

## I Know a Man in Christ

“The first part of the book attempts to present the great Elder mainly from his own writings, which he left us as a rich inheritance. Reading these texts at various times I have realised that Elder Sophrony is somewhere between St Symeon the New Theologian and St Gregory Palamas, having experiences and spiritual gifts similar to theirs. In his book *We Shall See Him as He Is* he recorded experiences comparable with those of St Symeon the New Theologian, just as St Symeon recorded his experiences in his works. At the same time, he carried on a dialogue with scholastic academic theology in his correspondence with David Balfour, published in the book *Struggle to Know God*, as did St Gregory Palamas with the scholasticism of his day. Thus, in sketching the spiritual figure of Elder Sophrony in this first part of the book, I mainly used the words of those two great Fathers of the Church, St Symeon the New Theologian and St Gregory Palamas.

*Introduction*

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“In 2004 a book called *Struggle to Know God (Agonas Theognosias)* and subtitled *The Correspondence of Father Sophrony with D Balfour* was published by the Holy Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, Essex, England. I was particularly interested in this book because, as I mentioned above, Balfour himself had told me about this correspondence, and had revealed to me how valuable the letters were which Father Sophrony had sent him to establish him in the Orthodox faith...

The overall impression is that these letters were written by a great ascetic and hesychast, who had reached exalted spiritual states and experiences, and therefore proved to be a great empirical theologian and spiritual father. And it should be borne in mind that Father

Sophrony, at the time when he was writing these letters, was in his thirties; he was a hierodeacon and subsequently a hieromonk with great spiritual experience. It is a book full of Orthodox theology and Orthodox experience. In it we see a great spiritual father, a Staretz, writing and directing. He has the same experiences as the Apostle Paul, St Symeon the New Theologian and St Gregory Palamas.”

*Reflections on the Book ‘Struggle to Know God’*

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“I had collected his words from my contact with him over the years in a file, which I had lost due to my frequent moves. Recently, when looking for something else, I found it. I began to read what I had noted down from time to time, and I realised how rich the words of the great Elder of blessed memory were. I wrote them out to see to what extent and in what way they could be put to good use. I felt that I did not have the right to keep them in obscurity.”

[1979] “– When I spoke to Staretz Silouan, I would let him talk. I would only ask him something if I did not understand, but that happened only occasionally. Afterwards I understood him fully, particularly after his death, when I went into the desert. This is what usually happens with all those who have contact with saints.

– When I was in the Monastery of St Panteleimon on the Holy Mountain and Staretz Silouan was still alive, mentally I would kiss even the ground that he trod. I had such profound respect for him.

– When we want to help someone, God will give us a word to offer him. In general we should pray to God to tell us what to say on each occasion...

– Sometimes someone who prays becomes clear-sighted and can foresee things. Often he does not realise it himself, as it is a natural state; sometimes he also hears the voice of God in his heart. This should happen to him continuously. So when on one occasion we hear God’s voice within us or something is revealed to us, we ought to

humble ourselves and reflect that we should be continuously in this state, as was Adam before the Fall.”

[1983] “– Someone asked me if I advised him to become a monk. I replied that I could not advise him. He asked: ‘Why can you not advise me? Perhaps you regret becoming a monk?’ I replied: ‘I do not regret becoming a monk but, when the grace to be a monk comes to someone, he immediately leaves for the monastery and does not need advice.’...

– On the worldly level it is considered clever for the pupil to correct the teacher and contradict him. On the spiritual level, however, for the disciple to contradict the Elder is stupidity and spiritual death...

– It is terribly painful to pray with tears for the whole world and to be aware that other people are not interested in their own salvation”

*Theologian and Shepherd*