it is easy for me to write, since my soul knows the Lord.

In order to hold the mysteries of God, we must earnestly entreat the Lord for a humble spirit, and then we shall know his mysteries through the Holy Spirit.

‘O Lord, Thou art merciful, Thou didst create us, and Thou didst feed and clothe all men. Thou seest, O Lord, how my father mourns because there is no rain. Do thou send rain upon the earth.

O Lord, give unto us this love throughout the whole universe!

O Holy Spirit, live in our souls, that with one accord we may all glorify the Creator, Father, son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

***Some Sayings about St. Silouan***

Under an article called: “The relevance of St Silouan’s teachings for today”. Harry Boosalis says:

‘The teaching of St. Silouan is especially relevant because it manifests this Tradition [the holy tradition dating from the earliest decades of the apostolic Church] to modern society. His life and teaching illustrate the ultimate meaning of man's salvation in Christ. Based on the personal experience of his own spiritual strivings, his teaching bears testimony to the truth that contemporary man is capable of acquiring the fullness of the grace of the Holy Spirit, through which countless Saints have been saved and sanctified throughout the history of the Church. St. Silouan embodies the heights of Orthodox spiritual life, which he experienced on twentieth-century Mount Athos. He serves as a link in the long line of spiritual tradition that unites modern man with all the great ascetic Saints throughout the centuries of the Orthodox Church.’

Boosalis continues saying:

‘Even though the writings of St. Silouan touch upon the deepest theological truths, they do not intimidate the average layman. He speaks not in the language of philosophers, but rather in the timeless tongue of the Holy Spirit. This language of love, which flows so freely from his pen, is a potent means of communication that the reader finds easy to comprehend and embrace. This certainly contributes to the popularity of his writings.’

And he says further down:

‘[The pseudo-religion of man attempting to forge his own destiny apart from God]. This was the modern mentality that St. Silouan undoubtedly took into account as he wrote down those God-inspired thoughts that came to him after much prayer. He was

addressing a world at war, a war raging not only in the trenches of modern Europe, but also on the battlefield of the human soul.’<sup>13</sup>

In the introduction to the book, *The Undistorted Image* (by Archimandrite Sofrony), the Right Rev. Georges Florovsky writes of Father Silouan's writings:

‘The sayings of Father Silouan are simple. There is nothing spectacular in them, except indeed their simplicity. He had no special ‘revelations’ to disclose. He spoke usually about common things. Yet even about the common things he spoke in a very uncommon manner. He spoke out of his intimate experiences. Love is both the starting point and the core of Christian endeavour. But the ‘novelty’ of Christian Love is so often overlooked and disregarded. According to Christ Himself, the only true Love is ‘love for enemies.’ It is in no case just a super-oratory advice, and not just a free option. It is rather the first criterion, and the distinctive mark of genuine Love. ‘St. Paul was also quite emphatically at this point. God loved us while we were His enemies. The Cross itself is the perennial symbol and sign of that Love. Now, Christians must share in that redemptive Love of their Lord. Otherwise, they cannot ‘abide in His Love’. Father Silouan not only spoke of Love. He practiced it. In a humble, and yet daring manner, he devoted his life to the prayer for enemies, for the perishing and alienated world. This prayer is a dangerous and ambiguous endeavour, unless it is offered in utter humility. One can easily become conscious of his love, and then it is corroded and infected by vanity and pride. One cannot love purely, except with the love of Christ Himself; infused and operating in the humble heart....the glory of the Saints is manifested in their humility, just as the glory of the Only Begotten has been manifested in the utter humiliation of His earthly life. Love itself has been crucified in the world.’<sup>14</sup>

And Father Louis Bouyer writes:

‘Simple, and untroubled by the questions which assail present-day intellectuals, he adapted himself to this new way of living, like the other monks, more by an organic fusion with his surroundings than through oral lessons.’<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Harry Boosalis, *The Relevance of St. Silouan’s teachings for Today*, copied from: <http://saintsilouan.org/articles/silouan/relevance/>.

<sup>14</sup> *St. Silouan a new friend for the Hermit*, copied from: <http://thecompletehermit.blogspot.com/2008/01/st-silouan-new-friend-for-hermit.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Maxime Egger writes:

‘J’aimerais encore dire que cette universalité du starets Silouane a été confirmée et promue par le Patriarcat de Constantinople, qui a canonisé celui-ci le 26 novembre 1987. Dans l’acte de canonisation, le starets Silouane est présenté comme " docteur apostolique et prophétique de l’Église et du peuple chrétien ". L’important ici est le " et ", c’est-à-dire que Silouane est considéré non seulement comme un saint de et pour l’Église orthodoxe stricto sensu, mais de et pour tous les chrétiens de la terre habitée.’<sup>16</sup>

**Troparion:**

By prayer didst thou receive Christ for thy teacher in the way of humility; and the Spirit bare witness to salvation in thy heart; wherefore all peoples called unto hope rejoice this day of thy memorial. O sacred Father Silouan, pray unto Christ our God for the salvation of our souls.

**Kontakion:**

In thine earthly life thou didst serve Christ, following in His steps; and now in heaven thou seest Him Whom thou didst love, and abidest with Him according to the promise. Wherefore, O Father Silouan, teach us the path wherein thou didst walk.

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<sup>16</sup> Maxime Egger, *Starets Silouan, Un Saint Actuel et Universel*, copied from: <http://www.pagesorthodoxes.net/saints/silouane/silouane-vita.htm>.

- [Vita and articles about Saint Silouan:](#)
  - In English:
    - [A Short vita of Saint Silouan \(in English\)](#)
    - [Archimandrite Zacharias Zakharou. Keep Thy Mind in Hell and Despair Not: A Word of God for Our Generation](#)
    - [Archpriest Michael G. Dahulich. A Modern-day Saint And His Disciple: Saint Silouan and Father Sophrony](#)
    - [Harry Boosalis. The Relevance of Saint Silouan's Teaching for Today](#)
    - [Christopher Veniamin. "Theosis" in Saint Silouan the Athonite and Starets Sophrony of Essex](#)
    - [Jean-Claude Larchet. On the love of enemies: the teaching of St. Silouan](#)
    - [Jean-Claude Larchet. 'But I say to you, love your enemies'](#)
    - [Paul O'Callaghan. The Ascetical and Pastoral Theology of St Silouan the Athonite and Archimandrite Sophrony \[Retreat by the Archimandrite Zacharias\]](#)
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    - [Aperçu de la vie de saint Silouane et le Synaxaire](#)
    - ["Petite Vie" de Saint Silouane \(texte extrait de la revue "Paix" consacré a Saint Silouane \(Avril-Septembre 1988\)\)](#)
    - [Diacre Maxime Egger. Un saint actuel et universel](#)
    - [Archiprêtre Georges Florovsky. Saint Staretz Silouane l'Athonite: Préface de "The Undistorted Image" \(Traduction Claude Lopez-Ginisty\)](#)
    - [Archiprêtre Michel Evdokimov. Saint Silouane, moine de l'Athos et la quête de l'Esprit](#)
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    - [Diakon Maxime Egger. Den hellige Silouan - en nutidig helgen](#)
  - In Dutch:
    - [Orthodoxe spiritualiteit \[in the DOC format\]](#)
  - In Italian :
    - [Jean-Claude Larchet. Sull'amore dei nemici: l'insegnamento di San Silvano](#)
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    - [About Saint Silouan in Chinese](#)
  - In Russian:
    - [Vita of Saint Silouan](#)
    - [Testimonies about Saint Silouan](#)
    - [Some Miracles of Saint Silouan the Athonite \(in Russian\)](#)
    - [Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh. Elder Silouan](#)

- [Archbishop Vladimir \(Ikim\). Sermon about Saint Silouan the Athonite](#)
- [Archpriest George Florovsky. Starets Silouan \(Foreword to the book by Archimandrite Sophrony \(Sakharov\) "The Undistorted Image: Staretz Silouan"\)](#)
- [Priest Michael Dudko. Silouan the Athonite](#)
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- [Olga Kosykh, Valentina Moreva. Story about the church of the Nativity of Christ at the birthplace of Saint Silouan the Athonite in Shovskoe village \(Voronezh Diocese\)](#)