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**The Ecclesiology of Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov)**

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**PhD**

**Durham University**

**Department of Theology and Religion**

**2013**

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**The Ecclesiology of Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov)**

**Abstract**

The present thesis is a critical study of Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov's ecclesiology. Its central claim is that Archim. Sophrony, a twentieth century Russian ascetic and theologian, understands the Church as a created-uncreated Being, which is hypostatizable, *soborny*, and sophiological.

Archim Sophrony's theology stems from the idea of theosis, understood as the ontological meeting 'ground' between God and Man, which was the primary concern of most Russian theologians of the time. However, the differences of perspective among these theologians led to a variety of ways in which theosis is approached and defined. For Archim Sophrony, a theology of theosis needs to look first at the question regarding the simultaneous difference and identity between Divinity and Man. This exclusive concern with the ontological in-between, where God and Man become One Being, is the common concern of a series of other contemporary Russian theologians, most notably Fr Sergii Bulgakov, whose formative influence on Archim. Sophrony's thought will also be looked at in the present thesis.

Archim. Sophrony addresses the question of theosis by developing a highly creative system of interpretations around the concept of Divine image, founded on the theologies of St Gregory Palamas and Fr Sergii Bulgakov. Thus, he distinguishes between three moments of *human* existence: essence, energy and hypostaticity, which reflect the three Divine modes of existence. Consequently, Archim. Sophrony makes three central ecclesiological statements: (1) that the Being of the Church is hypostatical; (2) that it is *soborny*; and (3) that it enters a special ontological relationship with the Divine Being which allows for the simultaneous absolute distinction and absolute identity of the two Beings. These three ecclesiological statements represent the three main claims of our research, and also generate the structure of the present thesis.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction. Theological and Biographical Context**

## Chapter One

### Introduction. Theological and Biographical Context

#### I. General Introduction

##### The claim of the present thesis

Throughout the present thesis I shall gradually build an argument to support the claim that Archimandrite Sophrony defines the Church as a created-uncreated being, which is hypostatizable, *soborny* (conciliar), and sophiological.

Archim Sophrony's theology stems from a focus on the idea of theosis, understood as the ontological meeting 'ground' between God and Man. This was the primary concern of most Russian theologians of those decades, and continued to attract the attention of mainstream Orthodox theology for the rest of the twentieth century. However, the differences of perspective among these theologians led to a variety of ways in which theosis is approached and defined. For Archim Sophrony, a theology of theosis needs to look first at the question regarding the simultaneous difference and identity between Divinity and Man. This exclusive concern with the ontological in-between, where God and Man become One Being, is the common concern of a series of other contemporary Russian theologians, most notably Fr Sergii Bulgakov and Nicholai Berdiaev; widely known today as the 'maximalist theologians' of the twentieth century for their universalist ontologically-centred theology, whose formative influence on Archim Sophrony cannot be overestimated.

Archim Sophrony addresses the question of theosis by using the concept of Divine image as his main methodological tool. Following Bulgakov, he makes creative use of St Gregory Palamas'

theology of the Divine Energies, by applying it on an anthropological dimension; thus, he distinguishes between three moments of anthropological existence: essence, energy and hypostaticity, which reflect the same three Divine moments of existence, in virtue of another original interpretation of a second Patristic idea, that of creation according to the Divine image. In consequence, Archim Sophrony's theology is constantly focused on the Church, understood as an ecclesial Being, which he calls by many names, especially All-Adam or the Whole Adam; a discussion of these ecclesial names and the differences among them is included in the present chapter. In connection to this Ecclesial Being, who is also the focus of this thesis, Archim Sophrony makes three main theological statements: (1) that it is hypostatical; (2) that it is *soborny*; and (3) that it enters a special ontological relationship with the Divine Being which allows for the simultaneous absolute distinction and absolute identity of the two Beings. These three ecclesiological statements represent the three main claims of our research, and will also generate the structure of the present thesis.

### **What the present thesis does *not* do and the reasons for not doing it**

This paper does not intend to place Archim Sophrony's ecclesiology in a Patristic context, nor to argue for the Patristic validity or invalidity of his ecclesiological thought. Similarly, I have not aimed to elaborate on the philosophical – mostly existentialist – context of the first half of the twentieth century; where necessary, I have noted the existentialist influence on Archim Sophrony's theological thinking and vocabulary.

The main reason for setting these limits is that the present paper represents the first study of Archim Sophrony's ecclesiology and, as such, there is a great need first to understand *what* Archim Sophrony actually has to say, before moving to any further questions. Indeed, this paper is also the first non-introductory study of Archim Sophrony's theology, with a research focus on a particular aspect of his work. I find it methodologically proper first to ask oneself what Archim Sophrony argues for, prior to measuring him against a Patristic or existentialist context; trying to do both would overstretch the limits imposed by a doctoral thesis.

However, as a suggestion for future researchers – and a second reason for the limits imposed on the present research – I also claim that any attempt to argue for or against Archim Sophrony's ecclesiology (or wider theological thought) starting from Patristic theology would be a

methodological error, given the particular manner in which Patristic authors find their way in his theology. In short, Church Fathers are used as arguments to support a certain theological vision, to the extent to which that can be done; when their views do not coincide with Archim Sophrony's own principles, they are ignored or simply discarded. A brief look at the way in which he builds his Patristic argument concerning life after death should suffice as an example. In other words, Archim Sophrony uses Patristic authors in order to support his theology, but he does not *derive* his theology from the Church Fathers; they are not the primary source of his theology. I would further suggest that this happens for two main reasons: firstly, the formative influence of Fr Sergii Bulgakov, which pre-determined the way in which Archim Sophrony later read and received Patristic authors; secondly, because of his experiential methodology of creating theology, in which things which are revealed to him through experience are primary sources of theology, which take precedence over written sources, be they Patristic or modern. This does not mean that Patristic sources will not be used at all throughout this thesis; rather, no attempt will be made to elaborate a critical assessment of Archim Sophrony's theology from a *Patristic perspective*. We shall, of course, look at those Patristic sources which he himself references in support of this thought, and we shall try to see how he reads them, how that reading is influenced by his primary sources, and how he makes use of them in the context of his own work.

The same above-mentioned reasons also justify why I have not dwelt at large on the existentialist aspect of Archim Sophrony's theology. Even less than Patristic authors, existentialist philosophers did not have a direct impact on his work. Indirectly, one can easily trace their influence, for instance in his writings on the importance and meaning of the 'I AM' name of God, and on what he terms 'existentialist knowledge'. However, although he was aware of existentialism and its main representatives, their influence on his work is only indirect and filtered through the work of other sources of more direct impact on his theology.

### **What the present thesis does and the reasons for doing it**

This brings us to what the present paper *does* intend to do and the reasons for doing it. Thus, the primary aim of the thesis is to develop a scholarly critical analysis of Archim Sophrony's ecclesiology. Previous studies of Archim Sophrony's theology have looked mostly at his maximalist

anthropology, usually within a predominantly ascetical framework<sup>1</sup>, or have been envisaged as general academic introductions to his theology<sup>2</sup>. In contrast, the present thesis is the first academic study focused on a single aspect of his theology, namely ecclesiology; in the following chapters, we shall build on all elements of his theology in order to draw a critical image of his vision of the church. By the end of this thesis, we shall have enough evidence to claim that Archim Sophrony's overall theology, in its various aspects, has at its centre his ecclesiology; in other words, the theological vision of the Church, as the All-Adam, represents the source of Archim Sophrony's otherwise predominantly ascetical (that is, anthropological) writings, and it is in relation to the church that his theological thinking is most creative and original.

The above-mentioned critical method of this thesis constitutes an element of theological development in itself, as all previous studies of Archim Sophrony's theology have been affected to various degrees by a hagiographic approach of the Elder's work<sup>3</sup>. This analytical attitude is strictly connected with the two secondary intentions of this thesis: a re-thinking of the role and influence of St Silouan the Athonite and his writings on Archim Sophrony's work, and an accurate assessment of the impact on his work of Fr Sergii Bulgakov's sophiological theology. In doing so, I shall argue that it is methodologically unacceptable to use St Silouan's writings to argue for or against Archim Sophrony's own theology; as I do so, I shall also argue that Archim Sophrony's theology comes from a deeply sophiological core, which is directly indebted to Fr Sergii Bulgakov's work, in spite of various attempts to argue for it from a multitude of other sources – Patristic and contemporary. By this, I hope to re-define Archim Sophrony as a daring, deeply creative and highly original theologian, able to make use of both Patristic and contemporary theology in order to address the existentialist questions of his own time.

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<sup>1</sup> Archim Zacharia Zacharou's work offers the best example of this sort of work.

<sup>2</sup> The best of which remains Nicholas Sakharov's doctoral thesis, published as *I love, therefore I am: the Theological legacy of Archimandrite Sophrony* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press: **Crestwood**, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Sakharov's thesis has received criticism precisely for its lack of critical thinking; see, for instance, John Chryssavgis' review of 'I Love, Therefore I Am', where he notes that 'one element missing from this exposition is the depiction of any personal or theological weakness in an otherwise exceptional spiritual director.' *Theological Studies* 64, 4 (Dec. 2003), p. 884.

In an age of renewed interest in Bulgakov's theology, Archim Sophrony offers one of the most original ways of pushing the research in an Orthodox direction. Rather than focusing exclusively on Fr Bulgakov himself, perhaps it would be better if we saw him in the larger tradition evolving around him, and put into perspective by the theology of people who adapted his thought in their own writings. The theology of these people serve as real commentaries on Fr Bulgakov's writings, and they have the advantage of having been written from within, from inside Fr Bulgakov's theological vision. Such theological adaptation is especially relevant if the latter commentator has already found a way to translate this vision into a theological system that is generally accepted and appreciated<sup>4</sup>. The personal manner in which Fr Sophrony's traditional ascetic spirituality can be informed and sustained by a dogmatic conscience filtered through Fr Bulgakov's theology offers a very distinctive way to approach Bulgakov's theology, and to recover his work and reaffirm its place within the Orthodox theological tradition.

## **Methodology**

Methodologically, I have devoted the first Chapter to a necessary introduction to Archim Sophrony's theology and my perspective on it, and I have reserved the final part, Chapter Five, to the Conclusions of our research.

The main body of the work is dedicated to the three main statements of the central claim of the thesis, namely that the Church is a being who is (1) hypostatical, (2) *soborny* and (3) sophiological. As I build my argument around these three central statements, they will also generate the structure of the body of the thesis; consequently, Chapter Two will focus on the hypostaticity of the Church, Chapter Three will be built around the *soborny* nature of the Church, and Chapter Four will look at the sophiological character of the Church.

In doing so, we also follow Archim Sophrony's three interpretations of the doctrine of creation according to the Divine Image, and the complex system of intra-essential (*ousia*) and inter-essential

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<sup>4</sup> This acceptance made possible such events as the conference in October 2007, organised in Athens by the Athonite Vatopedi Monastery, and titled 'Elder Sophrony: Theologian of the Uncreated Light'.

relations between the Divine and the Human Beings which these interpretations generate. We shall say more about that in due time. For the time being, I just want to note that there is a perfect correspondence between Archim Sophrony's three statements regarding the Church – hypostaticity, sobornicity and sophianicity – and his use of the doctrine of creation according to the Divine image.

Thus, after the present Introduction, we shall dedicate **Chapter Two** to Archim Sophrony's statements regarding the hypostaticity of the Church. Much has been made in previous studies about his Personalist theology, mirroring the interest in the subject of most twentieth-century Orthodox theologians. However, I find it surprising that this Personalist theology is not looked at in relation to the other mainstream theological interest of the last century, namely ecclesiology. In most cases, Personalist theology developed in the work of those theologians who were primarily interested in matters of ecclesiology, brought about by contemporary questions such as catholicity, ecclesial jurisdiction, the local church and so on. The central aim of the second Chapter is thus to reassess the final developments of this Personalist theology, as found in Archim Sophrony's work, in order to see what it says about his understating of the church. In doing so, we shall discover that hypostaticity is relevant not only in relation to anthropology, but also for his ecclesiology.

Secondly, we shall focus on the *soborny* nature of the Church. **Chapter Three** will offer an in-depth analysis of Archim Sophrony's use of the concept of *sobornost* (conciliariness), mostly based on his 1951 article 'Unity of the Church'. We shall see that the Elder was aware of the many and sometimes conflicting meanings of the concept, and that he used them with great care; thus, we shall identify various sorts of *sobornicity* (conciliarity) – ethnic *sobornost*, social *sobornost*, psychological *sobornost*, ontological *sobornost* – which he applies accordingly to different interests of his theology. By the end of the chapter, we shall see that he consistently applies only the ontological meaning of *sobornost* in his ecclesiological writings, placing himself in the line of Fr Sergii Bulgakov.

This theological heritage will represent the focus of **Chapter Four**, dedicated to Archim Sophrony's third statement regarding the Being of the Church, namely its sophianicity. As it treats the question of the inter-essential (*ousia*) relationship between the Divine Being and the Church, this chapter will necessarily bring into the foreground Fr Sergii Bulgakov's major influence on Archim Sophrony's theological vision. The major components of the chapter include the analyses of an original interpretation of the doctrine of Creation, which places the element of 'likeness' in the

identity of Life between the Divine and the Human Beings, and a critical comparison between Fr Sergii Bulgakov's Creaturely Sophia and Archim Sophrony's concept of Divine Life. The chapter will highlight some of the most pressing tensions and theological inconsistencies in Archim Sophrony's writings, most of which are generated by an attempt to develop a sophiological ecclesiology without a sophiological terminology; this chapter will also reveal the limits of the co-existence between the God-centred universalist theology of Fr Sergii Bulgakov and the Man-centred ascetical theology of Archim Sophrony.

## **II. This present chapter: Aim and Methodology**

The primary aim of this first Chapter is to contextualize the subject of the present thesis, while also defining my own perspective on Archim Sophrony's biography and work. The claim of this chapter is that Archim Sophrony's theology is a theology of ontological relationships, deeply indebted to Fr Sergii Bulgakov's sophiological vision. This idea will of course be developed at large throughout the whole thesis, but I need to introduce from the start the fundamental concepts and ideas.

Without having the intention of a biography as such, I intend to generate some new insights into Archim Sophrony's biography, especially his relationship with Fr Sergii Bulgakov; by the end of the chapter we shall see that their personal relationship pre-dates their meeting at the Theological Institute of St Serge in Paris, and that Fr Sergii's ideas were surely known to the young painter Sergii Sakharov some years before that. Another biographical element will be the relationship between Archim Sophrony and St Siloan; without the intention to minimalise the formative impact of this encounter, I also want to bring to the foreground two usually neglected aspects: firstly, the fact that the two Athonite monks shared a vision before they met, and that Archim Sophrony did not discover and 'adopt' a theological and spiritual vision which he did not have before meeting St Siloan; secondly, I want to address the methodological issue of using St Silouan's writings to support Archim Sophrony's theology, given that almost all the information we have about the Athonite Saint, including his heavily-edited writings, come from Archim Sophrony himself.

This first chapter will also provide a brief systematic introduction to the Athonite Elder's work, built around his main theological concepts and ideas. While we do this, we shall also look at Archim Sophrony's writing style and his particular manner of using Patristic and contemporary

sources. Because of a very confusing publishing activity, abounding in collections of selected texts and translations which all vary to some degree one from the other, I found it methodologically useful also to include in the following pages the first ever attempt at a full bibliography of Archim Sophrony's work.

## **Theological and Biographical Context of the Subject**

### **1. Ecclesiology before and after the Russian revolution**

The first thing I need to argue for is the relevance of an ecclesiological study of Archim Sophrony's larger body of work; thus, the purpose of this section is to clarify the biographical and theological reasons for which I believe ecclesiology is the central focus of Fr Sophrony's work. In order to show why ecclesiology matters in relation to Archim Sophrony, we need to look at the more general context of Orthodox theology at the beginning of the twentieth century, especially as it was developed in Paris by the Russian émigré theologians.

In the Orthodox circle Fr Sophrony joined after his return to Christianity in the early twenties, ecclesiology was already the undisputed focus of theological debate and it remained so throughout the twentieth century. Part of the reason for this unprecedented interest in ecclesiology is the fact that, when the Soviet Revolution took place, the Russian Orthodox Church was undergoing the deepest process of transformation in its history, and a debate regarding the theological meaning of the Church was already unfolding. Naturally, the same ecclesiological questions that dominated the agenda of the 1917-18 All-Russian Sobor were taken into exile by the very theologians who debated them as part of the Council. However, as these theologians were forced by persecution into exile, their questions also had to be qualified by the new historical context<sup>5</sup>.

As a result, the Orthodox theology of these decades is imposed, and deeply shaped by the need to adapt to the realities of Western society. Ecclesiology was the natural question: what is the church,

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<sup>5</sup> For a good account of the larger social-political context of Russian Emigration in those decades, see also Philip Walters, 'The Russian Orthodox Church' in Pedro Ramet (ed.), *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1988), pp. 61-91.

once its boundaries can no longer be defined by virtue of its relationship with the national state? how can one envisage the paradoxical notion of a universal church, while living in ‘exile’? what is the relevance of the Orthodox Church, if any, to the non-Orthodox? A theology of the Church was needed as an attempt to repair a series of distortions which became painfully evident after the fall of Old Russia, and even more so due to living in the Diapora; this new context deepened the need to answer the ecclesiological questions prior to the Russian revolution, but also gave them new scope and direction.

However, not all Russian factions in exile have chosen the same manner of responding to the challenges of this new context. These differences of approach brought about internal divergences between the various groups, such as the famously difficult relationship between the Church based in Paris and led by Metropolitan Evlagii Georgievsky, and the Karlovci-based group, under Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky’s omophorion. The Orthodox in exile should not be seen as a single coagulated block, but rather as many and varied groups, each driven by its own ideals and interests<sup>6</sup>, which led to an enormous spectrum of variations in the respective theological productions of these groups. This was becoming especially visible at the time Archim Sophrony rejoined the Church, in the twenties and thirties of the last century, when most of the theological material produced was open propaganda against the opposing Orthodox groups and their ecclesial actions. Only a brief browsing of the theological journals of the time<sup>7</sup> will suffice to showcase how fierce this theological fight had become.

Both these internal differences and the general attempt to survive in the new context generated a great amount of theological work, the vast majority of which dealt with ecclesiological questions. Emigration, by definition, implies a double negotiation. On the one hand, the group in exile enters a negotiation with its new home territory. On the other hand, the situation imposes a negotiation within the emigrating group itself, a need to discern between, and to reaffirm its own values. For the Russian theologian, exile meant a reassessment of his faith in the sense of having to discern

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<sup>6</sup> See for instance, the importance political belief held in the formation of the Karlovci Synod, an ensemble for which the monarchy (and the loyalty to the Tsar) was as central as their faith; Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Orthodox Church Under the Soviet Regime 1917-1982* (SVSP: Crestwood, 1984), pp. 116-8, 131.

<sup>7</sup> As visible in the articles published at the time in *Vestnik, Put’*, or the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate.

between that which is authentic and essential, and that which is contextual and temporary. This self-evaluation called for an unprecedented openness of Orthodox theology to new questions and new ways to address them, and for a reinterpretation of the long-standing tradition of not initiating real theological discussions with the non-Orthodox. Not at all by chance, these are also the decades when the first ecumenical meetings took place, with the Orthodox representatives very strongly involved and dedicated to the ecumenical idea.

## **2. Paris Ecclesiology**

In the years when Archim Sophrony was beginning to develop his theological thought, the ecclesiological themes which dominated the theological debate addressed mostly questions arising from the issue of a ‘church in diaspora’, such as canonical jurisdiction, the relationship between state and church, autocephaly etc. Some theologians continued to build upon the more ontologically-oriented intuitions of writers of the previous century and pre-Revolution Russia. They were concerned with questions regarding the larger interpretation of Orthodox ecclesiology, its relevance for the non-Orthodox and the relationship between ecclesiology and anthropology. Fr Paul Florensky, Fr Sergii Bulgakov, Nicolai Berdiaev and, in the second half of the century, Fr Sophrony himself expanded and refined in a critical manner the theological concepts of Khomiakov, Dostoevsky and Soloviov. For these theologians, the question of the Church is linked with that of humanity, and it can only find its answer on an ontological level; institutional ecclesiology carries little or no importance at all in their works. The other approach was focused precisely on the institutional Church, and it primarily wanted to answer questions regarding the canonicity of various forms of interaction between the different local churches. The stakes in this case were those of territorial jurisdiction and the canonicity of the decisions taken by each Russian group in exile. While the majority of the first group would eventually find itself based in Paris, around Metropolitan Evlogii and the Theological Institute of Saint Serge, the representatives of the second group were predominantly in Serbia, under the omophorion of Metropolitan Khrapovitsky<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> A comprehensive presentation of the Karlovci Church can be found in Oxana Antic, ‘The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad’, in Ramet, *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 135-145.

For those who sought an ontological definition of the Church, the meaning of Ecclesiology slowly continued the development it had started the century before the Russian Revolution. In time, the concept evolved from the classical definition as the gathering of those baptised in the Orthodox Church to a wider and more refined understanding, leading to the various degrees of universalism found in the writings of Fr Florenski, Fr Bulgakov, Bediaev and Archim Sophrony Sakharov. Such evolution has seen many reinterpretations of the Church<sup>9</sup> and a corresponding effort to justify these ecclesiological visions dogmatically. What remains common throughout all these efforts is the core belief that the answer to the question regarding ecclesiology is in fact a question concerning the ontological ‘middle ground’ between God and Man in their eschatological perfection. Thus, to rediscover the Church is to rediscover the manner in which God and Man interact; this eschatological rapport will lead to a complex system of ontological relationships which can be traced in the writings of all the above-mentioned ‘maximalist’ theologians, including in the work of Archim Sophrony.

## **Introduction to Archim Sophrony: Biography, Bibliography, Theology, Main Influences, Research and Studies dedicated to his work**

### **1. Biography**

Although Fr Sophrony’s biography is relatively well known today, I want to start with some brief biographical notes. The general line of his life is well documented in the writings of some of the members of the monastic community he founded in Essex. The most detailed biography of Archim Sophrony remains that included by Nicholas Sakharov in his study, ‘I love, therefore I am’<sup>10</sup>; Archimandrite Zacharias Zacharou’s doctoral dissertation also includes a short biography of the

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<sup>9</sup> Such as Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s ecclesiology, built around the concept of *Ecclesia supra ecclesia*, which, as we shall see, had an impact on Archim Sophrony’s ecclesiological thinking; see *Bride of the Lamb*, pp 310-11.

<sup>10</sup> See the entire first chapter, ‘Fr Sophrony’s Theological Formation’, in *I Love, Therefore I Am*, pp 13-37.

Elder<sup>11</sup>. A series of other biographical details appear in the introductions to various new editions or translations of Archim Sophrony's books, in interviews or clergy retreats given by members of the monastic community in Essex, or collected memories about the Elder.<sup>12</sup> To date, the Monastery in Tolleshunt Knights remains the main source of information regarding Archim Sophrony's life, which is only natural given the fact that he lived there for over thirty years. Nevertheless, the personal relationship between him and those reconstructing this life for the wider public leads to a perceived lack of transparency regarding the information available, both in terms of biography and bibliography.

It is not my purpose here to offer a complete version of Archim Sophrony's biography, nor to correct the hagiographical additions and omissions of those which already exist. There are, however, a few biographical observations which should be made for a more balanced and critical view both of the Elder and of his writings. At the same time, I feel I must offer my own perspective on a few yet central elements of his biography, as this perspective feeds into the more elaborate study of his theology which follows this introductory chapter.

Today, Archim Sophrony Sakharov is widely known in the Orthodox world as a Russian monastic and theologian, a disciple of St Silouan the Athonite, and the editor of the Saint's writings. It is also fairly known that he was a painter before joining the Russian monastery of St Panteleimon on Mount Athos, and that he briefly attended the Theological Institute of St Serge in Paris. Perhaps his most celebrated biographical detail is that he was the founder and the spiritual leader of the Orthodox monastic community of St John the Baptist in Essex, England, where he lived until the end of his life.

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<sup>11</sup> Zacharias Zacharou, *Christ, Our Way and Our Life: A Presentation of the theology of Archimandrite Sophrony*, pp 10-16.

<sup>12</sup> For a 'spiritual biography' of the Elder, see also Maxime Egger, 'Archimandrite Sophrony, moine pour le monde', *Buisson Ardent* 1 (1995), pp 23-40; 2 (1996), pp 40-53; 3 (1997), pp 17-30; 4 (1998), pp 76-89; 5 (1999), pp 31-47; 6 (2000), pp 71-91.

A future biography of the Elder must necessarily address a number of unresolved questions, such as (1) the details of his relationship with Fr Bulgakov (When did they meet? Did they keep in touch during Archim Sophrony's stay on Mount Athos? Is there a correspondence between the two in the archives of the Monastery?), (2) the real reasons for his return to Paris (Was this the effect of his controversial correspondence with David Balfour, a proven agent for the British intelligence during the war, rather than the official stories concerning his health and the desire to edit Saint Silouan's writings? Did he leave the Holy Mountain with the blessing of his Monastery or was he accused of treason and simply expelled?) and (3) the context of his decision to leave the Moscow Patriarchate and to ask that his newly-founded community be a Stavropegic monastery under the authority of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The controversial nature of this information makes the community in Essex reluctant to approach these questions in any way; at the same time, their archives are closed to the public, as are those of Mount Athos.

Fortunately, out of these unsolved biographical elements, only one is of real importance for the present thesis, namely the personal relationship between Archim Sophrony and Fr Sergii Bulgakov. In the lack of primary sources, contextual information and studies regarding the beginning of the last century offer an alternative way to address this aspect. Thus, the one thing I want to emphasize in what follows is the importance of his life as a painter before leaving Paris in 1925. In turn, this will offer us a more critical evaluation of the complicated relationship between Archim Sophrony's future theological writings and those of Fr Sergii Bulgakov, on the one hand, and St Silouan, on the other hand.

Biographical presentations of Archim Sophrony easily discard the years of his life prior to his arrival in Paris in 1923. And yet, by that time, he was already a thirty-year old man, with a deep spiritual experience and theological convictions strong enough to make him give up his artistic career. Before he left Russia in 1912, Fr Sophrony was a painter and lived the life of a painter, meeting the people in that environment, reading and exposing himself to the artistic debates of his time. When he left Russia, he again became part of a large Russian community of artists in exile. His art was the centre of his life during that period, as he himself witnesses in his autobiographical notes. As an artist, he visited the major cities of Europe, immersing himself in the artistic quests of the time and continuing to paint and exhibit, even after having settled in Paris. It is in Paris that he

gave up his Oriental mysticism and returned to Orthodoxy, following an experience of the Divine Light. Shortly after his conversion, he joined the first generation of students of the newly founded Institute of St Serge, where he met some of the best Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century.

One of these theologians was Fr Sergii Bulgakov<sup>13</sup>, who also became his father confessor and would influence his theological vision for the rest of his life. One of the things I want to point out is that Archim Sophrony must have known Fr Sergii, if not personally, than at least by reputation and through his work, long before their meeting at the Institute of St Serge in Paris. Fr Bulgakov's growing reputation as one of the most original and creative theologians must have preceded him. This becomes evident once we take into consideration the extreme impact which some of the publications published by Fr Sergii in the first two decades of the twentieth century had on the theology of that period, but also on some of the major contemporary Russian artists.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Fr Bulgakov's turn from Marxist ideology to Kantian idealism was already apparent<sup>14</sup>. His 1903 *From Marxism to Idealism* was a huge success among the intelligentsia, as many saw in it something of a manifesto concerning a long-awaited change in cultural politics. The fact that Fr Bulgakov was an academic gave the book extra weight and acted as an official recognition of the changes that were already taking place in the Art world. The impact of the book was so significant that, in 1915, when Kazimir Malevich published his manifesto for the Black Square, he titled it *From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism*, a reference to Bulgakov's own title<sup>15</sup>. Bulgakov's early writings also include some collections of essays published in the first decade of the century which were again highly influential among Russian artists. Thus, in 1902, Fr Bulgakov (and Berdiaev, among others) contributed to *Problems of Idealism*. This volume was followed in 1905 by *New Paths (Novye Puti)* and in 1909 by *Landmarks (Vekhi)*, to which both

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<sup>13</sup> For a condensed biography of Fr Sergii Bulgakov, see Antoine Arjakovsky, 'Le Pere Serge Boulgakov, et sa place dans l'histoire de l'Eglise' in *Le Messager Orthodoxe* 152 (2012), pp. 35-43.

<sup>14</sup> Bulgakov was not the only one; among others, he was accompanied in his move by Nikolai Bedyayev, Simon Frank and Peter Struve.

<sup>15</sup> Noemi Smolik, 'Kandinsky - Resurrection and Cultural Renewal', in Hartwig Fischer and Sean Rainbird (eds.), *Kandinsky: the Path to Abstraction* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), pp. 139-57 (142).

Bulgakov and Berdyaev again contributed. *Landmarks* was a ‘volume of sophisticated political-philosophical essays [which] rapidly became a bestseller and went within one year through several printings – a success unprecedented in the history of Russian letters.’<sup>16</sup> As expected, the volume came under attack – from all traditional forces in Russia, regardless of their political colour, while gaining a cult status among the intelligentsia, and especially so with the artists. And yet it was particularly the 1905 *New Paths* volume, with its argument for an authentic Russian path in art, literature and science, which attracted the attention and interest of the art world. Its publication was greeted as the sign of a ‘Russian Renaissance’ or even, in Sergii Diaghilev’s words, a ‘Russian Resurrection’<sup>17</sup>. These artists who ‘had already committed themselves to raising the status of their “own” culture ... took heart from the debate, instigated by Bulgakov and Berdyaev, concerning the future direction of Russia, seeing it as an affirmation of their own efforts which had so far been conducted outside the universities.’<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Gleb Struve, ‘The Culture Renaissance’, in Theofanis George Stavrou (ed.), *Russia Under the Last Tsar* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), pp. 179-201 (184).

<sup>17</sup> Regarding Sergii Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes and their overwhelming importance for twentieth century art, perhaps the most condensed account belongs to Andrew O’Hagan in his review of the 2010 Victoria & Albert Museum exhibition dedicated to Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes, 1909-1929: ‘In the last decade of his life, Proust would several times get dressed, apply his cologne, don his white gloves, and escape his clammy rooms on the Rue Hamelin to attend performances by the Ballets Russes. He went as if to greet the dawn. ... Picasso was there with Jean Cocteau. Bakst was there with Benois or Stravinsky. Apollinaire was certainly there, making notes, with Satie, making comments. Braque came in. Coco Chanel whispered something to Matisse or Prokofiev or Max Reinhardt, and the person with the programme was Clive Bell, accompanying the “lovely but incredibly silly ladies” lampooned in letters by his sister-in-law Virginia Woolf. And there at the dead centre of this Risko cartoon of Modernity was the man who put it together, Serge Diaghilev ... Diaghilev was a tastemaker, a despot, a hustler and a genius: he not only “jump-started Western ballet”, as the critic Joan Acocella has said, “but he staffed it”. He gave Nijinsky and Pavlova to France and the world, but he also gave Marie Rambert to Great Britain, George Balanchine to America, Léonid Massine to Hollywood and Monte Carlo, and Stravinsky to himself. It might be time to say that the great avant-garde artist of the 20th century was not really an artist at all, but a producer.’ *The Guardian* (9 October, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> ‘Kandinsky - Resurrection and Cultural Renewal’, pp. 143-4.

The extent of the interest taken by the artistic environment in the theoretical writings of these Moscow academics was an extraordinary and very rare phenomenon. More than anything, it was a sign of those years, of their common quest for what was authentically Russian, an experience of freedom from the old dualist choice between being either for or against Western Europe. The difference between this generation and their predecessors is best expressed by the fact that fifty years before, Russian artists were fascinated with anything Western, whereas now, they were invading the cultural life in the West with their own original music, painting and dance. At a time when most Russian thinkers were still torn between the old Western or Slavophile options, there were several – especially Bulgakov, Berdiaev and Florensky – who were just as strikingly authentic and original in their thinking as the artists themselves. This common quest for authenticity accounts for the permanent interest these theologians held in art, and also justifies the strong relevance their writings had for the artists themselves.

Russian art and theology were very much intertwined at the end of the nineteenth century, when many members of the Russian intelligentsia were returning to the Orthodox Church as part of the ‘Russian Religio-Philosophic Renaissance’. This relationship between theology and art continued well into the following century. As a professional and passionate artist, and as a member of the elite of Russian intelligentsia, Archim Sophrony must have been aware of who Fr Bulgakov was, and of his writings. Long before their meeting at St Serge, as one can see from Fr Sophrony’s autobiographical notes on his art and the manner in which he understood it, the influence of Fr Sergii is obvious. As Fr Sophrony’s focus shifted from art to theology, Fr Bulgakov was his confessor and also the person who could appreciate the way in which the two fields interact. We must not forget that Fr Bulgakov was also the confessor of Sister Joanna Reitlinger, another monastic painter, and Mother (now Saint) Maria Skobtsova, a very active monastic poet<sup>19</sup>. Kandinsky himself thought so highly of Bulgakov that he invited him to contribute to the ‘Blue Rider’ almanac which he and Franz Mark were editing and which would become the key moment of abstract art history. It is impossible to imagine that Malevich, Kandinsky, Bakst, Picasso, Matisse (to name just some of the painters) and the whole artistic world spinning around Sergii Diaghilev

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<sup>19</sup> See Irina Yazykova, *Hidden and Triumphant: The Underground Struggle to Save Russian Iconography* (Paraclete Press: Brewster, Massachusetts, 2010), pp. 73-81.

knew Fr Bulgakov's writings and recognized their influence on their art, while denying that a painter as spiritually inclined as Archim Sophrony had the same knowledge.

What I try to emphasize is that Fr Sophrony did not approach Fr Bulgakov as simply one of the many theologians in Paris. Fr Bulgakov's cult reputation in artistic circles must have prepared the way for this encounter. It is essential to understand that Fr Bulgakov's influence upon Fr Sophrony's thought did not start at St Serge, but a long time before that. We know that Archim Sophrony took part in the Youth Movement of the early twenties, which makes the meeting of the two theologians almost certain by 1923; indeed, Fr Sergii was one of the initiators (with Vassilii Zenkovsky) and the president of the Youth Movement<sup>20</sup>, he gave some of the most influential lectures there<sup>21</sup>, and was the spiritual father of most of its members.<sup>22</sup> We also know that there was a strong link between the newly-established Institute and the Christian Movement of Russian Students; indeed, the idea of the institute came during one of the first meetings of the Christian Movement and, in 1924, Bulgakov, Zenkovsky and Mott were already trying to found the institution in Prague. We also know that all the students who were offered a place for the first academic year of the Institute, including the young Sergii Sakharov, were members of the Christian Movement; all of

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<sup>20</sup> For a detailed account of the Youth Movement and Fr Sergii Bulgakov's involvement in it, see Cyrille Sollogoub, 'Le Pere Serge Boulgakov et l'ACER: Perspectives Historiques' in *Le Messager Orthodoxe*, Paris, No 152 / 2012, pp. 21-34.

<sup>21</sup> Vassilii Zenkovsky describes the effect Fr Bulgakov's lecture had on the participants to the Prerov meeting of the Youth Movement thus: 'Je me souviens qu'après la conférence de Boulgakov, qui a marqué l'auditoire à tel point que celui-ci ne fut pas capable de reprendre ses esprits et resta silencieux, Kartachev se leva et dit à la jeunesse, en reprenant les paroles du Christ à la Samaritaine: "Si tu savais qui se tient devant toi!"; Cyrille Sollogoub, 'Le Pere Serge Boulgakov et l'ACER', p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> 'À la fin du congrès, le samedi soir, le pere Serge Boulgakov propose, après les vigiles, une confession commune. ... Après l'absolution commune, tout le monde est allé se confesser individuellement. Les confessions ont duré de 9 heures du soir à 4 heures du matin. Dans le compte rendu officiel du congrès, Leon Liperovsky rapporte: "le pere Serge est devenu notre pere spirituel commun à tous"; Cyrille Sollogoub, 'Le Pere Serge Boulgakov et l'ACER', pp. 27-8.

them must have known Fr Bulgakov from the previous meetings of the Movement, and must have been at least familiar with his theology.<sup>23</sup>

To conclude this biographical section, I want to suggest that it is highly possible that a correspondence between Archim Sophrony and Fr Sergii will be published in the years to come. Although I have no proof of this, I nevertheless find it impossible to believe that Archim Sophrony would cut off his contact with his previous father confessor, especially without a reason. The whole controversy surrounding Sophiology and Fr Bulgakov's condemnation would only take place some years later, so they could not have affected their relationship. Even after the controversy, as the reaction of the Russian community in Paris proved, everyone was aware at the time of the political nature of the entire affair, and Fr Sergii's reputation, both as a professor and as a confessor, was not visibly affected. For these reasons, I believe that there is a high probability for the existence of a correspondence between the two theologians in the years after Archim Sophrony joined the Russian monastery on Mount Athos.

## **2. Bibliography<sup>24</sup>**

Archim Sophrony's writing career started after his return to Paris in 1947. We know from his autobiographical notes that he used to write long before that, in order to organize his thoughts and not to forget them. However, it wasn't until his collaboration with *Messenger de l'Exarchat* started in 1950 that his work started to be published; his first article is signed with initials, in the first number of the journal.

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<sup>23</sup> It is relevant, thus, that Fr Bulgakov created the Brotherhood of the Divine Sophia during the founding congress of the Christian Movement, at Pserov in October 1923; for more details on the set-up of the Movement, the Brotherhood and their connections with the Institute of St Serge, see Arjakovsky, *La Generation des Penseurs Russes*, pp. 114-25.

<sup>24</sup> See IdRef: 'Le référentiel des Autorités SUDOC for Sofroni (archimandrite; 1896-1993)' at <http://www.idref.fr/027142515>; Archim Sophrony: Obituary, *The Times* (London, 16 July 1993).

Over the next four decades, his published work grew to include a significant number of journal articles, books, collections of sermons, correspondence and various anthologies of texts. This great variety of formats reflects the variety of the work itself; as a common rule, the books, articles and the collections of these articles are of a theological nature, while his sermons and correspondence are generally of a more ascetical and practical nature. Of course, this distinction should not prevent us from using references to his sermons and letters in order to argue for his theological thought, as his theological vision seeps into and is manifested in his monastic writings. However, this must be done with discernment, especially for an author like Archim Sophrony, known for his ability to adapt his discourse according to the spiritual, intellectual and cultural level of this interlocutor. This can easily be spotted in his sermons, where he always specifies whom he is talking to: the new brothers or temporary guests of the monastery. The same desire to adapt to one's cultural and spiritual background justifies the many differences between the various translations of his work – chapters vary from one version to the other, some translations leave out a chapter, while others include new text written especially for the audience of that culture; these differences are not at all accidental, as most of the translations done during his lifetime (and certainly those into French, English and Greek) are the work of close friends (such as Rosemary Edmunds) or members of the monastic community (Archim Zacharias Zacharou, Archim Symeon, Fr Rafail Noica), who have worked under the Elder's close supervision (who also knew these languages himself).

As a rule, one must keep in mind that Archim Sophrony's writings (and talks to his community, since they have eventually been published) serve two different purposes: to expound his theology and to help the spiritual growth of his community. Both of these strands of writing can be traced back to the very beginning of his career; thus, his work in the first years after his return to Paris included spiritual writings like the article on 'Holy Silence', published in *Messenger de l'Exarchat*, but also theological studies such as his introduction to St Silouan's notes and his essay on the 'Unity of the Church' in *Messenger de l'Exarchat*.

Methodologically, since the aim of the present thesis is to look at Archim Sophrony's ecclesiological thinking, a predominantly theological subject, I have focused more on Archim Sophrony's journal articles, his books and anthologies of essays, rather than his private correspondence and semi-private talks to his community in Tolleshunt Knights. These monastic

writings have been used only to support the concerns and ideas he develops in his theological work, or as illustrations of how these ideas are manifested on a more practical level. As we shall see, at times, as is the case with his developments of the *soborny* principle, it becomes necessary to draw a very clear demarcation line between his theological views and their various ascetical manifestations, as these can differ to the extent of opposing each other.

Apart from these methodological considerations, I also find it necessary to offer at least an outline of a bibliography of Archim Sophrony's work. This is the first attempt of its kind, as neither Nicholas Sakharov, nor any other of those who have written on Archim Sophrony have put together a complete list of his writing output. For practical reasons, I have opted for a chronological list of the materials I have encountered, rather than organizing them according to any other criteria. This will make the list easier to use for future research; it should also be clear enough from the publication details whether one particular work is a journal article, a book, a collection of various essays or part of his correspondence. I also want to underline that, since the Monastery in Essex holds the rights to archive, edit and publish Archim Sophrony's work, the following list can only be incomplete, and may be expanded as new material (especially correspondence) will be made available by the Monastery.

‘Sviatoe Molchanie’<sup>25</sup>, in *Messenger de l'Exarchat*, number 1, 1950;

‘Unity of the Church according to the Unity of the Holy Trinity – Orthodox Triadology as model for Orthodox Ecclesiology’, in *Messenger de l'Exarchat*, numbers 2-3, 1950<sup>26</sup>;

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<sup>25</sup> This is Archim Sophrony's first journal article; it is signed ‘h.s.’ (Hieromonk Sophrony), but the ‘Index des articles parus dans le *Messenger de L'Exarchat* entre 1950-1960’ lists the article under his name (see *Messenger de l'Exarchat*, no. 1, 1961).

<sup>26</sup> Translated into French as ‘Unite de l'Eglise, Image de la Sainte Trinite’, *Messenger de l'Exarchat*, no. 5, 1950.

‘Unite de l’Eglise à l’Image de la Sainte Trinite: Triadologie Orthodoxe Comme Principe de l’Ecclésiologie’, published by *Contacts: Revue bimestrielle des Orthodoxes français*<sup>27</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> year, New Series, nos. 21-4, 1958;

*Elder Silouan (Starets Siluan)*, published as samizdat, Paris, 1952;<sup>28</sup>

‘The Principles of Orthodox Asceticism’ (‘Ob osnovah pravoslavново podvijnitchestva’)<sup>29</sup>, in *Messenger de l’Exarchat*, numbers 13 and 14, 1953;

‘On the Transfiguration of the Lord’ (‘Slovo na Preobrazhenie Gospode’), in *Messenger de l’Exarchat*, number 19, 1954;

*His life is mine*, a collection of selected texts published by St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y., in 1977<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> This edition of the article was included in *La félicité de connaître la voie* (Genève: Labor et fides, 1988), and later in the Russian anthology of texts *Rozhdenie b Tsarstvo* (Essex: Monastery of St John the Baptist, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> Translated into English by Rosemary Edmonds and published as *The Undistorted Image* in 1958, and again in two parts, as *The Monk of Mount Athos. Staretz Silouan 1866-1938* (London: Mowbrays, 1973) and *Wisdom from Mount Athos* (London: Mowbrays, 1974); translated into French by Hieromonk Symeon as *Starets Silouane, moine du Mont Athos: 1886-1938: vie, doctrine, écrits* (Paris: Présence, 1974).

<sup>29</sup> Later published under the same title by Imprimerie Union, Paris, 1953. Translated into French as ‘Des Fondements de l’Ascèse Orthodoxe’, *Messenger de l’Exarchat*, numbers 17 and 18, 1954.

<sup>30</sup> Translated into French by Claude Lopez and Hieromonk Symeon as *Sa vie est la mienne* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1981).

*We Shall See Him as He Is (Videt' Boga kak On yest')*<sup>31</sup> (in Russian in 1985?)

*La Félicité de connaître la voie : des principes en orthodoxie*, published by Labor et Fides, Genève, 1988;

*On Prayer (A Molitve: sbornik statei)*, published by YMCA-PRESS, Paris, 1991<sup>32</sup>

*Letters to Close People: Correspondence with the Family of Protopresbyter Boris Stark (Pisma blizkim liudiam: perepiska s sem'ei protoiereia Borisa Starka)*, published in Moscow, by Otchii Dom, 1997;

*Letters to Russia (Pisma v Rossiyu)*, published by the Monastery of St John the Baptist, Essex, 1997;

*Birth Into the Kingdom Which cannot Be Moved (Rozhdenie b Tsarstvo nepakolebimoe)*, published by the Monastery of St John the Baptist, Essex, 1999;

*The Striving of Finding God (Podvig Bogopoznania: Pisma s Afona k D. Balfuru)*, published by the Monastery of St John the Baptist, Essex, 2002;

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<sup>31</sup> Translated into French by Hieromonk Symeon as *Voir Dieu tel qu'Il est* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1984); translated into English as *We Shall See Him as He Is* in 1987.

<sup>32</sup> Translated into French by Hieromonk Symeon as *La prière, expérience de l'éternité* (Paris: les Éd. du Cerf, 1998); later published in English as *On Prayer*.

*Spiritual Talks (Dukhovnie Besedi)*, published in two volumes, as: *Dukhovnie Besedi vol. 1* (Essex: Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2003) and *Dukhovnie Besedi vol. 2* (Essex: Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2007)

*Correspondence with Protopresbyter George Florovsky (Perepiska c Protoiereem Georgiem Florovskim)*, published by the Monastery of St John the Baptist, Essex, in 2008;

### **3. Theology**

#### **a. Archim Sophrony's Writing Style**

What has just been said regarding the methodological need to distinguish between Archim Sophrony's theological writings and those of a more ascetical nature is the reflection of a similar dichotomy in the contents of his theology. Throughout this thesis, special attention will be given to discern Archim Sophrony's theological thinking in the ascetical texts it is applied to. The books Archim Sophrony himself valued most – *We shall See Him as He Is, On Prayer*, and the anthology of articles *Birth into the Kingdom* – offer a deeper and clearer, almost systematic perspective of his theological vision, whereas the rest of the bibliographical material – especially his correspondence and the collections of sermons which were published after his death – offer a more diluted version of his thinking, which sometimes seems to go against the very principles he enunciates in his books. It seems to me, therefore, that a proper study of Archim Sophrony's theology can only be founded on a proper discernment between the value and the appropriate usage of the material – written and oral – he left behind. A correct assessment of his theological thinking can only be obtained by starting from the books and studies he published during his lifetime; the collections of the talks to the community and the correspondence published posthumously should be used with care and exclusively in order to illustrate his ascetical thinking or the ways in which he applied the principles of his theology to the monastic life of the community around him.

Over the following few pages, I aim to make a brief and general presentation of Archim Sophrony's theological thinking. This theoretical presentation will be developed in more detail in the subsequent chapters of the thesis; its intention at this stage is to offer an introduction into Archim Sophrony's main theological concerns and concepts, and my own perspective on these. Before I embark on this presentation, I must also emphasize that Archim Sophrony is not a systematic theologian, although one cannot argue either that he is entirely without a system. He constructs his books as collections of essays or chapters, most of which do not flow one from the other and do not contribute to a common stream of thought running through the entire volume.

This manner of writing theology is directly connected with Archim Sophrony's understanding of what he names 'existentialist knowledge', meaning that to know something is to experience it; consequently, to write about God is to experience God, so that proper theology comes when 'we are introduced into the very act of the Divine Being'<sup>33</sup>; he writes:

Our existential union with the God of Love presupposes the harmonious confluence of two wills – God's and man's. Such union takes place in a state of love. God, the Personal Spirit, and man qua persona are joined in one in the eternal Act of Divine Life. Thus do we come to know God.<sup>34</sup>

Knowledge, therefore, is an act of personal revelation from God, a mutual openness between God and man. Being personal by nature, existential knowledge cannot be learned from books or tradition; once one acquires this sort of knowledge, all that tradition has to offer are examples of people who have had similar experiences<sup>35</sup>. We shall look into more detail at Archim Sophrony's

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<sup>33</sup> *We Shall See Him*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>34</sup> *We Shall See Him*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>35</sup> An interesting case is the strong relationship Archim Sophrony has with St Paul, which comes from a similarity of their experience; see, for instance, his account of the experience of repentance, when he writes that, 'thus it was with me. And so, reading St Paul's Epistles, I surmise – confidently, I make no secret of it – that he, too, was given the same experience', *We Shall See Him*, p. 227. For more examples, see also: *We Shall See*, pp. 26, 83, 116, 133, 226; page 153 offers a touching account of St Paul's conversion, into which one can easily read Archim Sophrony's similar experience.

notion of existential knowledge in Chapter Four; for now, I wanted to underline the link between it and Archim Sophrony's unsystematic theology.

At times, Archim Sophrony complains about the limits of his own language and his ability to express in words the impressions left by a living experience; at other times, this handicap is generalised, so that it is no longer a personal matter<sup>36</sup>, but the expression of a universal inability of a created mind or language to contain and describe uncreated realities. This does not refer only to writing itself, but to any other manner of expression, including art; thus, he writes that:

[God] surpasses all human thought. Not a single one of our abstract conceptions is applicable to Him. ... When I was a painter I never achieved satisfaction because the means at my disposal were impotent to portray the beauty of creation. And now all the words that I can find to express my wonder before God are quite futile.<sup>37</sup>

In some cases, systematic thinking is seen not only as an inability, but even as something alien to the living experience of God. The 'thinking proper to mathematicians' cannot express this experience; life in God 'is not appropriate for "systematization"'<sup>38</sup>. The same unsystematic approach reflects on his autobiographical notes, too; he warns: 'do not expect an orderly, properly-

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<sup>36</sup> See, for instance: *Rozhdenie*, pp. 62-3; also *We Shall See Him*, pp. 138, 215, 230.

<sup>37</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 198; see also *Rozhdenie*, p 27-30; 179.

<sup>38</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 3.

constructed account of the life of my soul'<sup>39</sup>. Instead, he often uses analogies, which he defines as 'the method of the Fathers'<sup>40</sup>, and prefers to quote extensively from the New Testament<sup>41</sup>.

The apparent methodology and structure of a book like *Birth Into the Kingdom*, for instance, is the contribution of those who edited the volume, not a result of Archim Sophrony's systematic approach to the subject. On the other hand, a few of these essays and chapters – such as *The Principles of Orthodox Asceticism*, *The Hypostatical Principle in the Godhead and in the Human Being* and *Unity of the Church according to the Image of the Holy Trinity* – stand out among the others through their structure and methodology. Some of these chapters were envisaged as independent texts, either to be published as journal articles or to be presented as conference papers<sup>42</sup>, which justifies for their overall superior structure and systematic approach to their topic.

What holds these various independent texts together is Archim Sophrony's coherent and consistent theological vision. This consistent vision is visible in all of his essays and compensates for the lack of a more systematic style of writing. At the same time, this unifying vision justifies the scholarly

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<sup>39</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 143. Apart from the limits imposed by our rational thinking and created language, there is also a danger in trying to understand what happens to oneself spiritually, as the external limitations of the mind and language can lead to deformations of the living experience; as Archim Sophrony repeatedly writes, this is a risk closely linked with being a father confessor – see *We Shall See Him*, pp. 145, 199-200.

<sup>40</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 78; some of these analogies are extremely beautiful – see, for instance, *Rozhdenie*, pp. 84-85; also, *We Shall See Him*, pp. 68, 90, 111.

<sup>41</sup> At times, these Scriptural quotations take pages; in several instances, he quotes entire chapters from the New Testament, as for instance in *Rozhdenie*, p. 77 (Letter to the Hebrews, chapters 3 and 4) and pp. 33-34 (New Testament selections), but also in *We Shall See Him*, p. 76 (Matthew, the entire chapter 16); this aspect of his writing style he shares with Fr Sergii Bulgakov.

<sup>42</sup> 'The Principles of Orthodox Asceticism' was delivered as a public lecture in Paris, in 1952; the following year, it was published in *Messenger de l'Exarchat* 13 and 14 (1953); similarly, 'Unity of the Church' was envisaged from the very beginning as a longer contribution to *Messenger de l'Exarchat* 2 and 3 (1950).

attempts of researchers interested in his theology, myself included, to look for a systematic thinking behind the otherwise largely unsystematic body of work.

## **b. Terminology: Hypostasis, Sobor and other derived terms**

In his work, Archim. Sophrony makes abundant use of several technical terms. Most of these are common among all Russian theologians working at the beginning of the twentieth century, reflecting the common theological interests which captured their attention at the time. Anthropology and ecclesiology were the main topics during the first decades of last century, so that terms such as ‘hypostasis’ and ‘sobor’ were particularly common.

The purpose of this brief section is to introduce the reader to these terms and their meaning in the context of Archim. Sophrony’s thought. Each of these terms - hypostasis, hypostaticity, principle of hypostasis, sobor, soborny, sobornost and so on - and their meanings are presented in much more detail in the following chapters, as follows: hypostasis and all its forms are looked at in a dedicated section of Chapter Two, ‘Hypostasis versus principle of hypostaticity. Definitions’; similarly, sobornost and its derived forms are defined in depth in the second part of Chapter Three, ‘*Sobornost*: an anthology of meanings and their relevance to Archim. Sophrony’s ecclesiological thinking’.

The above-mentioned theological homogeneity at the beginning of last century is limited to the level of language. Rather than reflecting a similar homogeneity of thought, this terminological similarity hides a variety of meanings, many times opposed to each other. This blandness of their vocabulary can be explained through a number of factors, such as the common ethnicity of most major theologians at the time (most of them were Russian), the common linguistic impact of existentialism on their work, and the fact that all these theologians share common themes and interests. This final reason is partly explained by the influence Fr Sergii Bulgakov had on those writing theology at the time; regardless of their personal attitude towards his work, most of these theologians responded to Fr Sergii’s theology by developing the same subjects and using similar terms.

One of these terms is that of *hypostasis* (or *Person*), which is perhaps Archim. Sophrony's most frequently used concept. Archim Sophrony borrows the term of *hypostasis* from the early Christological debates and applies it anthropologically. In general terms, Archim Sophrony uses *hypostasis* to refer to the ontological state of a being that has fully actualised its nature; very frequently, this is opposed to the state of the *individual*. Despite the frequent recurrence of the term, Archim offers no precise definition of his understanding of *hypostasis*, and prefers to refer to the alternative ideas of *hypostaticity* or *personal principle*. Although they appear to be synonymous, the two concepts carry different meanings for Archim. Sophrony: while *hypostasis* denotes an ontological state of existence, *hypostaticity* (like *personal principle* or *personhood*) refers to an ontological *process*. In Archim Sophrony's work, hypostasis is an ontological destination, while the personal principle is the way to this destination.

The same difference appears between his two main ecclesiological terms: *sobor* and *sobornost* (*sobornicity* or *soborny principle*). *Sobor* is the Russian word for 'church' and also for 'council'; most probably, it comes from the verb *sobrat*, meaning 'to gather'<sup>43</sup>. *Sobornost* and *soborny* are specifically Russian terms, both of them derived from *sobor* and linked with the idea of catholicity. In fact, *soborny* is the Slavonic translation for *catholic*, as it appears in the Russian Creed. Over the course of Russian history, the *idea of sobornicity* went through a number of profound transformations, both of meaning and of terminology. In a few centuries, the concept evolved from a predominantly ethnic idea into a social and nationalistic one; ultimately, in the early twentieth century, *sobornost* became the ontological concept we find in the works of Fr Sergii Bulgakov and Nicolai Berdiaev. Archim. Sophrony collects most of these variations of meaning and applies them to a wide range of ideas, such as nationalism, monasticism, psychology, pan-humanism and, especially, ecclesiology. Each of these meanings of the concept of *sobornost* and their respective usage in Archim. Sophrony's work will be looked at in detail in Chapter Three, the section on '*Sobornost: an anthology of meanings and their relevance to Archim. Sophrony's ecclesiological thinking*'.

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<sup>43</sup> see Andrew Louth's discussion in *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* (SPCK: London, 2013), the subchapter on 'Sobornost' and the Church' pp. 92 - 5.

### c. The Main Concepts of His Theology

Archim Sophrony's theology can be reduced to a series of questions concerning humanity: what is it to be human? what is the relationship we have with other human beings? and what sort of relationship do we have with our Creator? Ultimately, Archim Sophrony's theology is an investigation of the ontological relationships which define what it is to be Human. He develops this theology of ontological relationships by building on three fundamental concepts, which shall be briefly looked at in what follows: (1) an original implication of the Palamite distinction between essence and energy, which allows him to make the same distinction on the human level; (2) a creative use of the doctrine of creation according to the Divine image, which creates a series of correlations between these modes of existence on the Divine and human dimensions, respectively; and (3) a Christological thinking allowing Archim Sophrony to apply anthropologically all dogmatic statements concerning Christ's humanity.

The following section of this chapter offers a brief systematic introduction into these key concepts and their theological implications. We shall start by offering more details about Archim Sophrony's Christological thinking and the twofold revelation he derives from it. This will be followed by an introductory analysis of Archim Sophrony's theology of ontological relationships; starting from Christ's Divine-Human Hypostasis, we shall distinguish between intra-essential relationships (relations within the same nature) and extra-essential relationships (relations between two different natures). Once we have achieved that, we shall briefly address Archim Sophrony's three fundamental ecclesiological statements: (A) the Church is Hypostatical; (B) the Church is *Soborny*; (C) the Church enters a particular relationship of identity-difference with the Divine Being. This discussion will include a brief analysis of the role held by 'Adam' in relation to Archim Sophrony's ecclesiology; thus, we shall distinguish between Adam, All-Adam and the Whole Adam and their different meanings. As we shall go through these stages, other central concepts will also be introduced into our discussion, such as maximalism, personalism or commensurability.

## Christology and Christological Revelation

### Christology

In Archim Sophrony's writings, Christology is of central importance more as a methodological 'tool', rather than a subject in itself<sup>44</sup>. Christ's primordial importance is not expressed through an investigation of His Person 'per Se', but through an investigation of His Person as the 'measure of all things and foundation of all knowledge'<sup>45</sup> concerning both God and Man<sup>46</sup>. Archim Sophrony's final purpose by means of Christological investigation is not to understand something about Christ, but instead to understand something about Humanity through what Christ's Incarnated Person reveals about the Human Being<sup>47</sup>.

Archim Sophrony sees Christ as a point of intersection of a complex system of ontological relationships on the Divine, human and Divine-human levels. As such, Christ is central not as the

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<sup>44</sup> Things differ, of course, when Archim. Sophrony focuses on practical aspects of life, such as asceticism and monastic unity.

<sup>45</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 101.

<sup>46</sup> 'Without Him (Christ) I know neither God, nor Man' – 'On the Personal Principle', in *We Shall See Him*, pp. 300-1.

<sup>47</sup> 'Christ is the unshakeable foundation and the highest criterion of the teaching of the Church concerning man – of anthropology. Everything we confess concerning Christ's humanity is the revelation of God's Idea before the ages for humanity in general' in *Rozhdenie*, p. 71; also 'Christ showed us true man as conceived by the Creator' – *We Shall See Him*, p. 229.

key to specifically Christological questions<sup>48</sup>, but to anthropological, ecclesiological and sophiological ones. The central place Christ occupies in Archim Sophrony's theology comes from what His Hypostasis reveals in an implicit manner about the Divine and Human Beings and the relationship between the two. This is justified by the central axiom of his theology, according to which everything we know about Christ's humanity can and must be universally applied to human beings<sup>49</sup>.

This Christocentric character of Fr Sophrony's theology is manifested in his focus on Christ's ontological *soborny* 'structure' – both as God and Man – and in the identity of Life (the identity of the 'moment of energies') of the two natures co-existent in Him. His Christology presupposes an

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<sup>48</sup> Patristic Christology is clearly assimilated and presupposed by Fr Sophrony's theological writings, but it is not repeated as such. He is not interested in re-formulating Patristic conclusions, but to use them in order to formulate answers to contemporary theological questions. Although he remains very reserved in formulating the purpose of his theology, his attitude becomes visible at times; for instance, in one of his notes in *Unity of the Church* that 'I find it useless to expand on themes which have already been developed by other authors' (*Rozhdenie*, note 33, pp. 212-13).

For example, he never stops to argue for the co-existence of two natures in Christ, as this is something the Tradition he belongs to already presupposes. What interests him is not that there are two natures in Christ, but what this co-existence of two natures in Christ means, how it is possible and what are the implications of this Patristic dogma; this is precisely Fr Sergii's attitude to theology.

<sup>49</sup> It seems necessary to observe here that Fr Sophrony's anthropological axiom is not alien to Patristic theology. The basic idea that man is not yet himself, and that he must undergo a process of transformation in order to become properly human is common among the Fathers. The methodology used to define what this proper human being looks like is also common; in a Patristic manner, he starts from the doctrine of Creation and the Chalcedonian dogma of the Incarnation. His originality consists in his interpretations of what it means to be created 'according to the image and likeness' and the extent of such 'likeness' between the Divine and the Human Beings.

understanding of Christ not only as a Hypostasis, but also as a *Sobornost*<sup>50</sup>; this makes his theology as much Trinitarian (a theology of the *Sobornost*) as it is Christological (a theology of the Person)<sup>51</sup>. Similarly, Archim Sophrony's Christ is also a Sophiological being who hypostatizes the Divine Energy in a two-fold manner, both creaturely and uncreaturely. As a result, Christ becomes the revealer of both intra-ontological relationships (within the Divine *Soborny* Being and the Human *Soborny* Being, respectively) and an inter-ontological relationship between the two Beings.

### **Twofold Christological Revelation**

In what could be called a typically Patristic method of investigation, Archim Sophrony starts his analysis of what it is to be human by looking at Christ's own manner of being human; by the end of this examination, however, his theology reflects the formative effect twentieth century scholarship and its developments of Patristic theology had on him. Ultimately, Archim Sophrony looks to Christ in order to answer the three essential questions he has regarding the All-Adam: (1) what does it mean that humanity is a multi-hypostatical being? (2) what does it mean that humanity is one *soborny* being? and (3) what is the nature of the relationship between God and humanity?

Christ's Divine-Human Hypostasis is an appropriate source of revelation regarding these questions, as His Incarnation places Him at the intersection point of a complex ontological system of horizontal relationships (allowing for intra-essential revelations) and vertical relationships (leading to inter-essential revelations). This perspective of Christ allows Archim Sophrony to use this twofold Christological revelation in order to develop a comparative investigation of the two

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<sup>50</sup> Without being Himself the *Sobornost* of the Holy Trinity, Christ (as each of the other Two Divine Hypostases) is nevertheless dynamically identical with It, and Its absolute Revelation.

Simultaneously, and in a similar manner, without being Himself the *Sobornost* of the Whole-Adam (the Church), the same unique Person of Christ (as each of the multitude of other human hypostases) is nevertheless dynamically equal with it, and its absolute revelation.

<sup>51</sup> It is as if the hypostasis is merely the 'methodology of revelations' regarding *soborny* beings and *soborny* ways of existence; in other words, the *Soborny* Being and Existence of the Divine Trinity (and those of its image, the Church) can only be revealed when they manifest hypostatically.

ontologically-different *Soborny* Beings – the Holy Trinity and the Church – and also of the relationship which exists between these two *Soborny* Beings.

Thus, on the one hand, Christ is defined through the existential relationships He engages in the Divine *Sobornost* (with the other Two Divine Persons), and within the Human *Sobornost* (with the multitude of the other human persons). Consequently, the relation between Christ and the Holy Trinity becomes the model of the relation between a human hypostasis and the human *sobornost*, the Church. The dynamic identity between the Divine *Sobornost* and any of Its three Hypostases is projected into the rapport between the Human *Sobornost* and all of its hypostases. The theological foundation of this transfer of relationships comes from a creative treatment of the idea of man's creation 'according to the image' of the Divine Being.

At the same time though, Christ also lives, and thus reveals, the ontological unity (in the sense of being identical and one) between the Divine Being (the Holy Trinity) and the Human Being (the Church). Therefore, Archim Sophrony uses Christ's Hypostasis as the prototype of the ontological relationship between the Divine Being and the Human Being. He takes his main arguments from the Chalcedon dogma concerning the Incarnation, a series of Scriptural passages<sup>52</sup> and the implications of his original Palamite interpretation of the doctrine of Creation 'according to the image'.

Following from this interpretation of Christ, it becomes impossible to treat separately the two concepts of hypostasis and *sobornost*, both regarding the Divine and human Beings. At the same time, given the relationship between these two *Soborny* Beings made visible in Christ, it also becomes impossible to draw an absolute demarcation line between them, with the traditional exception of the ontological difference between their respective natures<sup>53</sup>. These two ontological

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<sup>52</sup> Most of which are the same ones Fr Sergii Bulgakov recurrently referred to in his own writings.

<sup>53</sup> 'According to Revelation, the distinction between God and man in eternity is only on the level of Essence, and not at all as far as the glory or content of Divine Life are concerned' 'Unity of the Church' in *Rozhdenie*, p. 82. However, things become complicated when he defines 'Eternal life in God – that is God Himself' (*Dukhovnie Besedi* I, p. 158). Deification does not mean becoming 'one more god' alongside God, but becoming the very God, the only God, as His Energy.

tensions remain obvious throughout Fr Sophrony's entire work, and they eventually become the central poles of his theology.

To conclude this brief presentation of Archim Sophrony's methodology, we must keep in mind that he uses Christology mainly to argue that Man and the Church are dynamically identical, following the dynamic identity (identity at the level of energy) between Christ and the Holy Trinity. Also, the Human Being becomes ontologically identical with the Divine Being according to the moment of Energy, as revealed in their energetic unity and oneness in the Divine-human Person of Christ. The system of these two theological equations, the analysis of the way in which the two different ontological realities are intertwined and relate to each other, is the specific and most original mark of Fr Sophrony's writings, ultimately defining his thought as a theology of ontological relationships.

### **Intra-essential Relationships: The Principles of Human Hypostaticity and *Sobornost***

Fr Sophrony consistently understands Christ as the model (and revelation) of the relationship between a Hypostasis (Divine or human) and Its ontologically-proper *Sobornost* (Divine or human, respectively). This is why he rarely meditates on Christ separated from the Holy Trinity. It is this very relationship between Christ's Hypostasis and the *Soborny* Being of the Holy Trinity which Fr Sophrony sees as a revelation in itself. In this sense, his theology is just as much Trinitarian (a theology of the *Sobornost*) as it is Christological (a theology of the Hypostasis-Person), as the two notions presuppose one another – the hypostasis cannot be defined outside the *soborny* principle, and the other way around<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Archim. Sophrony follows a common theme in Russian theological tradition. Beginning with Khomiakov and undergoing several transformations (the most important of which were Dostoievsky and Soloviev), the notion of '*sobornost*' gradually acquired an ontological meaning at the beginning of the twentieth century through the works of Florensky and Bulgakov. From then on, the idea has become a mantra of Russian theology.

But this relationship between the Divine *Sobornost* and the Divine Hypostases imposes a similar relationship between the Human *Sobornost* (the Church as the Whole-Adam) and each of all the Human Hypostases. This is justified by Fr Sophrony's reading of the Creation 'according to the image' as the reflection of this very relationship between the Divine *Sobornost* and Hypostases at the human level<sup>55</sup>. Indeed, Fr Sophrony uses the Divine *Sobornost* (the Holy Trinity) and the Divine Hypostasis (Christ) as the respective Prototypes of the human *Sobornost* (The Church) and human Hypostases. Thus, when he thinks of the Human Being ecclesiologically, as the Church, he uses the Trinitarian *Sobornost* as its Prototype<sup>56</sup>. However, when he focuses on human hypostaticity, he defines Man as being created in the image of Christ, as of one of the Divine Hypostases<sup>57</sup>.

This dynamic identity of the *soborny* and hypostatical principles in the Divine Being allows for the simultaneous absolute identity and absolute difference between each of the Three Divine Persons and the Holy Trinity. The reflection of this dynamic identity of the two principles on the human level necessarily imposes that Anthropos (Adam, as each of all human hypostases) and Ecclesia (All Adam, as the human *sobornost*) should also become dynamically identical<sup>58</sup>.

Archim Sophrony argues that this identity is not something of secondary importance, but the very mark of Christian anthropology. Only Trinitarian theology allows for, and demands this dynamic

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<sup>55</sup> 'This is also how one must understand the image of God in man: with other words, humanity, while being one in its essence, is composed by a multitude of hypostases, each of them afore-destined to bear in itself, eschatologically, the complete wholeness of Divine-human existence ... in other words, to become a universal man. And this wholeness cannot be reached otherwise except in the Church and through the Church'; *Rozhdenie*, p. 85.

<sup>56</sup> '[M]an is one, one in essence and multiple in hypostases ... man, according to the image of the Holy Trinity, is a consubstantial soborny being' – *Rozhdenie*, p. 60.

<sup>57</sup> Man is created and called to become 'according to the likeness of the perfect man – Christ, Who bears in Himself the whole Man' – *Rozhdenie*, p. 60.

<sup>58</sup> Thus, while *sobornically* 'man is one ... a consubstantial soborny being', hypostatically this is manifested by the fact that 'such mode of existence, in its final becoming, means that each human hypostasis ... must become ... equal with the whole humanity, with the whole One-Man (cf. Genesis. 1:26)' – *Rozhdenie*, p. 60.

ecclesia–anthropos identity. As Fr Sophrony defines it, the hypostatic principle presupposes *sobornicity* under both its aspects, as multitude and as wholeness. On the one hand, *sobornost* as multiplicity is the guarantee of the absolute differentiation between the hypostases, even in their perfect identity. On the other hand, *sobornicity* as wholeness implies the unity and oneness of these hypostases, their absolute dynamic identity. Thus, the principle of uniqueness, of Personhood, can only be activated in parallel with the complementary principle of multiplicity, of *Sobornost*. The Christian Person is necessarily also a *Sobornost*, while the Christian *Sobornost* is necessarily manifested as a multitude of Persons.

If any of the two aspects of a *soborny* being would be lost or distorted, the hypostatic principle would no longer express Christian dogma, but would instead lead back to the old heresies concerning God's Being<sup>59</sup>. That would be further reflected in a distorted and non-Christian vision about Man's own Being. In other words, in order for it to be a Christian concept, a human hypostasis (a Person) must necessarily also be a human *sobornost* (the Church). Otherwise, should the hypostatic principle be conceived without *soborny* multiplicity, the Divine *Sobornost*, the Holy Trinity, would be reduced to one single Hypostasis. Implicitly, the Human *Sobornost*, the Church, would be reduced to one single Hypostasis. The heresy of heno-theism would find its anthropological counterpart in the non-Christian heno-anthropos<sup>60</sup>. From the opposing perspective, if we define the hypostatic principle outside the wholeness (that is unity and oneness) of the *soborny* being, both the Divine and the Human Beings would be 'broken' into a multitude of different hypostases. Theologically, this would mean a return to paganism and an anthropological system which mirrors the pagan system of multiple and separate deities.

The 'structure' of Fr Sophrony's Anthropos and Ecclesia can only exist within Christian theology, they require a Divine Prototype of mono-theistic structure – a Divine Multi-Hypostatical

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<sup>59</sup> See the comparative analysis of mono-theism, heno-theism and paganism based on how they reflect the *soborny* and hypostatic principles in their visions of the Divine Being; *We Shall See Him*, pp. 51-3.

<sup>60</sup> See also *We Shall See*, p. 292, where he describes the personal principle as highly 'dynamic' and opposed to the 'static, closed within itself' type of personhood which is specific for a heno-theist faith.

*Sobornost*<sup>61</sup>. However, as we have said at the beginning of this introductory section, the dynamic identity between hypostasis and *sobornost* is only half the story, that half which refers to the inter-essential relationships revealed through Christ's Hypostasis. The other half, and the more interesting one, is concerned with the relationship between the Tri-Hypostatic Divine Being and the Multi-Hypostatic Human Being, and addresses the Sophiologically nuanced question of the type of inter-essential relationship which exists (pre-exists) between the Holy Trinity and the Church.

### **Inter-essential Relationships**

We have seen so far that Fr Sophrony understands Christ as the Revelation of a certain type of ontological relationships which are in place between the hypostases and the *sobor* of the same essence (nature): what we have termed intra-essential relationships. He makes use of a creative reading of the doctrine of Creation 'according to the image' in order to project the intra-essential system of relationships within the Divine Trinity, as revealed through Christ, at the ontological level of humanity. The One Tri-Hypostatic Divine Being becomes thus the 'structural' model for the One Multi-hypostatic Human Being. But once this intra-essential structural similarity has been established, Archim Sophrony moves on to identify in Christ's Divine-human Hypostasis the Prototype for the inter-essential relationships between the Divine and the Human Beings. After having seen what it means for humanity that Christ is one of the Trinity, it is time to see what it means that Christ is both God and Man. The fact that both natures subsist in Christ makes Him the perfect Revelation of the rapport which exists (pre-exists) between these essences: what I have called intra-essential relationships. By means of implication, this relationship between the two natures will elucidate the intra-essential rapport between God and Man.

To continue our presentation, it now becomes necessary to look briefly at Archim Sophrony's perhaps most creative interpretation of the concept of Divine image. Having used the same doctrine

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<sup>61</sup> He does not dwell on the number 'three' except to say that it 'transcends all limitation, becoming equal with infinity'. What interests him is the principle of multiplicity of Persons in the *Soborny* Divine Being; he then applies this same principle of multiplicity of persons within one *soborny* being on the human level.

to justify the *soborny* structure of the Human Being, Archim Sophrony again makes use of it to support his vision of the Divine-Human inter-relationship. Following St Gregory Palamas, Fr Sophrony distinguishes between three modes (or moments) of existence of the Divine Being: the moment of essence; the moment of energy; and the moment of the hypostases. This three-fold 'structure' of the Divine Being is then projected on to the level of humanity, so that he goes on to distinguish between the same moments in the Human Being. Thus, humanity itself<sup>62</sup> is 'structured' according to the moments of essence, energy and hypostasis<sup>63</sup>.

However, it should be noted that unlike the Divine moments, these human moments are very difficult to be argued for on the basis of Patristic theology. This is not to say that Fr Sophrony's opinion contradicts any preceding doctrines, but that it is impossible to find such an interpretation of the Divine image anywhere else before him, except perhaps for Fr Sergii Bulgakov's Sophiology. St Gregory Palamas himself only applied his three-fold structure to the Divine Being, while making no similar statements regarding humanity; of course, his theology can be used to support such parallelism, but one could not say that it necessarily implies it. The closest precursor of this interpretation of the doctrine of Creation is, once again, Fr Sergii Bulgakov and the parallelism he develops between the Divine Sophia (Energies) and a reflected Human Sophia (Energies). Although Fr Sergii speaks of human energy long before him, Fr Sophrony is the first to formulate clearly this original distinction between three moments in humanity, mirroring the three moments of the Divine Being. Thus, he writes that the Church, as the Whole-Adam, has one nature, a multitude of hypostases, but also one energy. This energetic moment (or 'pole')<sup>64</sup> is the key to the inter-ontological relationship between the Divine Being and the Human Being.

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<sup>62</sup> Notably always in its *soborny* existence, as Church, or Whole-Adam.

<sup>63</sup> For instance, in *Unity of the Church* he writes that 'As the likeness of the Holy Trinity, the Church, in its being, also bears an antinomic character: identity and, at the same time, multiplicity. According to the image of the Divine Being, in which we have distinguished between three moments – the Person, the Essence and the Energy – in the Church we identify the presence of persons, essence and works (acts) which, in man's final perfection, must become one' - *Rozhdenie*, p. 85.

<sup>64</sup> Which he sometimes replaces with other concepts, such as the traditional 'attributes' or the more original 'content of life'.

Let us return now to Christ's Divine-Human Hypostasis and see how Archim Sophrony applies this original interpretation of the doctrine of creation in order to investigate the inter-essential relationships between God and All-Adam. Within the introductory aim of this section, it is sufficient to say that Archim Sophrony defines 'belonging' to a nature as living the life of that nature or, in other words, hypostatizing the energy of that essence. Thus, since Christ's Incarnation reveals Him as one Hypostasis in two natures, it follows that Christ lives one Life (that of the Holy Trinity) in a twofold manner, as God and Man, according to both His essences. In effect, Archim Sophrony argues for the identity of the Divine mode of existence according to the energy with the corresponding human mode of existence according to the energy. This in turn has two theological implications, both of which are further developed by Archim Sophrony: the so-called commensurability of the two natures, and the identity of Life between them, or what Archim Sophrony refers to as dynamic identity.

### **Commensurability of essences and the identity of Life**

Before we conclude this introductory presentation of Archim Sophrony's theological vision, let us correlate what has been said so far with the three fundamental statements Archim Sophrony makes regarding the All-Adam, and which also generate the methodological structure of the present thesis. We have said that Archim Sophrony argues for three characteristics of the Church: (A) that the Church is a Hypostatical being; (B) that the Church is *Sobornny*; and, finally, (C) that the Church enters a paradoxical ontological relationship of identity-difference with the Divine Being. The first two statements, regarding the hypostaticity and the *sobornicity* of the Church, are derived from what Archim Sophrony has to say about intra-essential relationships. We have briefly looked at these over the previous pages. The last statement, however, is the most interesting of these three, and is argued for on the basis of two of the major implications of Archim Sophrony's theology of inter-essential relationships: (1) the commensurability of essences; and (2) the identity of Life.

It may benefit this analysis if we clearly distinguish between the manners in which Archim Sophrony applies the maximalist theology which developed in the beginning of the twentieth

century, and which had an immense impact on his thinking. I suggest that there are three types of maximalism to be discerned in his writing, corresponding to each of the modes of existence. These also correspond to the three statements he makes regarding the All-Adam concerning the nature of the relationships it is engaged in. Thus, he develops a type of maximalism according to the moment of the hypostasis (personhood), a type of maximalism according to the moment of essence (*sobornost*) and a third type of maximalism according to the moment of energy (identity of Life).

The final question about the Church which Archim Sophrony attempts to answer is concerned with the nature of the relationship it enters with the Divine being. His answer to this question is maximalism according to the moment of energy, which could be looked at either as the commensurability of essences or identity of Life. As we shall see over the next few paragraphs, these two concepts are not entirely interchangeable, although they ultimately express a common ontological reality. Because of its more traditional sound, most previous commentators of Archim Sophrony's work have chosen to focus on the more common idea of 'commensurability of natures', and to ignore the more daring and Sophologically nuanced statement of an 'identity of Life' between God and All-Adam.

Without dwelling upon it, it must be said that commensurability is yet another concept Archim Sophrony borrowed directly from Fr Bulgakov and Berdiaev. As its name suggests, it refers to a common 'measure' shared by the Divine and human natures, a 'measure' which Fr Sophrony identifies as the moment of Divine Energy or Divine Life. As we see in the Incarnation, the 'equality' of the two natures is already manifested in Christ<sup>65</sup>, and it will be universally valid in the Eschaton. There is little difference between Archim Sophrony's key arguments and those previously used by Fr Bulgakov, from the traditional usage of the Incarnational dogma of Chalcedon to the point that they use in the same manner the very same Scriptural passages<sup>66</sup>. By comparison, once we move from the moment of essence to that of energy, maximalism no longer refers to a certain

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<sup>65</sup> 'The fact of the Incarnation is witness to the great worth of man: a certain common measure between God and man. God's possibility to become man bears in itself the parallel possibility of man to receive deification.' 'Image and Likeness', in *Rozhdenie*, pp. 95, 96.

<sup>66</sup> For instance, the original interpretation both writers give to Colossians 2:9-10, and their common reading of Christ's Ascension 'to the right of the Father'.

quality of two natures (their commensurability), but instead reflects the ontological unity between these two different natures. In other words, if commensurability means simply that there is a sort of common ‘measure’ between the two natures, maximalism as identity concerns the ‘measure’ itself, the Divine Energy, and the actual fact that the Church, as the All-Adam, lives this Divine Life as its own proper Life<sup>67</sup>. The All-Adam – both as *Sobornost* (the Church) and as its multiple Hypostases – eschatologically lives the Life of the Holy Trinity as its own proper Life, which makes the two Beings – God and man – dynamically (that is, according to energy) identical.

The differences between these two sub-types of inter-essential maximalism become even more evident if we consider that the concept of commensurability deals within the limits of ‘identity as equality’ and refers primarily to the two natures, whereas maximalism according to energy refers to the Divine Life, the Energy of God. As Archim Sophrony repeatedly argues, energetic maximalism is no longer affected by any sort of differentiation, as the same Divine Life is to be shared by both God and Man. In this case, ‘identity’ no longer refers to two equal (co-measurable) but ontologically different realities, as was the case with the Divine and human natures; instead, energetic ‘identity’ points to the idea of ‘oneness’ – one and the same Energy simultaneously corresponds to the two different natures. However, this energetic maximalism is very often misleadingly presented as similar to the previous idea of commensurability<sup>68</sup>, most probably because of the Sophiological implications it discloses.

Thus, Divine Energy, as St Gregory Palamas himself insists, is not some sort of lifeless ‘attribute’<sup>69</sup> of God, but Life Itself, God Himself. In other words, the Church (and each of its hypostases, which

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<sup>67</sup> Man ‘is created with the potential to assimilate and to bear eternally within himself the uncreated Life of Divinity’ and again ‘in other words, man hypostatizes the Divine attributes, such as eternity, love, light, wisdom, truth’, thus ‘becoming god through the content of his being’ (‘On the Personal Principle’ in *We Shall See Him*, pp. 274-5).

<sup>68</sup> See *I Love, Therefore I Am*, pp. 146-59.

<sup>69</sup> Both Fr Sergii Bulgakov and Archim Sophrony, although they do sometimes employ the term, were very wary of it, precisely because it carries this connotation of something lifeless, and preferred other terms, with Fr Sergii’s ill-fated Sophia perhaps the best option so far, as it expresses both unity (oneness) and personhood (alive).

are dynamically identical with it) lives God Himself and becomes authentically Divine, according to this third moment of the Energies. Everything God is, His Divine Energy is also, and the Human Being (as *Sobornost* and Hypostases) will also be in the Eschaton<sup>70</sup> in virtue of what we have just said regarding maximalism as identity of Life. The only distance never to be crossed is the ontological difference between created and uncreated, although Archim Sophrony follows Fr Bulgakov in stating that the All-Adam does become uncreated himself, according to the moment of energy.

Of course, none of this is new in the wider context of twentieth century Russian theology, but precisely what Fr Sergii Bulgakov wrote concerning the eschatological identity between the Divine and Human Sophias<sup>71</sup> and the implications of this ontological identity. However, the confusion between commensurability and energetic identity is an easy one to make, and at times Archim Sophrony himself seems to use this confusion as if to hide from the conclusions of his own theology. Commensurability refers to the moment of essence, and it simply affirms a common measure between the two natures, but not identity. Identity refers to the common Divine Life, which is God Himself, which is to be eschatologically shared by the two Beings, thus becoming One<sup>72</sup> (not only equal) according to the moment of energy. Without losing their ontological difference, the two natures eschatologically share the same Life, which is their common ‘measure’. Ultimately, ontologic identity between God and Man means the co-Being of the Two Beings, their becoming one according to the moment of energy.

Understandably, this particular part of Archim Sophrony’s theology has not been given much attention. Generally, identity on the level of energy is misinterpreted as commensurability on the level of nature, and thus its full implications are obscured. At other times, based on the difference

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<sup>70</sup> ‘Like in the Holy Trinity each Hypostasis is bearer of the absolute wholeness of Divine Being, so also in our human existence each hypostasis must become, in its final perfection, bearer of the complete wholeness of Divine-human Being.’ - *Rozhdenie*, p. 85.

<sup>71</sup> The very notion of ontologic identity (*tozhestvo*) is inherited from Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s theology of the rapport between Divine Sophia and Creaturely Sophia.

<sup>72</sup> ‘[I]f identity is not perfect, then nor can unity be perfect’ in *Rozhdenie*, p. 85.

between Archim Sophrony's theological and his more ascetical writings<sup>73</sup>, Divine Life is presented as a sort of lifeless conglomerate of Divine Attributes, which are only properly identified with God Himself separately, in his ascetical work. Most of the times, energetic identity is applied to milder concepts, such as Divine Light or Love, without making the connection with the ontological oneness of the Divine and Human Beings which it implies. Once again, I assume that the reason behind this confusion is these writers' determination to avoid a theologically controversial pedigree and the obvious break the notion of absolute energetic identity produces between Fr Sophrony's theology and that of more preferable predecessors, especially Vladimir Lossky<sup>74</sup>.

### **Archim Sophrony's Adams and Their Relevance to His Ecclesiology**

Several times already, we have used All-Adam as a synonymous term for the Church; without being incorrect, this rapport of identity does not entirely express the complex relationship between the Church and a series of 'Adamitic' concepts, including the already-mentioned All-Adam and the Whole Adam, but also simply Adam; at times, other names for the Church are Man, Humanity, All-Man or the Whole Man. As I shall continue to use these Adam-concepts throughout the thesis, let us look briefly at how Archim Sophrony himself uses them. This brief section, dedicated to the Adamitic concepts which populate Archim Sophrony's work, has two aims: first, to identify and bring into focus the ecclesiological Adams representing the subject of this thesis; secondly, to distinguish between these ecclesiological Adams according to the way Archim Sophrony uses each of them.

The first thing to note is that his writings are inhabited by a multitude of various Adams, while also abounding in Adamitic references. In line with Orthodox tradition, Archim Sophrony sees all people

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<sup>73</sup> In part, due to Archim. Sophrony's own separation between the two.

<sup>74</sup> The difference in their way of defining apophaticism is reflected in a different understanding the extent of the relationship between God and Man. This difference led to Fr Sophrony's repeatedly rejecting Lossky's apophaticism, and Lossky's implicit (via Fr Sergii Bulgakov) rejection of Fr Sophrony's maximalism as identity.

as the ‘sons of Adam’<sup>75</sup>, affected by the same Adam’s fall<sup>76</sup>, which at times can feel like a curse<sup>77</sup>. Some of these Adams designate real historical persons; thus, ‘the first Adam’ is Adam himself, the first created man<sup>78</sup>, while the second Adam is Christ, the Son of Man.

However, as we advance in our reading of his work, it soon becomes obvious that his understanding of Adam goes further than the patristic Tradition, and that – in a similar way as with other concepts, such as ‘hypostases’ or ‘*sobor*’ – Archim Sophrony uses ‘Adam’ almost like a principle, rather than a real person. The first examples of this Adamitic type are Adam as God’s ‘first thought’ for humanity, and Adam as the ideal human hypostasis. Both of them are anthropological principles derived from the Person of Christ, and are not real hypostases, but principles of hypostaticity: each human being is meant to develop into this common pre-eternal prototype / eschatological ideal<sup>79</sup>. In

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<sup>75</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 35.

<sup>76</sup> Adam’s sin, repeated by all human beings with the exception of Christ (*We Shall See Him*, pp. 80, 123) is usually identified with an attempt to reach divinization without God (*We Shall See Him*, p. 34) and is described as ‘pride inherited’, a personal and *soborny* ‘drama’ (*We Shall See Him*, p. 142) leading to a state of ‘corruption’ (as opposed to the ‘undeclining light’ of the saved; *We Shall See Him*, p. 127) and generating death (*We Shall See Him*, p. 199).

<sup>77</sup> Because of this inheritance, we become ‘devils incarnate in our fall’ (*We Shall See Him*, p. 145), a state of being of which we only become aware after experiencing the Divine Light (*We Shall See Him*, p. 142).

<sup>78</sup> This particular usage of Adam should be read in correlation with St Silouan’s references to Adam, especially as we find them in ‘Adam’s Lament’. For St Silouan, Adam is both a real human figure, but also the first of a series, an idea which we also find in Archim Sophrony: humanity includes everyone ‘from Adam to the last born of a woman’; *We Shall See Him*, p. 36. See, also, Andrew Louth, ‘Sur les *Lamentations d’Adam* de saint Silouane’, *Buisson Ardent* 11 (pp 55-60).

<sup>79</sup> Rafail Noica, a member of the Essex monastic community and son of the Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica, envisages an ontological representation of time as a curve which starts from Adam (God’s first thought for mankind), only to immediately disappear (under the level of ontology proper to humanity) until the Incarnation of Christ, in which all humanity is eschatologically contained; see Rafail Noica, *Cultura Duhului (Culture of the Spirit)* (Alba-Iulia: Editura Reintregirea, 2002).

his ecclesiological writings, Archim Sophrony departs from Adam, the real person, and increasingly uses Adam as a theoretical concept, a principle which needs a prefix before its name to express its new meaning; thus we get to the concepts of ‘All-Adam’ and ‘the Whole Adam’, which are of interest to our thesis<sup>80</sup>.

Archim Sophrony uses both these terms – All-Adam and Whole-Adam – as ecclesiological, rather than anthropological principles, always in reference to the Being of the Church. I also suggest that they express two different modes of the existence of the Church: *soborny* and sophiological, respectively. More to the point, All-Adam and Whole-Adam reveal the relationship Archim Sophrony sees between a hypostasis and its nature (through the concept of All-Adam) and that between a hypostasis and its energy (through the concept of the Whole-Adam). Thus, when he writes that man should become equal to All-Adam and live as All-Adam, Archim Sophrony envisages the rapport between each hypostasis and the all the multitude of hypostases which belong to its nature. Significantly, he defines the relationship between Adam and All-Adam as the living experience of the consubstantiality of all human hypostases, which is to live the entire human *Sobornost*, thus becoming a real *Persona*; he writes:

‘Lively experience of the *Persona* (...) comes by praying like Christ for the whole world as for oneself. ... man existentially lives the image of the Triune God. In this kind of prayer, one experiences the consubstantiality of the human race. Such prayer reveals the ontological meaning of the second commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”. All Adam

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<sup>80</sup> The English distinction between the ‘All-Adam’ and the ‘Whole-Adam’ reflects a similarly nuanced terminology in the original Russian text. Thus, All-Adam is the translation of ‘Ves’ Adam’ (or ‘Ves’ Chelovek’), while Whole-Adam translates the Russian ‘Yediniy Adam’ (or ‘Yediniy Chelovek’). It is worth noting that the English translation was made during the life of Archim Sophrony, who himself could speak the language. In comparison, other translations (such as the Romanian) were made after the Elder’s death, and do not always preserve these terminological differences (although the Romanian language would allow it, by using ‘Tot-Adamul’ for ‘All-Adam’ and ‘Intregul-Adam’ for the ‘Whole Adam’).

becomes One Man – mankind. Anything less than this is less than the Gospel commandment.’<sup>81</sup>

By contrast, living the Whole Adam refers to the sophiological or energetic moment of existence, according to which each hypostasis lives the life (the Act) proper to the entire humanity, thus becoming dynamically identical with it. If All-Adam is the human reflection of the *sobornicity* proper to the Triune God, the Whole Adam points to the Divine Life, a Divine reality in its own right, given to man as a gift. Here Archim Sophrony’s theology becomes almost explicitly sophiological, as we shall see in more detail in Chapter Four. Whole-Adam is referred to in direct connection with the plenitude of existence:

‘the fulness of human existence (be-ing) becomes the property of each human hypostasis. ... this manner of existence, in its final perfection, means that each human hypostasis, because of its belonging to the soborny unity (of mankind), must become the bearer of the whole plenitude of human existence (be-ing), and so equal to the whole mankind, equal to the Whole Adam (Whole Man).’<sup>82</sup>

In their final actualisation, each human hypostasis, each personal Adam will be dynamically equal and identical with the whole being of Church, according to the moments of essence (All-Adam’s consubstantiality) and energy (Whole-Adam’s sophianicity). Of course, these two ‘Adams’ are deeply inter-related, to the extent that the one presupposes the other. In the above quotation, Archim Sophrony says that the Whole Adam becomes possible ‘because of its belonging to the soborny unity (of mankind)’; in other words, to live the entire *Sobor* ontologically presupposes also living the whole Life of that *Sobor*. To conclude, All-Adam points to a multiplicity of Adams, and to the rapport between one hypostasis and this multiplicity of hypostases, while the Whole-Adam expresses the wholeness of life, the perfect actualisation of the ‘unbroken’ human nature. All-Adam

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<sup>81</sup> *We Shall See Him*, pp. 203-204. He goes on to talk about hypostatical prayer, in which we ‘pray for the whole world, for all mankind, all Adam’; the ultimate effect of such prayer is the hypostatization of the entire human nature, so that “‘All Adam’ ... becomes a concrete reality’ for all its hypostases – see *We Shall See Him*, p. 208.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Unity of the Church’, *Messenger de l’Exarchat*, numbers 2-3, 1950, pp. 15-16.

is an ecclesiological concept which expresses the *sobornicity* of the Church, while the Whole-Adam is also an ecclesiological concept, denoting the sophianicity of the Church.

#### 4. Main Influences

We have argued for an understanding of Archim Sophrony's theology as a complex system of ontological rapports, a theology of ontological relations between the Divine and the Human Beings, in their respective hypostatical, *soborny* and energetic modes of existence. Our statement now is that the theoretical support of this theology of ontological relationships is centred on the Sophiological theology of Fr Sergii Bulgakov; there are, of course, several other influences on Archim Sophrony's theology, which we shall look at briefly in what follows, but these are lines of argumentation, rather than generative of theology. What I mean by that is that Archim Sophrony uses this secondary category of references mainly as arguments for a theological vision which is already in place, rather than deriving his vision from these sources. Thus, for instance, one may say that his theology is neo-Palamite in the sense that it uses St Gregory's theology to support its statements, but not in the sense that it is derived from Palamas' theology.

If we were to systematize the major influences one can discern in Archim Sophrony's thinking, perhaps the best method would be to follow the various theological strands which feed into his writing: patristic theology; modern theology; and ascetical theology. Thus, the major Patristic (late Byzantine, rather) influence is the above-mentioned St Gregory Palamas, by means of his distinction between nature and activities (or energy) and, implicitly, his distinction between three modes of existence of the Divine Being. In Modern theology, Fr Sergii stands out as the overwhelming influence, in spite of the numerous quotations and references to anyone else but him; from Fr Sergii, Archim Sophrony inherited the theoretical framework of his maximalist ontology, in all its various implications. Finally, from the perspective of ascetical theology, Archim Sophrony's Athonite Elder, St Silouan the Athonite is the most referenced authority. In a striking paradox, given the controversy surrounding Fr Bulgakov, St Silouan's teachings do not seem to depart very much, if at all, from Fr Sergii's theology. They differ only in the sense that St Silouan's maximalism offers

an ascetical perspective on Fr Sergii's theology; if Archim Sophrony owes his theory to Fr Sergii, he also owes the praxis of this theory to St Silouan.

These are the central figures – Gregory Palamas, Sergii Bulgakov, Silouan the Athonite – with many other secondary names to follow. I also want to suggest that the right method to look at these three lines of influence is not to follow the chronology of their intersection with Archim Sophrony's life, but rather to look at the impact each of these sources had on his theology. The argument for this method is that the theological vision with the strongest impact on Archim Sophrony's thinking necessarily pre-conditioned the reception of those sources of less powerful impact. It is clear from Archim Sophrony's use of Palamas, for instance, that he had already read Fr Sergii, and that this influenced his reception of Palamas. For this reason, I suggest that we briefly go through these three key lines of thinking, in a chronology which reflects their successive impact on Archim Sophrony's theology. We shall start, therefore, with Fr Sergii Bulgakov, move on to St Silouan the Athonite, and finish with St Gregory Palamas.

### **Modern Theology. Fr Sergii Bulgakov. Theological maximalism: the theory.**

Archim Sophrony's theology is surprisingly modern; nineteenth century theology, as represented by Alexis Khomiakov and other Slavophile writers, had only a minimal influence on his thought. Khomiakov is recognized as a major theologian, but his thoughts, especially those regarding the concept of *sobornost*, are heavily filtered through twentieth century theology before they find a way in Archim Sophrony's writings. Slavophilism is too deeply interconnected with nationalism, autocephaly and the local state to be of real influence on the thinking of the Essex elder. I have dedicated one chapter to an in-depth analysis of how Archim Sophrony uses the idea of *sobornost*. We shall see that his understanding of *sobornost* carries none of the limitations specific to the Slavophile writers; instead, he uses *sobornost* as a principle of universal applicability, in total resonance with Fr Bulgakov and other theologians writing at the beginning of the twentieth century. Theologically, Archim Sophrony inherited Fr Bulgakov's universalist ontology, with its unqualified relationship of identity between Divinity and Creation, reflected in their common maximalist view of Humanity as Church. This maximalist ontology has remained the key and the pattern of Archim

Sophrony's entire future theology. I do not wish to say that Fr Bulgakov is the exclusive influence on Archim Sophrony's development as a theologian, but a proper assessment of his work must necessarily acknowledge the overwhelming impact Fr Bulgakov's dogmatic vision had on the Essex elder. As we shall see throughout this thesis, Archim Sophrony's thinking can be defined as an ascetic experience filtered through a Bulgakovian lens. The Patristic authors Archim Sophrony uses later on in his writings, the manner in which they are read and used as part of his arguments, even the experience of meeting St Silouan, find a place in the elder's inner life not because they reveal something new to him, something previously unknown, but precisely because they correspond with and support a pattern of theological thinking which he already had and whose roots are clearly grounded in Fr Bulgakov's dogmatic vision. The pre-eminence of ontology and the focus on a relationship of identity between God and Man clearly place Archim Sophrony in the theological line of Florensky, Berdieav and, especially, Fr Bulgakov. On the more restricted focus of this thesis, it is worth pointing out that they all build their respective theological or philosophical work around the same system of ontological relationships which also shapes Archim Sophrony's ecclesiological thinking, and which does not accept any ontological break (although it does allow for differentiation) between Man and Church, Church and God.

At this stage, I feel a few words are needed, regarding the theological 'heritage' left behind by Fr Bulgakov. It has been observed that, unlike Lossky and Florovsky, whose writings have found immediate 'heirs', Fr Bulgakov's theology lacked such interpreters. Although that may be true in the sense that Fr Bulgakov's name seemed to disappear for a few decades after his death, the reasons for that were predominantly political<sup>83</sup>, rather than theological. Almost a century after the controversy surrounding him, modern research has shown how Fr Bulgakov's theology continued to influence and shape modern Orthodox thinking, and how the questions raised by him affected even those who attacked him; indeed, Lossky and Florovsky continued their inner dispute with Fr

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<sup>83</sup> See the interesting list made by Hopko and taken further by Plekon of 'individuals who either attacked or ignored Father Bulgakov's theology – from academic figures such as Serge Verhovsky, Vladimir Lossky, and Florovsky, who published critiques or attacked him in the classroom, to Meyendorff and Schmemmann, who rejected him mostly by avoiding mention of him in their writings and teaching, to Sophie Koloumzine, the noted leader in Christian education, who in her youth had Father Bulgakov as a spiritual father and whose sole response to his effort to explain his work was the idea that 'it was unnecessary.' - Michael Plekon, *Living icons: Persons of Faith in the Eastern Church* (University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, Indiana, 2002), p. 3.

Bulgakov long after his death, and that directly influenced how they wrote and what they wrote about<sup>84</sup>.

In spite of those initial decades of apparent silence, Fr Bulgakov's theological heritage can be discerned in the work of some major Orthodox theologians who use him, but chose not to name him; this is the 'tragic consequence of Orthodox ecclesiastical conflict,' as Rowan Williams suggests, 'the turning of a younger generation or different school – Vladimir Lossky and Georges Florovsky – upon their elders or opponents, the desire to escape controversy, eventually indifference, perhaps even self-loathing'.<sup>85</sup> As unpleasant as it may be to admit to it, Archim Sophrony is one of those who, out of a desire to stay away from controversy, chose not to acknowledge the influence his old confessor had upon his thinking. Instead, he either gives no reference or, when in need of support, points to more acceptable, even though misleading, theoretical sources.

Nine decades after Fr Bulgakov's first condemnation, it seems to me that this veil of controversy is finally broken, so that one can openly state that he eventually found a highly original inheritor of his theology in Archim Sophrony. His originality consists not only in the strength of his own theological developments, but also in his ability to filter his Bulgakovian dogmatic roots through a life of authentic ascetical spirituality, and to present the resulting theology in a manner that is more easily understandable and acceptable to the larger Church. At a time when interest in Fr Bulgakov's work is gaining strong momentum both among the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox, Archim Sophrony's importance as one of the most interesting successors of Fr Bulgakov's theology cannot be overstated. Rather than shying away from this relationship as controversial and detrimental to Fr

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<sup>84</sup> See, for instance, the biographical note on Vladimir Lossky quoted in Arjakovsky's 'Histoire de la Pensée Orthodoxe Contemporaine': 'impulsion malgré tout positive donnée à la réflexion théologique de V. Loskij par la pensée bulgakovienne: d'une certaine manière en effet toute la théologie de V. Loskij, centrée sur la grâce accrue, sur la conception palamite de l'énergie divine, tentera d'exprimer d'une manière traditionnelle et rigoureusement orthodoxe, l'intuition fondamentale du père Bulgakov' - Antoine Arjakovsky, *Histoire de la Pensée Orthodoxe Contemporaine; La Génération des Penseurs Religieux de L'Émigration Russe – La revue La Voie (Put')*, 1925-1940 (Kiev-Paris: L'Esprit et la Lettre, 2002), p. 656.

<sup>85</sup> A suggestion made by Rowan Williams in his *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), pp. 172-81, and taken up by Plekon in *Living Icons*, p. 33.

Sophrony, we should perhaps embrace it as meritorious in relation to him, and revelatory (and apologetic) in relation to Fr Bulgakov.

### **Monastic Theology. St Silouan the Athonite. Theological maximalism: the praxis.**

We have said that we shall look at the three major influences on Archim Sophrony's theology in reverse order of their impact on his theology. Should we have referred to the impact these sources had on his inner life, his meeting with St Silouan must necessarily have been the event to start our list with. The impact of the Athonite Saint on Archim Sophrony's life is unparalleled and he repeatedly refers to this meeting as a huge 'privilege' given to him and an 'event' in the development of his spiritual life. However, this impact on Archim Sophrony's life is not matched by a similar impact on his theological thinking. There is hardly anything new in terms of theology which can be derived from this momentous personal encounter. Paradoxically, it is easier to argue that St Silouan (or, at least, his public persona) was enriched theologically by meeting Archim Sophrony, than vice versa.

The two Russian ascetics share many common theological ideas. However, most of the time it is impossible to argue for these ideas' starting from St Silouan's writings; rather than a process of generating theology from the Athonite Saint's written work, this is a case when Archim Sophrony merely *recognises* these ideas which they share in the simple, ascetically-focused notes of St Silouan. This, in turn, implies that Archim Sophrony already had this theological vision prior to his meeting with St Silouan, as well as previous knowledge and understanding of the concepts he later identifies in the Saint's 'illiterate' words. The first meeting between the two ascetics took place at St Silouan's initiative, precisely because he had recognised a similarity between his and Archim Sophrony's thinking.

If we are to apply their own understanding of knowledge as 'existential experience' – according to which 'to know something is to live it' – to the event of their first meeting, it would also follow that Archim Sophrony had already reached the same level of holiness as St Silouan himself. St Silouan 'recognises' in Archim Sophrony the same Spirit which was revealed to him, in the same way in which Archim Sophrony 'recognises' in the Saint's words the theological vision he himself had already acquired before meeting the Saint; their relationship becomes thus one among equals, both

in terms of spiritual experience and of theological depth. To conclude, it is obvious that that meeting with St Silouan was immensely influential for Archim Sophrony's spiritual development, and remains of the highest relevance in relation to his ascetical writings. By comparison, in terms of theology, St Silouan had very little to add to Archim Sophrony's already-shaped theological vision.

Understandably, Archim Sophrony himself made much of his relationship with the saint, and the Athonite elder is his first reference in any matter concerning ascetical experience and practice, and all their theological implications. Although it is fair to accept these ascetical references as correct, anything more than this seems to me of questionable reliability for at least two reasons: firstly, Archim Sophrony was already formed theologically at the point when he met St Silouan, a fact which is pointed out by Archim Sophrony himself in his account of his first interaction with the Elder; the implication of this is that the source of Archim Sophrony's theology must be looked for somewhere else, before his encounter with the Athonite Saint. Secondly, one must acknowledge that St Silouan's writings cannot be used to support or comment on Archim Sophrony's own theology for the simple reason that Archim Sophrony is also the editor of Silouan's writings and the exclusive source of information regarding Silouan's life and his work. I shall briefly address both these concerns in what follows.

St Silouan was 'an illiterate peasant'<sup>86</sup>, 'he was no scholar, having attended the village school for "just two winters"<sup>87</sup>, whose writing was simple and straightforward, with rare moments of poetical phrasing. Referring to the Saint's theological concerns, Archim Sophrony describes him as 'a man of a single idea, which occupied his whole being, the fruit of the Saviour's searchless appearance to him'<sup>88</sup>, so that 'again and again he returns to the same theme – that God and all that is of heaven are made known only through the Holy Spirit'<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> Sophrony Sakharov, *Saint Silouan the Athonite* (trans. Edmonds, Rosemary) (St Vladimir's Seminary Press: Crestwood, New York, 1991), p. 74.

<sup>87</sup> *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, p. 52.

<sup>88</sup> *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, p. 265; and again: 'The Staretz was a man of a single idea, but this idea is the most profound, the most beautiful, the most ontologically perfect there is, and - most importantly of all – he realised it in his own life', p. 266.

<sup>89</sup> *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, p. 263.

Theologically, the two Russian ascetics indeed have many things in common; for instance, they both distinguish between two manners of acquiring knowledge: existentially and theoretically, they both underline the fundamental importance of love for one's enemies<sup>90</sup>, and they share an ontological interpretation of Christ's commandments, while also preserving a striking and unusual freedom from the 'forms' of the spiritual life<sup>91</sup>. It would, therefore, be tempting to claim that these common aspects of their writings are the result of their personal relationship, in which St Silouan played the role of the elder, and Archim Sophrony that of the disciple. However, if we take into account what has just been said about their meeting, things become less clear than that. To add to the confusion, all the common traits we listed above can also be found in Fr Sergii Bulgakov's writings, including the theological foundation behind St Silouan's insistence on love for one's enemies, which Archim Sophrony himself links directly with the ontological maximalism typical of Fr Sergii's theology. This is also true about other less prominent aspects of their – i.e. of St Silouan, Fr Sergii Bulgakov and Archim Sophrony – theologies, such as, for example, their theology of time.

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<sup>90</sup> 'The cardinal attestation of his [St Silouan's] whole life is that love for one's enemies is absolutely indispensable for knowledge of Divine mysteries. He asserted categorically that he who has no love for his enemies is separated from God, does not know God', *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, p. 267.

<sup>91</sup> This freedom is manifested in relation to forms of asceticism (see the example of the cup of tea served during a period of strict fasting – *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, p. 60), forms of ecclesiastic life (see St Silouan's opinion that church services 'although they were instituted by the gift of grace from the Holy Spirit, in their form [they] did not constitute perfect prayer', p. 97) and even theological forms. This last manifestation of freedom extends to all written tradition, from the Patristic works to the Scriptures themselves, as 'our monks not only read these books, but could themselves write their like... Monks do not write because there are masses of fine books which satisfy them. But if these books were somehow or other to disappear, then the monks would write new ones.' (p. 72), to which Archim Sophrony adds: 'Suppose that for some reason the Church were to be bereft of all her books, of the Old and New Testaments, the works of the holy Fathers, of all service books – what would happen? Sacred Tradition would restore the Scriptures, not word for word, perhaps – the verbal form might be different – but in essence the new Scriptures would be the expression of that same 'faith which was once delivered unto the saints'. They would be the expression of the one and only Holy Spirit continuously active in the Church, her foundation and her very substance' (pp. 87-88).

It would therefore, seem, that the three theologians have many things in common<sup>92</sup>; the question which remains is which of them is the primary source of these common theological beliefs. My opinion is that the surprising similarity between the ‘heretical’ Fr Sergii and the canonised St Silouan can be justified by two complementary factors: on the one hand, despite the differences between their historical lives, the two must have had a similar experience of God, which reflected in their similar theologies; on the other hand, Archim Sophrony acted as a mediating interface between Fr Sergii’s attempts to a systematic theology and St Silouan’s attempts to put into writing the experience of his monastic life. The effect was that, when Archim Sophrony met St Silouan, he applied his own reception of Fr Sergii’s theology to the Saint’s life and teachings, leading to the paradoxical above-mentioned similitude between the Paris theologian and the Athonite elder.

We have already referred to the ways in which Fr Sergii’s influence has shaped Archim Sophrony’s theology. Let us now see how the Essex elder contributed to the formation and the reception of St Silouan’s public persona; to do so, I suggest we look at the following aspects: the process of editing the Saint’s writings, the process of re-creating testimonies to the Athonite ascetic’s holiness, the elaboration of a theological interpretation of his writings, and, finally, the way in which the previous three factors pre-conditioned the public reception of the Saint’s biography and work.

After his elaborate interpretation of the Saint’s theology, Archim Sophrony is happy that ‘now I can lay down my pencil’<sup>93</sup> and simply transcribe Silouan’s notes; of course, the editing process is much more complicated than that and presupposes a personal and sometimes intrusive involvement of the editor with the writer’s work. This is especially so when one has to edit a large number of short notes<sup>94</sup>, at times incomplete, illogical or ungrammatical, written in no obvious thematic order and in

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<sup>92</sup> Of course, there are also differences between the theology of Fr Sergii, on the one hand, and that of St Silouan and Archim Sophrony, on the other. However, most of these differences are secondary and they stem from their different lives; such is the case, for instance, with Fr Sergii’s ideas regarding the theological importance of martial love and all the theological speculations derived from it.

<sup>93</sup> *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, p. 255.

<sup>94</sup> Some of these notes were written down in a note-book, others on individual pieces of paper, others on the pages of the Saint’s praying books and even on the margins of the books which he used for his work (such as a garden book).

no clear chronology. Archim Sophrony himself admits to his contribution to the final shape of the Saint's writings, by noting that 'selecting copy is always a conditional, more or less circumscribed task. To make use of all the available material would risk perhaps distracting attention from my spiritual father's main concerns'<sup>95</sup>. In other words, his involvement in the editing process extends to selecting the texts and editing them, arranging the resulting fragments in an order of his choice, grouping several notes under various titles and themes, while also discerning between the Saint's 'main concerns' and those of smaller importance, and selecting accordingly the notes to be included in the final version of the volume.

Even more drastic is Archim Sophrony's contribution to recreating the Saint's biography.<sup>96</sup> Hagiographical *par excellence*, Silouan's life is simply re-imagined by his disciple and written as such; this is especially true in relation to his life in the monastery. It must be remembered that Archim Sophrony is the sole provider of all testimonies concerning the Athonite Saint, and that even other people's testimonies are mediated through him. The Saint's meetings and dialogues with other ascetics which we find in his biography are re-imagined and re-created by Archim Sophrony; although various other people witness to the Saint's teaching and holiness, it must be kept in mind that all these people are, in fact, merely characters in Archim Sophrony's story of the Saint's life.

This sense of exclusive 'ownership' of the Saint's teachings is increased by the difference one finds between Silouan's actual writings and Archim Sophrony's theological interpretation of them. The discrepancy between the simple, often bland writings of the Saint, and the complex theology which Archim Sophrony builds on their foundation is recognised by the Essex elder himself, when he notes that 'much of what we discussed does not appear in his writings'<sup>97</sup>; and again, he warns that 'the reader will find in my expose a whole series of propositions introduced by me and based, mostly, on my many discussions with the Staretz'<sup>98</sup>. At times, the process of interpretation takes over and we find several examples when, while supposedly interpreting St Silouan's writing,

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<sup>95</sup> *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, p. 255.

<sup>96</sup> See, also: Antonios Pinakoulas, 'La *Vie* de saint Silouane l'Athonite: un texte hagiographique moderne', *Buisson Ardent* 14 (2008), pp 65-76. This is the only study I know that looks at St Silouan's Life as a piece of writing, and tries to assess Archim Sophrony's creative input to it.

<sup>97</sup> *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, p. 75.

<sup>98</sup> *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, p. 255.

Archim Sophrony manages to write several pages of dense theology with hardly any mention of the Saint; thus, for instance, the five pages of the section on ‘Time and Eternity’<sup>99</sup> has only two references to St Silouan, one of which is in fact a quote from the New Testament, while the fundamental theological ideas clearly come from Fr Sergii’s theology of time.

Naturally, Archim Sophrony’s theological interpretation of the Saint’s thought invariably affected the general reception of his work, by pre-conditioning the response to his writings. It is relevant that, without Archim Sophrony’s preface, the reactions to the first edition of the Elders’ writings referred only to their spiritual importance, with almost no credit to their theological relevance; for this precise reason, Archim Sophrony decided to write the introductory study which later became a permanent preface to the Saint’s writings.

To conclude this section, I want to underline that everything that has been said regarding Archim Sophrony’s contribution to the public persona of St Silouan fits into the familiar process of hagiographic re-construction of one’s biography and work; the Christian tradition abounds in similar examples. The purpose of this section was neither to discredit Archim Sophrony in any way, nor to suggest that St Silouan and his writings are Archim Sophrony’s exclusive creation. This section had only two intentions: first, to highlight the mediating role Archim Sophrony had between Fr Sergii’s theology and St Silouan’s writings, and the impact this mediation had on the interpretation and reception of St Silouan’s work. Secondly, I intended to elaborate on the reasons why it is methodologically impossible to argue for Archim Sophrony’s theology starting from St Silouan’s writings.

### **Patristic Theology. St Gregory Palamas. Three modes of existence.**

Archim Sophrony’s reading of Palamas brings very little new to the table, both in the sense that the Palamite influence does not move his theology in a new direction, and that Archim Sophrony says very little, if anything, which has not been already said by Fr Bulgakov some decades later. Palamas and derivatives of his theology are used as Patristic arguments for a pre-determined line of theological thinking, rather than as proper sources which generate new theological thinking or have a major

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<sup>99</sup> *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, pp. 145-49.

impact in its development. It is my opinion that Archim Sophrony not only uses Palamas to argue for a Bulgakovian idea, but his method of doing it, his very reception of Palamas is identical with that of Fr Sergii.

As we have already noted in our introductory analysis of Archim Sophrony's theology, Palamas' distinction between nature and energy is used as the basis for a highly original interpretation of the idea of creation according to the Divine image, which then constitutes an argument for the provocative idea of ontological identity between God and All-Adam at the level of energy. If Archim Sophrony has any original contribution to the development of Fr Sergii's use of Palamas, that is his clear articulation of the distinction between energy and nature at the human level. The distinction exists in Fr Sergii, as well, and much is made of it, especially by identifying the human moment of energy with Creaturely Sophia, but Archim Sophrony is the first actually to construct an argument for this development of Palamas. His major contribution to the discussion is to bring additional clarity to it, but most of his insights are already to be found in Fr Bulgakov's works.

It should be noted also, that Archim Sophrony most probably had the chance to read more Palamas than Fr Bulgakov or, at least, he had access to some Palamite writings before they were translated and made accessible to the larger public. Vasilii, the future Archbishop of Brussels and Belgium, was still a monk in the same Russian monastery of St Panteleimon as Archim Sophrony, while he was working on his translations from Palamas. We also know that Archim Sophrony was an assistant librarian to the monastery, so he would have been aware of Vasilii's work before it was first published in 1936, in *Seminarium Kondakovianum*<sup>100</sup>. It is striking to see how Palamas' reception and use by Fr Bulgakov and, implicitly, by those whom he influenced<sup>101</sup>, remained almost

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<sup>100</sup> 'The ascetic and theological teaching of Gregory Palamas, 1296-1359', *Seminarium Kondakovianum* 8 (1936) pp. 99-154.

<sup>101</sup> See, for instance, M. Lot-Borodine's study of the meaning of deification in Orthodox theology in 'La doctrine de la deification dans l'Eglise greques jusqu'au XIe siecle', in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, nos. 105 (Paris, 1932), pp. 5-43; 106 (1932), pp. 525-574; 107 (1933), pp.8-55.

unnoticed or ignored for a few decades after the ‘Palamite revival’<sup>102</sup>; this has recently been corrected by more recent studies, which have shown that Fr Bulgakov used Palamas more than two decades before his official ‘recovery’ by mainstream Orthodox theology. Unlike Archim Sophrony, who lived to experience this revival, Fr Bulgakov died just as it was emerging<sup>103</sup>; in spite of this, their reception and use of Palamas does not differ in any way, a testament to Fr Sergii’s lasting influence on the elder’s thought, who received the new studies and further translations from Palamas through the interpretative lens inherited from Fr Bulgakov.

Apart from the above-mentioned distinction between three modes of human existence, Palamas is also an argument for Archim Sophrony’s understanding of knowledge as an ‘encounter’ with the object of one’s knowledge. As Daniel Rogich points out, according to St Gregory, ‘the stress should be on one’s personal encounter with God, not any “external” form of knowledge, even the

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<sup>102</sup> Kallistos Ware, for instance, does not mention it at all, although he refers precisely to Palamas’ reception among the Russian theologians active in Paris at the beginning of last century; he writes that ‘Among the characteristics that distinguish contemporary Orthodox theology, there is none more striking than the rediscovery of St Gregory Palamas. This Palamite renaissance has involved Orthodox of different national backgrounds. The pioneers in the 1930s were a Russian monk on Mount Athos, Fr Basil Krivocheine (now the Russian Orthodox archbishop in Brussels), and a Romanian scholar then teaching at Sibiu, Fr Dumitru Staniloae. In the 1940s and 1950s the study of Palamas was pursued chiefly in Paris by Russians of the emigration: apart from the more specialized monograph by Fr Kiprian Kern of the Institute of St Sergius, St Gregory’s thought was made known to a wider Western public through the writings first of Vladimir Lossky and then of Fr John Meyendorff.’ - Kallistos Ware in the ‘Foreword’ to Georgios Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition* (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press: Crestwood, NY, 1984), p. 8.

<sup>103</sup> John Meyendorff’s influential study, for instance, was published in 1959, fifteen years after Fr Bulgakov’s death: ‘Introduction à l’étude de Grégoire Palamas’, *Patristica, Sorbonensia*, a collection edited by H.-I. Marrou, No. 3, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1959.

“external” acceptance and knowledge of scripture and dogmatic tradition’<sup>104</sup>. This is strikingly similar to Archim Sophrony’s method of reading the Fathers and the Scripture; although the result of Revelation, these remain only external sources of knowledge, while the aim is to acquire knowledge from the direct experience of a personal encounter with God. The radicalism of this understanding of knowledge is best expressed by Archim Sophrony’s idea that ‘If we lose the Scripture, we lost nothing’; interestingly, this spiritual freedom from ready-made theological formalism he could have inherited either from Fr Sergii Bulgakov or from St Silouan the Athonite, as they both argue for it in their writings. Behind this radical detachment from the scriptural revelation and the complete focus on personal experience lies the well-known Palamite idea of hesychast prayer, through which God communicates Himself to the prayerful person; this leads to knowing God directly, rather than simply acquiring knowledge of God.

### **Archim. Sophrony. Synthesis – ontology / eschatology / maximalism.**

Archim Sophrony’s fundamental role seems to have been that of mediating between theology, especially as received through Fr Sergii Bulgakov, and ascetic spirituality, as the result of his meeting with St Silouan the Athonite. In virtue of his life as a monastic and theologian in his own right, he was in the position to filter the two one through the other, and to build his own body of theological work on the resulting synthesis. His original perspective allowed him to perceive the theological depth of St Silouan’s writings, just as it allowed him to see beyond the political controversy surrounding Fr Bulgakov’s theology.

Unlike the vast majority of Paris theologians, he chose to become a monastic and joined the Russian monastery of St Panteleimon on Mount Athos. On Athos, he dedicated himself to a life of harsh asceticism, while continuing his intellectual study of the work of Patristic, as well as contemporary

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<sup>104</sup> Daniel Rogich, *Becoming Uncreated: The Journey to Human Authenticity* (Edina: Light and Life Publishing, 2009), p. 45; and also: ‘a certain knowledge can come from scripture and the acceptance of dogmatic truths, but those are no more than means, albeit primary ones, to attain “intimate conversation with God” in the form of a “meeting with God” acquired most fundamentally through the sacraments – baptism and eucharist – and hesychast prayer’ (p. 44).

authors<sup>105</sup>. However, his encounter with their writing is filtered through the pre-qualifying Bulgakovian pattern of the way he learned to read theology. To a very large extent, during his Athonite years Archim Sophrony looked for, and selected the Patristic arguments supporting the theological perspective he had inherited. He is the unique figure of an ascetic monastic trying to make sense of his modern theological vision by means of Patristic arguments.

His best known accomplishment is editing and publishing St Silouan's writings. More than merely publishing them, he also offered a scholarly interpretation of them, so that his contemporaries may perceive the theological depth of the Saint's writings. A less visible accomplishment, perhaps even more impressive, is that Archim Sophrony's writings offer a less daring and more traditional adaptation of Fr Bulgakov's theology. His merit in relation to Fr Sergii is his ability to refine his thought in such a way that it becomes more accessible and acceptable to the majority of the Church.

In spite of the visible tensions of his theology, or perhaps because of them, Archim Sophrony is one of the most balanced Orthodox theologians of the last century. The pre-eminence of ontology in his thought makes him join the ranks of the other maximalist theologians of the century, especially Fr Sergii Bulgakov and Berdiaev. At the same time, though, his monastic attitude to theological questions makes him more prone toward a sort of dogmatic humility which forbids him to attempt to solve some of the paradoxical axioms of his own theology; this is reflected, as we shall see throughout this thesis, in a series of theological tensions which remain unresolved.

Archim Sophrony is an extraordinary exception in that he is a monastic who remains relevant for academic dogmatic theology, in the line of Fr Bulgakov, and also important within the ascetic spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church, in the line of St Silouan. In his attempt to balance these personalities, Archim Sophrony manages the rare achievement of keeping a balance between ontological theology and ascetical spirituality. His writings belong to a kind of spiritual dogmatics, or dogmatic spirituality which escapes the old, almost traditional dichotomy between dogmatic

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<sup>105</sup> His correspondence with David Balfour provides valuable information about the sort of literature he was reading while living on Athos; the collection of letters between him and Fr George Florovsky is another source of such information.

knowledge and ascetic practice. From this perspective, Archim Sophrony is a unique and most valuable modern addition to the line of rare Saints who have managed this balance in the history of the Orthodox Church.

## **5. Research and Studies Dedicated to Archim Sophrony's Work – A Bibliographical Contextualization of this Thesis**

Archim Sophrony's work has had a relatively low impact on the theological debates of the academic field. This could have something to do with his unsystematic, narrative writing style, just as it could be the indirect effect of the predominantly hagiographic image created around him. While both these factors limited the impact of his theological thinking, they contributed greatly to his increasing influence on the spirituality of the Orthodox peoples.

His life and his work has been the subject of a comparatively small number of academic studies, all of which were authored by members of the monastic community in Essex – I include here Archim Zacharias Zacharou's volumes and Fr Nicholas Sakharov's thesis. By comparison, numerous references to Archim Sophrony can be found in a series of spiritual books, journal articles, conference papers, various introductory studies of contemporary ascetic theology and Modern Orthodox Theology, book sub-chapters, prefaces, correspondence volumes, memoirs etc. As a testimony to his increasing relevance as a spiritual figure, this bibliographic material comes in a number of different languages and from people who were not members of his monastic community.

In what follows, I shall briefly mention those studies which are dedicated exclusively to Archim Sophrony's work, or at least devote a substantial part of their content to his biography or writing:

Fr Nicholas Sakharov, *I Love, Therefore I Am: the Theological Legacy of Archimandrite Sophrony* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002);

Archimandrite Zacharias Zacharou, *Christ, Our Way and Our Life: A Presentation of the Theology of Archimandrite Sophrony*<sup>106</sup> (South Canaan: St Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2003);

Archimandrite Zacharias Zacharou, *Remember Thy First Love: the Three Stages of the Spiritual Life in the Theology of Elder Sophrony* (Essex: Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2010);

Archimandrite Zacharias Zacharou<sup>107</sup>, *The Enlargement of the Heart: 'Be ye also enlarged' in the Theology of Saint Silouan the Athonite and Elder Sophrony of Essex* (South Canaan: Mount Tabor Publishing, 2006);

Hieromonk Nathanael Neacșu, *Întru Lumina Ta vom Vede Lumina: Conștiință Dogmatică și Viață Duhovnicească în Gândirea Arhimandritului Sofronie Saharov (In Your Light We Shall See Light: Dogmatic Conscience and Spiritual Life in the Thought of Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov)* (Sibiu: 'Lucian Blaga' University Press, 2011);

Perry Theodore Hamalis, *Formed by Death: A Constructive Ethical Study of Death, Fear of Death and Remembrance of Death in Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov and Thomas Hobbes*, doctoral dissertation (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004);

Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, *Oida Anthropon en Christo (I Know A Man in Christ)* (Levadia: Monastery of the Birth of the Mother of God, 2008);

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<sup>106</sup> This volume was originally Archim Zacharias' doctoral thesis, written at the University of Thessalonica, Greece.

<sup>107</sup> Although they are not dedicated to Archim Sophrony's theology per se, one should also see Archim Zacharias' other writings, especially *The Hidden Man of the Heart* (Essex: Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 2007).

Dumitra Daviti, *Amintiri despre Parintele Sofronie de la Essex (Memories about Father Sophrony of Essex)* (Caras Severin: Manastirea Piatra Scrisa, 2002)<sup>108</sup>;

*Burning Bush: Cahiers Saint-Silouane L-Athonite*<sup>109</sup> 10 (2004), dedicated to Archim Sophrony<sup>110</sup>;

Mantzaridis Georgios (ed.), *Elder Sophrony: Theologian of the Uncreated Light* (Vatopedi Monastery: Agion Oros, 2008).

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<sup>108</sup> Translation of the Greek original, published in Athens, Thos Publishing House.

<sup>109</sup> Apart from this particular issue, which commemorates ten years after his death, and is entirely dedicated to him, the other numbers of the journal also contains studies and articles focused on his life and theology. Also, each number ends with a bibliography of the new books, studies and articles dedicated to either St Silouan the Athonite or Archim Sophrony, which were published that particular year.

<sup>110</sup> The issue contains a number testimonies regarding Archim Sophrony's life, and the following studies: Nicolas Sakharov, 'L'archimandrite Sophrony. Esquisse', pp 107-26; Lioudmilla Iliounina, 'L'art et la priere selon l'enseignement du Pere Sophrony', pp 127-37; Monseigneur Hilarion, 'L'Onomatodoxie apres la controverse onomatodoxe', pp 138-71; Archimandrite Symeon, 'Commandements de Dieu et liberte humaine', pp 172-85; Metropolitte Antoine de Souroge, 'Sur le pere prirituel et la paternite spirituelle', pp 186-92.

**Chapter Two**  
**The Church as Hypostatical Being: Ecclesiology and Personhood**

## Chapter Two

### The Church as Hypostatical Being: Ecclesiology and Personhood

#### I. Introduction: Aims and General Considerations

Previous studies of Archim. Sophrony's theology are devoted almost exclusively to the personalist aspect of his theology<sup>111</sup>. That is to say that, with no notable exception<sup>112</sup>, these scholars have focused on Archim. Sophrony's anthropology, especially on his use of the hypostasis and the

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<sup>111</sup> Archim. Zacharias Zacharou's volumes are almost exclusively dedicated to Archim Sophrony's theology of personhood and its various applications, while Nicholas Sakharov dedicates an entire chapter to the same subject. Similarly, most articles concerned with Archim Sophrony's theology are focused on his personhood. See, for instance, George Mantzarides, 'L'Archimandrite Sophrony, theologien du principe personnel', in *Buisson Ardent* 2 (1996), pp 96-106; Archimandrite Symeon, 'Mystere et dimensions de la personne: lineaments d'anthropologie chretienne', *Buisson Ardent* 8 (2002), pp 65-76. Personhood is also the most frequent subject, alongside monasticism, of the papers submitted for the Conference dedicated to Archim Sophrony's theology: Georgios Galitis, 'First and Last Adam in the Theology of Elder Sophrony', pp. 131-42; George Mantzaridis, 'Participation in the Energy of God as the Condition for the Realization of the Hypostatic Principle in Man', pp. 241-51; John Zizioulas, 'Elder Sophrony's Conception of the Person in Comparison with Contemporary Theological Trends', pp. 253-62; Metropolitan Hierotheos, 'The Person as Truth in the Teaching of Elder Sophrony', pp. 265-86; George Zavershinsky, 'Theological Existentialism of Elder Sophrony (Sakharov). "The Principle of Persona" and Theology of Dialogue', pp. 355-66; Sophronios Michaelides, 'Ascetical Anthropology According to Elder Sophrony', pp. 405-21; all published in George Mantzaridis (ed.), *Elder Sophrony: Theologian of the Uncreated Light* (Vatopedi Monastery: Agios Oros, 2008).

<sup>112</sup> Fr Nicholas' is an introductory study and, as such, although it includes sections on most topics of interest in relation to Archim. Sophrony, they tend to remain introductory and not to represent exhaustive critical analyses.

hypostatical principle. The intention of this chapter is to show that, as Archim. Sophrony develops his anthropology, he also reveals an important aspect of his ecclesiological vision: its relation to hypostaticity. While the hypostasis represents the axis of his anthropology, hypostaticity (or the principle of the hypostasis) also applies to ecclesiology. More to the point, my opinion is that Archim. Sophrony's anthropology is a more 'practical' derivation of his ecclesiological thinking.

The claim of this chapter is that Archim. Sophrony understands the church as a being which exists according to a hypostatical moment, thus placing his anthropology and ecclesiology in a paradoxical rapport which presupposes that Man and the Church are dynamically identical, while also preserving their difference. While Man is a proper hypostasis, the Church merely exists according to a hypostatical mode; that is to say that, although it is not a hypostasis, the existence of the Church herself is, nevertheless, also structured according to the hypostatical principle.

Ultimately, this ontological rapport implies that each Man is dynamically identical to the whole Being of the Church. Man and the Church are identical in virtue of the common Life they share (the nature of this Life and its theological implications shall make the subject of Chapter Four), while the differentiation comes precisely from the manner in which the hypostatical principle applies to the two Beings.

To justify this claim, we need to approach it gradually, by looking at several other of Archim. Sophrony's ideas, and making a series of intermediary, secondary claims. The first of these claims is that Archim. Sophrony uses Christology as a fertile methodological system to derive the generic principles of his maximalist anthropology, rather than a topic in its own right. The obvious difficulty of this claim is that Archim. Sophrony's Christology is one of the most traditional aspects of his theology, in clear contrast with his daring maximalist anthropology.<sup>113</sup> To overcome this difficulty, we need to make a second intermediary claim, namely that the maximalist elements of Archim. Sophrony's anthropology are not primarily the result of his own Christological developments, but rather of the original use he makes of the doctrine of creation in the Divine image. In other words, Archim. Sophrony uses more or less the same prototype, but essentially modifies the manner in which this prototype is reflected in its image; by altering the lens, he obtains

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<sup>113</sup> On Archim Sophrony's maximalism, see also the section on 'Maximalisme anthropologique' in Archimandrite Symeon, 'Mystere et dimensions de la personne: lineaments d'anthropologie chretienne', *Buisson Ardent* 8 (2002), pp. 65-76 (pp. 74-76).

a highly creative image of Man without any substantial change of the originating Christological prototype .

To conclude this introductory section, the aims of this chapter are to argue for the following statements:

(a) that the root of Archim. Sophrony's maximalist theology is to be found in his original interpretation of the concept of the Divine image; this fruitful interpretation of the doctrine of creation allows him to build an original system of anthropology, which has further ecclesiological implications;

(b) that, once the doctrinal lens of creation according to the Divine image is redefined, Archim. Sophrony uses Christology as a methodological tool to extract the theory of the hypostatical principle which he further employs to build his maximalist anthropology – his Christology is deeply indebted to Fr Sergii Bulgakov, and represents the result of a process of co-relation between Chalcedonian and Palamite theologies;

(c) finally, that, while he develops his anthropology through the ontological approach imposed by the hypostatical principle, Archim. Sophrony implicitly reveals the hypostatical aspect in his ecclesiological thought. Ultimately, this means that Man and Church are two dynamically identical beings, whose only differentiation comes from the way in which the hypostatical principle applies to them.

## **II. Archim. Sophrony's Maximalist Interpretation of the Doctrine of Creation in the Divine Image**

As we have said, the claim of this section is that Archim. Sophrony developed an original interpretation of the doctrine of Creation according to the Divine Image, which he then employed to generate his three fundamental interpretations of the Divine Image; in turn, these form the basis of his maximalist theology. We need to demonstrate his original understanding of the Divine Image as part of our larger claim that the source of Archim. Sophrony's maximalist approach to anthropology

lies in a mixture between the creative manner in which he interprets and applies the doctrine of Creation, and his sophiological developments of Christology.

The doctrine of man's creation according to the 'Divine image and likeness', and an understanding of Christ as the eternal human prototype are the two sources of Archim. Sophrony's theology; almost everything else is derived from these two centres of revelation. The overwhelming accent on Christology and Anthropology is specific to all ascetic writers, and Archim. Sophrony is no exception. However, this focus on Christ does not limit his theology, but merely founds it on the Revelation of Christ's Divine-Human Hypostasis: 'Without Him, I know neither God nor man'<sup>114</sup>. In comparison to other ascetic writers, Fr Sophrony's understanding of Christ is not limited to making an example of his earthly life; rather, his Christology is very dense and Archim. Sophrony uses it to infer a theology of the Holy Trinity, the Church and Uncreated Energy, all founded on this common theological foundation – Christ's Divine-Human Person.

Archim. Sophrony's focus on Christology necessarily leads to the central place occupied by anthropology in his writings. Since Christ is the perfect Man, He is also the revelation of God's 'first thought' for humanity and as such, everything revealed through Him about Man becomes part of Man's Divine 'image and likeness': 'The idea of 'likeness to God' – completely, not partially – lays the foundation of Christian anthropology.'<sup>115</sup> In consequence, Archim. Sophrony identifies the Divine image with a multitude of concepts. Some of them come from Patristic literature, others are specific to twentieth-century Russian theology. The image of God is variously defined by the Fathers. At first analysis, Fr Sofrony apparently follows many of them, by identifying the Divine image sometimes in the mind<sup>116</sup>, at other times in man's freedom, creativity, self-determination and so forth. All these are, in fact, attributes of the Divine Life, which, according to Archim. Sophrony, can be hypostatized both by Man and by God; as a result, all attributes of Divinity, except uncreatedness, become expressions of the Divine image in man<sup>117</sup>:

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<sup>114</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 208.

<sup>115</sup> *Rozhdenie*; p. 96.

<sup>116</sup> It should be pointed out that by mind, Archim. Sophrony understands 'created spirit', not 'reason'; *We Shall See Him*, pp. 226, 234.

<sup>117</sup> See also Nicolas Sakharov, *I Love, Therefore I Am*, p. 122.

‘In the act of divinization, grace exalts man from the dimensions and patterns of the earth to the dimensions and patterns of the Divine Life. In other words, man hypostatizes divine attributes such as eternity, love, light, wisdom, truth.’ Thus, man becomes ‘a god by the content of his being.’<sup>118</sup>

However, as his Christology unfolds, his interpretation of Man’s Divine image also expands<sup>119</sup> until, eventually, it includes original readings, which no longer find a clear equivalent in Patristic theology. Instead, they are common among his contemporary Russian theologians and express the theological debates of the twentieth century. This will be demonstrated in the first part of this section. The second part is dedicated to his three fundamental new readings of the ‘Divine image’, which be explored in more detail as we advance through this thesis: image as the hypostatical principle; image as the *soborny* principle, and image as the Divine Life (Uncreated Energies or Sophia).

## **Maximalist interpretation of the doctrine of Creation in the Divine Image**

### **1. Introduction**

The purpose of section is to analyze Archim. Sophrony’s interpretation of the doctrine of creation according to the Divine image. We shall demonstrate that Archim. Sophrony outgrows the Patristic tradition concerning the definition and the use of the Divine image, and that he sets out his own understanding in the framework of twentieth-century theological maximalism.

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<sup>118</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 192.

<sup>119</sup> We should also note Archim. Sophrony’s interesting use of Origen’s classical distinction between ‘image’ and ‘likeness’, by suggesting that ‘Adam-the Whole Man [was] made ‘according to the image’, and in his view to live ‘according to the likeness’ of his Creator’; thus, ‘the image’ is the ontological potentiality given to man at creation, while ‘the likeness’ becomes the eschatological fulfilment of that potentiality, and consists in the hypostatization of Divine Life – *Rozhdenie*, p. 102. Also: ‘We are created by God “in His image” for life “after His likeness” – that is, for our ultimate divinization, for the communication to us of Divine Life in all its plenitude.’ – *We Shall See Him*, p. 110.

As we shall advance in our analysis, we shall see that Archim. Sophrony develops a Christo-centric – even Christo-morphic – theology of the image, which he applies both Anthro-po-logically and Theo-logically, in the sense that he defines both Man and God starting from the same theological source: Christ’s Divine-Human Person. Thus, by the end of this section, it will become clear that Archim. Sophrony develops a maximalist interpretation of the Divine image, which allows him to claim the identity of man with Christ, both in His perfect Humanity and in His Divinity.

## **2. Being like Christ in His perfect Humanity**

The first thing we need to show is that, unlike some Patristic writers, who limit the concept of image to one or several aspects of Christ’s Incarnate Person, Archim. Sophrony rejects any such limits and claims that everything that can be said about Christ as the Son of Man implicitly becomes a legitimate element of anthropology, applicable to all human hypostases: ‘everything that Christ says of Himself in His incarnation can apply to us, too.’<sup>120</sup> Thus, he can confidently write that:

‘Christ is the unshakeable foundation and the highest criterion of the teaching of the Church concerning man – of anthropology. Everything we confess concerning Christ’s humanity is the revelation of God’s Idea before the ages for humanity in general.’ And, further on, ‘if we accept that He is the measure of all things, we must also accept that our affirmations regarding Christ’s humanity at the same time reflect the whole diapason of the potentialities of human nature in general.’<sup>121</sup>

Archim. Sophrony’s understanding of Christ is consistently that of the revelation and ‘foundation of our [humanity’s] being’, so that ‘through Christ and in Him we have a momentarily positive expression of man answering to his primordial image and likeness to God.’<sup>122</sup> This interpretation of the Man’s ‘primordial image and likeness to God’ is a maximalist key to reading anthropology, in the sense that it abolishes all criteria of selection from the process of reflecting Christology at the human level of existence. Consequently, *all* attributes of Christ-the-Son-of-Man are perfectly

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<sup>120</sup> *We Shall See Him*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>121</sup> *Birth Into the Kingdom*, p. 90.

<sup>122</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 71.

mirrored on to humanity, rather than a limited selection of Christological elements, as we encounter in Patristic tradition<sup>123</sup>; this leads to what is commonly termed the maximalist anthropological trend of twentieth-century theology, most frequently associated with the work of Fr Sergii Bulgakov<sup>124</sup>. For the time being, we need to remember that part of the theological system generating Archim. Sophrony's maximalist anthropology is a corresponding maximalist interpretation of the Divine image, according to which 'everything we confess concerning Christ's humanity is the revelation of God's Idea before the ages for humanity in general'.

### 3. Being like Christ 'in His Divinity, too'

However, once we embark on this particular methodological path to re-constructing 'primordial' anthropology, we soon find that Archim. Sophrony's initial intention to limit his anthropological prototype exclusively to 'Christ's humanity' is difficult to put into practice, and it soon extends to Christ's Divinity, as well. Because of the ontological inseparability between that which is human and that which is Divine in Christ's Hypostasis, Archim. Sophrony soon finds himself referring to Christ's humanity as 'Divine-humanity' or 'super-humanity'; of course, given his maximalist interpretation of the doctrine of creation, this exalted humanity becomes the new prototypical state of being for the entire humanity. By consequence, he infers that:

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<sup>123</sup> 'Man is made in the image of God. What is it that constitutes this image in him? Is it his body? His threefold psychological structure? The answer is extremely complex. Some sort of refraction and reflection of God's image cannot be excluded from these aspects but the most essential is to be found in the *mode of being*.' – *St Silouan the Athonite*, p. 174. **For a discussion concerning the different interpretations of the idea of 'Divine image' in Patristic literature, see Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, 'The Soul in Greek Christianity', in James Crabbe (ed), *From Soul to Self* (Routledge: London and New York; 1999), particularly the section 'An undivided unity in the divine image', pp. 50-4.**

<sup>124</sup> see also *I Love Therefore I Am*, pp. 153-56 – Nicholas Sakharov's brief analysis of the roots of maximalism suffers for two reasons: his generally hagiographic approach to Archim. Sophrony's work, and his own superficial reception of Fr Sergii Bulgakov's theology.

‘We shall *ipso facto* become like unto Him in His Divinity, too.’<sup>125</sup> And, again: ‘Christ manifested the perfection of the Divine image in man and the possibility for our nature of assimilating the fullness of divinization to the very extent that, after His ascension, he placed our nature ‘on the right hand of the Father’.’<sup>126</sup>

This exalted humanity of Christ is not, of course, a new humanity, ontologically different from the ‘usual’ inferior humanity. Christ merely reveals the hidden potentiality of Man, He actualises what Archim. Sophrony calls God’s ‘initial plan’ concerning our ‘perfection’<sup>127</sup>. Thus, to ‘contemplate the primary creative idea of God concerning Man’ is to ‘experience the holiness of God’<sup>128</sup>, and only in this sense is the hypostatical man ‘new’; he writes that:

“‘To cross the threshold’ means to be born again, radically – to become “a new creature”. It means to receive the gift of divine eternity. Godlike life will come to be our inalienable possession. Uncreated grace is so joined to our created nature that the *two* will become one. And this is *divinization*.’<sup>129</sup>

A similar interpretation should be given to Archim. Sophrony’s distinction between ‘human’ and ‘super-human’, as for instance when he writes that ‘Christian perfection is super-human, divine’<sup>130</sup>. The same also applies to his description of the Mother of God as having a greatness ‘beyond human measure’. In a rare note about the Theotokos, he writes that, although she remains of one nature

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<sup>125</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 150.

<sup>126</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 193; and further ‘each of us individually bears within himself the image of the only-begotten Son’, p. 198. Also: ‘he who believes in Christ believes in his own divinization. Belief or disbelief depends on an elevated or depreciated conception of man.’ – *We Shall See Him*, p. 73.

<sup>127</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 40.

<sup>128</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 44.

<sup>129</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 94. And again ‘it is imperative for every one of us to be totally reborn by the action of grace; that the ability to apprehend divinization be restored in us’ – *We Shall See Him*, p. 119.

<sup>130</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 130.

with all humanity ‘it is impossible to isolate her from Christ-God’, and ‘her greatness is beyond human measure’<sup>131</sup>.

What this means is that man’s ontological perfection is not the result of an intervention or change operated by Christ’s Divine-Human Hypostasis at some point in the course of history. Instead, this perfection is in fact ‘pre-eternal’<sup>132</sup>, as its source is the perfection of God’s ‘uncreated grace’, and it belongs to Christ-God (see the quote concerning the Mother of God), rather than Christ-Man; to say otherwise is a sin, as it minimizes God’s intention for Man.

So far, we have shown two fundamental aspects of Archim. Sophrony’s theology of the Divine image. First, that he uses a maximalist key of interpretation, in the sense that he places no limits on the extent to which one can mirror Christ’s humanity at the level of general human existence. Secondly, we have seen how the limits of what can be projected upon humanity extend even to Christ’s Divinity, reflecting Archim. Sophrony’s reception of contemporary sophiological discussions regarding Christ’s Divine humanity.

#### **4. Divine Humanity; Ontological Identity and Differentiation between Divinity and Humanity in Christ’s Divine-Human Hypostasis**

In this context, the focus of the present section is to elaborate further on the theological implications of what has just been said regarding Archim. Sophrony’s interpretation of the Divine image, with a focus on the topics of ontological identity and differentiation between that-which-is-Divine and that-which-is-human in Christ’s Divine-Human Hypostasis.

The previous analysis of Archim. Sophrony’s use of Divine-humanity is connected to his description of the ontological attributes of the hypostasis: non-circumscribed by time and space,

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<sup>131</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 156.

<sup>132</sup> ‘In Christ, incarnate Son of the Father, we contemplate God’s pre-eternal idea of man’ – *We Shall See Him*, p. 193; also, p. 40.

eternal – including in the sense of without beginning, all-present, omniscient, even a subtle sense of hypostatic un-createdness<sup>133</sup>. Thus, for instance, he writes that:

In creating man ‘according to His image and likeness’, God repeats Himself in us. The entire plenitude of Divine Life – without beginning and without end – will be the unalienable possession of those who are saved. God is omnipresent and omniscient – the saints, also, dwelling in the Holy Spirit, become ‘everywhere present and all-knowing.’ God is *the truth and life*, and the saints too, in Him become alive and true. God is the all-perfect Goodness and Love Who embraces all that exists; the saints, too, in the Holy Spirit embrace with love the whole cosmos. The Act of Divine Being is without beginning, and those who are deified, as they partake of this Act, they too become ‘without beginning.’ *God is light and there is no darkness in Him*, and, through His dwelling-in, He also changes the saints into ‘perfect light.’ Just as Divine Existence is a ‘Pure Act’, so also, deified man, which was initially created only as a potentiality, perfectly actualises its created existence, and so, he, too, becomes ‘pure act’, by ‘crossing the threshold.’<sup>134</sup>

This entire discussion derives, of course, from the more general issue concerning Archim. Sophrony’s reception of Fr Sergii’s sophiology. In this sense, all the above-mentioned attributes of humanity are the theological effects of Archim. Sophrony’s own sophiological thinking, and of the idea that the plenitude of the Divine Life is hypostatized perfectly by each human hypostasis:

We shall inherit the fullness of Divine Life, the fullness of knowledge and strength of love which is manifested to us by Uncreated Light in which is no darkness at all (cf. John 1:5).<sup>135</sup>

These implications will be looked at in more detail in Chapter Four, dedicated to the sophiologic element of his ecclesiology. For the time being, we only need to note that ‘likeness to the point of

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<sup>133</sup> As it happens, for instance, when he writes about the ontological importance of the cross, which ‘initiates me into the mysteries of being, not only created, but Uncreated, too’; similarly, ‘in the cross, as in the Saviour’s Cup, my created being becomes linked with uncreated Divine Being.’ – *We Shall See Him*, p. 224.

<sup>134</sup> *Rozhdenie*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>135</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 228.

identity' can only refer to the moment of energy, as there can be no identity of hypostaticity<sup>136</sup> or of nature<sup>137</sup>: 'only life unites'.<sup>138</sup> These ideas are at times clearly comprised in short and dense paragraphs, like this:

'To speak of likeness to the point of identity troubled those who interpreted this as a complete fusion with God. There is, and always will be, an ontological distance between God, Who is unconditioned Primordial Being, and man, who is His creation. But in the Act of Creation 'in His image, after His likeness', our Creator in effect repeats Himself, and in this sense is our Father.'<sup>139</sup>

The Patristic differentiation between the two natures of Christ becomes thus a fundamental element of anthropology, as well. The concern for differentiation between that which is properly human and that which is Divine in humanity again reflects Archim. Sophrony's sophiological approach to all aspects of theology, including anthropology. What he is in fact trying to do is to establish the ontological rapport between the Divine-humanity, proper to all humanity, and the Divinity-as-such, proper to Christ only among men, as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. This rapport necessarily includes both identity, in virtue of the moment of energy, and differentiation, in virtue of the moment of essence.

It should be made clear that, despite their apparent similarities, the Patristic concern regarding a mixture of essences in Christ is not the concern of Archim. Sophrony and other sophiological theologians; they are deeply aware of Patristic Christology and they frequently state their understanding of this differentiation. Thus, Archim. Sophrony's statements regarding our likeness to

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<sup>136</sup> '[T]he personal principle is non-transferrable' – *We Shall See Him*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>137</sup> 'In the age to come, God's union with men will be complete in all the content of His Being, except, of course, identity of Essence. This last cannot be conveyed to mankind and will forever remain inconceivable for all created beings – angels and humans.' – *We Shall See Him*, p. 120.

<sup>138</sup> It is worth noting that this affirmative likeness 'to the point of identity' also finds a different, this time negative, expression in Archim. Sophrony's idea that men only become aware of 'one's own deformity' when faced with Christ's perfect humanity – *We Shall See Him*, pp. 59; and 90.

<sup>139</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 193.

Christ ‘to the point of identity’ should always be corroborated with his vision that ‘even in Him our nature did not become one with the Essence of the Uncreated God’<sup>140</sup>.

The real issue here is not to differentiate between essences, but to establish the rapport between Divinity-in-Itself and Divinity-as-Divine-humanity, a discussion which should be seen in its wider context, starting from Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s theology of differentiation and identity between the Divine Sophia and the Creaturely Sophia. Another way of expressing it would be the need to differentiate between the moment of energy of the Divine Being and the moment of energy of the Human Being. Ultimately, this is nothing else except the fundamental concern of Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s sophiological theology. The difference between Fr Sergii and Archim. Sophrony is one of preferred methodology – Fr Sergii starts from the moment of energy, and elaborates on the rapport between Divinity-in-Itself and Divine Humanity, while Archim. Sophrony focuses on hypostaticity, and tries to differentiate between *the manner* according to which God and Man, respectively, hypostatise Divine Life (which he uses as a generic term both for God’s third moment of existence, and for Man’s third moment of existence<sup>141</sup>).

In fact, Archim. Sophrony introduces a third element – the moment of energy – in the traditional Patristic discussion regarding Christ’s essence and hypostasis. In doing so, he identifies the element of identity between Christ and humanity in the moment of His Energy, while the other two modes of existence – hypostasis and essence – are both defined as elements of differentiation. Paradoxically, Archim. Sophrony’s maximalist anthropology does not weaken the distinction between God and Man, but instead strengthens it, by highlighting a second element of distinction. Thus, while he claims that Man is ontologically ‘identical’ with Christ, his pre-eternal Prototype, according to the moment of energy, Archim. Sophrony also argues that God and Man remain, nevertheless, different according to the moments of essence and hypostasis. The ‘hypostatical’ differentiation is inferred from the idea that ‘the personal principle is non-transferrable’, which represents the conclusion of a

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<sup>140</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 193.

<sup>141</sup> Divine Life is Archim. Sophrony’s preferred way to refer to Uncreated Energies; other terms he uses are: ‘third moment of existence’; ‘grace’; ‘Divine Mysteries’; and a series of Divine Attributes, especially Love, Light and Humility (sometimes replaced by Self-Emptying or Kenosis).

larger comparative discussion regarding the unity of life and hypostatic unicity, starting from the eschatological name each human person will be given at the Last Judgement.<sup>142</sup>

In conclusion, in this section we have seen how Archim. Sophrony's reception of sophiological theology strengthens his argument regarding the ontological identity and differentiation between Divine humanity and Divinity as such. Although Archim. Sophrony remains true to the Patristic distinction between essences in Christ, that is no longer enough in the context of his maximalist interpretation of the doctrine of creation, and the process of hypostatization is used to extend the differentiation from the moment of essence to the moment of energy.

## 5. Hypostaticity as a methodological tool

Thus, it becomes obvious that Archim. Sophrony's interest in Christology comes from a need to identify a new methodology which would enable him to differentiate between Divine Life, as hypostatized by God, and Divine Life, as hypostatized by humanity. From this approach, Christ's Hypostasis becomes a methodological tool, in the sense that It reveals to us a principle of likeness, rather than the element of likeness itself. When Archim. Sophrony writes that hypostaticity is the very element of likeness<sup>143</sup>, he does not mean it in the sense that humans are called to become Christ's own Hypostasis; hypostaticity is a non-transferrable reality, as he clearly points out himself. Instead, it is Christ's *hypostaticity* – not His Hypostasis as such – which provides us with the 'method' to attain the 'likeness to the point of identity'.

Archim. Sophrony uses hypostaticity – or the principle of hypostasis – to mediate between the other two ontological moments of existence: essence and energy; as such, the whole discussion regarding hypostaticity can be seen as a methodological interface between the ideas of absolute difference (according to nature) and absolute identity (according to energy) between God and Man. Thus, while 'the Divine Being, according to the 'moment' of Essence, is absolutely transcendent to

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<sup>142</sup> See *We Shall See Him*, pp. 84-5.

<sup>143</sup> As is implied, for instance, when writes that: 'The Unoriginate Absolute – God – revealed Himself to us as Personal Being. And we are created as potential *personae*' – *We Shall See Him*, p. 104.

creation’, and ‘according to the “moment” of Energy [Act, Life], It enters, in Its entire plenitude, in real communion with spiritual being [thus] becoming “immanent” to creation’:

The Divine Being, understood according to the Hypostatic (Face, Person) principle, remains eternally an ‘Other’ for those ‘created in the image and likeness.’ And yet, this ‘Other’ is our Beloved, Who knows us, Who told us: ‘You are My *friends*’, inexplicably related to us, unspeakably precious (cf. John 15:13-15).<sup>144</sup>

Hypostasis thus becomes Archim. Sophrony’s attempt to express his reception of Fr Sergii’s sophiological concerns without his sophiological terminology.

## **6. Anthro-morphism versus Christo-morphism**

I want now to address briefly one of the effects of Archim. Sophrony’s focus on Christology, as an argument that there is little difference, if any, between his Christo-centrism and the Anthro-morphism he often criticizes in other twentieth-century theologians.

We have seen how, despite his initial warning that only those theological statements which apply to Christ’s humanity are to be reflected on to humanity, there remains little, if anything, one could say about Christ, including in His Divinity, which is not applied anthropologically. At the same time, all these statements are also applied on to the Divine plane of existence as well, on the principle that whatever Christ is, He cannot be anything different from His uncreated existence as one of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. As such, Christ becomes a double methodological key, through which both God and Man are revealed; as Archim. Sophrony say: ‘Without Him I know neither God nor man.’<sup>145</sup>

‘The incarnation of the Logos of the Father – Jesus Christ – furnishes a solid foundation for our knowledge of God’<sup>146</sup>,

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<sup>144</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 68.

<sup>145</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 208.

<sup>146</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 190.

as well as being the legitimate source of anthropological theology:

‘When the Holy Spirit gives us to see Christ, as He is... it will become plain to us that He, Christ, is *all things* – in Him is fulness of Divinity and fulness of man.’<sup>147</sup>

Being *all things* both as God and as man, allows Archim. Sophrony to transfer all Christ’s attributes – His Love, Kenosis, Self-emptying etc. – simultaneously on to both the Divine and human levels of existence. Similarly, the Personal character of His Hypostasis, the *sobornicity* which His Person reveals, the sophianic aspect of His Person, are also projected on the ontological levels of both Beings – God and Man. Christ becomes the ‘prototype’, so to say, not only of Man, but also of God’s Own revelation of Himself to Humanity<sup>148</sup>:

Christ gave us everything. He revealed to us the glorious mystery of the *Holy Trinity*. He ‘shewed us the Father.’ Through Him we receive and experience knowledge of the Holy Spirit, and can infallibly determine when it is He, the Third Person proceeding from the Father, Who is acting in us, and not some other spirit ... Through Christ and in Him we have a momentously positive expression of man answering to his primordial image and likeness to God. Now there is no longer in us anything or anyone else that could be the foundation of our being, either here on earth or in eternity.<sup>149</sup>

There is a sense in which, while trying to avoid the anthropomorphism he sees in some contemporary theologians<sup>150</sup>, Archim. Sophrony ends up doing precisely the same thing, most probably because he saw a greater danger in accepting the opposing view, of other contemporary

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<sup>147</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 233.

<sup>148</sup> Compare with Fr Sergii’s understanding of Sophia as ‘revelation of God Himself’.

<sup>149</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 71.

<sup>150</sup> Although he never mentions any name, this most probably refers to Fr Sergii Bulgakov, who does precisely the same thing Archim. Sophrony does, but openly accepts that he is re-building God from the revelation of Christ’s Divine-Humanity. To a certain extent, this is also Archim Sophrony’s critique of Fr Sergii’s idea that theology must necessarily develop cataphatic formulations of the main Christological dogmas.

theologians<sup>151</sup>, according to which there is an element in Divinity which will eternally remain unknown to and unshared with humanity. There makes, after all, little difference between terming one's theology Anthopo-morphic or Christo-morphic, if the Anthropos and the Christ in question are merely two different terms for the same being: the Divine-Human Hypostasis of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

### **Three fundamental interpretations of the Divine Image; Christ's Hypostaticity as the Divine image of Man.**

We have said at the beginning of this section on Archim. Sophrony's interpretation of the doctrine of creation that we aim to demonstrate two things: firstly, that he adopts the maximalist interpretation of the concept of Divine image specific to twentieth-century sophiological theologians; and secondly, that he identifies in Christ's hypostaticity one of the fundamental elements of human likeness to the Divine Being. Having already demonstrated the first of these two claims, let us now turn to the second and prove our claim that Archim. Sophrony understands hypostaticity as an essential manifestation of the Divine image in Man.

Archim. Sophrony derives his theology of the hypostasis from a larger original development of St Gregory Palamas' distinction between essence and energy, by which he operates the same distinction at the human level, as well. This in turn leads to three fundamental interpretations of the Divine Image in man, of which hypostaticity is one. In order to understand Archim. Sophrony's use of the hypostasis, we need to place it in the more general framework of these developments of St Gregory Palamas' theology.

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<sup>151</sup> See Lossky's reticence to speculate about God's inner life, and the theoretical distinction between the transcendent God-in-Himself and the immanent God, revealed to Creation (a theoretical distinction which he himself often ignored). In what seems to be a direct conversation with his former colleague, Archim. Sophrony asks: 'is it permissible to venture beyond one's own experience and in mental contemplation conceive of the participation of the Father and the Holy Spirit in the Son's death on the cross?', before embarking on an affirmative 'contemplation' on the subject – *We Shall See Him*, pp. 139 - 40.

## 1. The Christian Revelation of the three Divine modes of existence.

In the first part of our larger analysis of Archim. Sophrony's interpretation of the doctrine of creation in the Divine image, we have seen how he defines the idea of *image*. The second thing to consider is His interpretation of the *God* in Whose image man was created.

Once again, Archim. Sophrony starts from the revelation of Christ's hypostasis in order to derive knowledge about God, in a similar manner as he used Christ to derive knowledge about humanity. God is revealed to us through Christ, so that all we know of Christ is eternally true in relation to His Divinity, too. Through Christ, we get to know God not as the Old Testament Monad, but as a *Sobor*, as the Holy Trinity. This aspect of the Revelation is of central importance to Archim. Sophrony who recurrently points to the differences between the Jewish and Islamic henotheism<sup>152</sup>, and Christian monotheism. The Christian God, revealed through One of its Hypostases, is nevertheless not mono-Hypostatic, but Tri-hypostatic, Three Persons in one essence.

We reach thus to the Christian revelation of a God for Whom 'the Hypostasis-Persona is the inmost principle of Absolute Being - its first and last dimension.'<sup>153</sup> This is the fulfilment of the Sinaitic revelation of the 'I am' name, and implies a corresponding hypostatical manner of existence on God's image, humanity. At the same time, however, humanity was given the revelation of a God Who is Three Consubstantial Persons, absolutely different yet not separated, a Triune God Whose monotheism does not exclude, but instead presupposes, hypostatical multiplicity in the same nature.

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<sup>152</sup> Archim. Sophrony uses *heno-theism* to define the exclusive belief in one mono-hypostatic deity: 'Old Testament humanity helplessly in the limits of One-Divinity, understood not as Christian mono-theism, but in the sense of non-Christian heno-theism (One Divinity, that is Uni-Hypostatic God)', in *Rozhdenie*, pp. 51-52. Also, in relation to Islam: 'In the heno-theistic and uni-hypostatical perspective of Islam, and even that of the Old Testament, such identity of Person and Essence is understood as total, to the absence of any difference between them.', in *Rozhdenie*, p. 65. This definition of heno-theism differs from its general meaning as the exclusive worship of one deity, while nevertheless recognizing the existence of several gods. At times, heno-theism is replaced with 'metaphysical monism' (*Rozhdenie*, p. 53), with no difference in meaning. Whenever heno-theism is used in this paper, we shall refer to Archim. Sophrony's particular understanding of it.

<sup>153</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 191.

Finally, Archim. Sophrony claims that these Three Persons are ontologically united because of their common Life, which denotes the third mode of Divine existence, according to the moment of energy.

To conclude, Archim. Sophrony uses Christ's Hypostases to argue for the three moments of Divine existence: essence (through *sobornicity*), hypostasis and energy. Rather than simply referencing back to St Gregory Palamas' distinction between these three modes of existence, he prefers to infer them anew from Christ's Divine-Human Hypostasis and only uses St Gregory's theology to prove the dogmatic truth of his Christological deductions. He prefers to derive these distinctions from Christ's Hypostasis, rather than directly from St Gregory, because of his further intention to apply them anthropologically. St Gregory starts from Christ's Hypostases and infers a theological statement about the Holy Trinity; his distinction between energy and essence is only in connection to the Divine Being. By comparison, Archim. Sophrony's interest is in anthropology so that, although he also starts from Christ's Hypostases, his deductions are meant to be applied at the human level of existence.

## **2. The three moments of existence as elements of human likeness to the Divinity**

We have seen so far that Archim. Sophrony (a) extends the concept of Divine image to all statements regarding Christ, and (b) that he distinguishes in Christ three moments of existence: according to the hypostasis, essence and energy. Based on these two conclusions, Archim. Sophrony can develop St Gregory Palamas' theology and is able to distinguish between essence, energy and hypostases within humanity, as well.

This distinction is itself a highly original development of traditional theology; although founded on Patristic and Palamite ideas, the distinction between the three modes of existence was never applied to humanity until the beginning of the twentieth century. Fr Sergii Bulgakov made particular use of it as an essential element of his sophiologic system. Archim. Sophrony inherited this distinction and uses it in very much the same way; significantly, he even applies it to his interpretation of St Silouan's writings, which is a clear sign that his sophiological thinking dates back to the years he spent in the Holy Mountain, if not earlier.

In conclusion of this section, we have shown that Archim. Sophrony attributes a variety of interpretations to the concept of Divine image, the most original being that he reflects the three moments of Divine existence on humanity. Any discussion of Archim. Sophrony's understanding of the Divine image in Man must be carried within the general framework of this distinction between the three modes of existence of the Divine Being. More to the point, one has to bear in mind that Archim. Sophrony applies the same set of distinctions at the level of the human being, as well.

In what follows, we shall look at the implications of this correlation between St Gregory Palamas' theology and Archim. Sophrony's anthropological interest. The aim is to demonstrate that, as he applies the distinction between hypostasis, essence and energy on to humanity, he establishes the conceptual foundation of his anthropological, ecclesiological and sophiological thinking, respectively.

### **3. Divine Image as Hypostaticity; Anthropology.**

Patristic theology understands Christ as a perfect Divine-Human Person, which is one hypostasis in (belonging to, existing in, having) two natures, meaning that Christ hypostatizes both essences – Divine and human. Archim. Sophrony's general understanding of a hypostasis can be reduced to one's ability to actualize one's nature perfectly. In the existentialist language of twentieth-century theology and their distinction between three 'moments' of existence at the level of humanity, such perfect actualization of one's nature can be further defined as the process of fully living the life proper to one's essence or, as Fr Sophrony repeatedly says, being able to join the Divine 'I AM'.

This potential to live the Divine 'I AM' belongs to each human being and Fr Sophrony identifies it with the Divine image in Man. Like Christ, each human individual has the potential to become a real hypostasis (Person) by actualizing his essence and living the Life (Energy, Sophia) common to both the Divine and the Human Beings. As we shall see, Archim. Sophrony prefers to refer to this interpretation of the image as a hypostatical principle rather than simply hypostasis, precisely because of this common moment of energy between God and Humanity.

#### **4. Divine Image as *Sobornicity*; Ecclesiology.**

The theological arguments behind the hypostatical principle are those of Christ's Own Hypostaticity and the idea that our 'likeness' to Him means that everything that was revealed about Christ can be applied anthropologically. However, Christological revelation is not limited to Christ's Person, but also includes the revelation of God as a Trinitarian (that is, *soborny*) Being. God is not a Monad, one hypostasis in one nature, but a Triad, Three Hypostases in one nature.

Based on this and the above-mentioned understanding of human 'likeness' to the Divine Being, Archim. Sophrony infers that humanity also has a *Soborny* Being. Reflecting the Tri-hypostatic *soborny* structure of God, humanity also is a multi-hypostatic being united by one common essence. And, just as Christ and the Divine Trinity are at the same time perfectly identical and perfectly different, so are the human Hypostases and their corresponding *Sobor*, which is the Church. We shall use this interpretation of the Divine Image in the following chapter, when we shall look in more detail at Archim. Sophrony's ecclesiology.

#### **5. Divine Image as *Sophia* or *Divine Life*; *Sophiology*.**

Archim. Sophrony's distinction between the three moments of 'existence' at the human level proves most useful for his interpretation of the Divine image as the common Life shared by both Divine and Human Beings. Its theological foundation lies, of course, on St Gregory Palamas' distinction between the Divine nature and Divine energy, and the doctrine of human ability to receive these Uncreated Energies in full. Fr Sophrony's approach towards these Palamite concepts is deeply indebted to Fr Sergii Bulgakov's *Sophiology* and its key ideas about the Divine Energy, including the relationship between the Divine and Creaturely *Sophias*, which, in Archim. Sophrony's case, is expressed as the distinction between the different manners in which God and Man hypostatize the common moment of Energy. Archim. Sophrony defines the relationship between Divine Life hypostatized by God and Divine Life hypostatized by Man as the third fundamental element of the Divine image in man.

Divine Life, as fully experienced by God, is perfectly accessible to humanity. At the same time, however, Divine Energy is not ‘something’ which belongs to the Divine Being, but Divinity Itself, in its immanent ‘moment’. In other words, Divine Life is God entering humanity, Divinity being hypostatized by human beings. From this derives the relationship between the Divine and Human Life, their absolute identity (not likeness, but ontologic identity), in spite of the difference of essence between God and Man.

This identity of the Divine Life is the third major interpretation given by Fr Sophrony to the doctrine of human creation according to the Divine image, and we shall make use of it in chapter four, when we shall look at the relationship between the Church and Man. For the time being, let us now focus on Archim. Sophrony’s first interpretation of the Divine image, which corresponds to our first claim concerning his ecclesiology, namely that the Church is a hypostatical being.

### **III. Personhood and the Church: the hypostatization of the All-Adam**

After we have seen how Archim. Sophrony develops the doctrine of creation in the Divine image to include the element of hypostaticity, it is now time to return to the main claim of this chapter, namely that Archim. Sophrony places anthropology and ecclesiology in a rapport of ontology which presupposes identity, as well as differentiation.

In support of our claim, we shall start with an analysis of Archim. Sophrony’s understanding of hypostaticity or personhood. So far, we have established that Archim. Sophrony sees hypostaticity as the Divine image in Man; let us now see exactly what he understands by hypostaticity. To do so, we shall follow Archim. Sophrony and shall start, once again, from Christ’s Hypostasis.

#### **Hypostasis versus principle of hypostaticity. Definitions**

The intention of this section is to differentiate between that which Archim. Sophrony has in common with most twentieth-century theologians, and to identify what it is that makes his theology of personhood different. By the end of this discussion, we shall demonstrate that his most fertile development was to connect the Chalcedonian definition of hypostasis with St Gregory Palamas’

distinction between essence and energy, an approach to hypostaticity which places his theology of personhood in a direct line with Fr Sergii Bulgakov's sophiological theology.

We have already said that, so far, Archim. Sophrony's theology of personhood has been the most-often analyzed aspect of his work. Despite the widespread interest generated by his personalist theology, there is in truth little new that he adds to the general twentieth-century discussion of the subject. Overall, Archim. Sophrony's writings on the topic perfectly fit the usual concerns and lines of inquiry followed by the most representative theologians of the century, and he unreservedly shares some of the generally accepted assumptions of their theology. While this is particularly true in relation with the sophiological approach of Fr Sergii Bulgakov, the general character of personalist terminology allowed Archim. Sophrony to make references even to theologians of different views on the subject.

Let us begin with an attempt to formulate a definition of what Archim. Sophrony understands by hypostasis. The first thing to observe is that throughout his entire work, Archim. Sophrony avoids any clear definition of what a hypostasis (or Person) is, although it is one of the most frequent terms he employs. Even when he does attempt to define what a hypostasis is, the end-result takes the form of a short dogmatically-condensed aphorism, which requires a great effort of further unfolding and clarification. One such example is included in the essay on 'The Hypostatical Principle in the Godhead and in the Human Being', in which he includes the following definition of the hypostasis: 'The Person is He Who alone and genuinely lives.'<sup>154</sup> Similarly vague is the different, much longer description included in *Birth Into the Kingdom*:

The Three Faces (Persons of God) are but abstract concepts, but bear existentially Their Essence-Energy: Existential Faces. ... In Eastern theology, ... the term hypostasis ... tended to underline the existential meaning of Face in the Divine Being; in other words, by emphasizing this principle, it talked about it as the foundation of all Being, as That Which really lives, Which is the True Absolute God. ... Hypostaticity is the first and the last dimension, the source of all, the end of all – the all-encompassing principle beyond which nothing exists nor can exist.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 194.

<sup>155</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 47.

The above definition points to our second observation, namely that Archim. Sophrony often replaces hypostasis with other seemingly synonymous notions; this is especially visible in his later writings, where hypostasis is increasingly replaced by other notions, such as hypostatic principle, personal principle or hypostaticity. Although they seem to be used as synonyms, it quickly becomes obvious that, while hypostasis denotes the plenitude of an ontological state of existence, hypostatical principle and its other substitutes express a dynamic state of evolution and growth.

Despite this difference, whenever Archim. Sophrony tries to formulate a definition of the hypostasis, he always prefers to do it by referring to the hypostatical principle. Consequently, while we find no clear definition of what he understands by a hypostasis, his work offers, nevertheless, a series of definitions of the hypostatical principle<sup>156</sup> and its manifestations, which allow us to define *the process* by which a hypostasis is created. Thus, we learn that:

This is the feature of the personal principle. The Person does not live in itself. The Father poured His whole Self in the Son and the Holy Spirit. In a similar manner, humanity becomes a multitude of hypostases, but it is one man.<sup>157</sup>

The reason for the absence of a definition for hypostasis in Archim. Sophrony's work is that he understands hypostasis-as-such as the eschatological perfection of the deified man, and, as such, it represents a mystery and remains beyond definition. By comparison, hypostaticity is a process, a principle which can be applied to various layers of existence. This difference between hypostasis and hypostaticity is reflected in the way Archim. Sophrony writes about them: while created language is unable to articulate a description of the hypostasis, principles are not ontological realities, but revelations of a dynamic, of a process of evolution and, consequently, one can formulate various definitions of them.

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<sup>156</sup> It should also be noted that he never uses hypostatical principle, although he does use 'personalnii printsip' (see, for instance, *Rozhdenie*, p. 28). However, 'lichnii nachalo', which is his usual expression, can only be translated as personal or hypostatical principle; in Russian, litso (face) is also used to denote hypostasis, person.

<sup>157</sup> *Dukhovnie Besedi* Vol II, p. 27.

One such possible definition could be formulated by starting from the difference Archim. Sophrony sees between the individual and the proper hypostasis<sup>158</sup>, two seemingly synonymous terms, which ‘in a certain perspective ... have opposing meanings’.

One cannot apply to the Absolute the limited image of our ‘existence’, especially as individualism, wrongly understood as ‘personhood’; in other words, [this is] the confusion between two diametrically opposed concepts – the individual and the person. The first is the limit of divisibility; the second is the bearer of the whole Being.<sup>159</sup>

Thus, an individual becomes a hypostasis by perfectly living its ontologic potential, which is then further defined as either the actualization of one’s nature or, which is the same, as the complete appropriation of one’s proper life. Although they express the same process, the first definition points to the relationship between hypostasis and its nature, while the second focuses on the relationship between hypostasis and the energy corresponding to its nature.

This definition of the human hypostasis, which is common in its general lines to all Russian theologians active in Paris at the time, has two elements of theological novelty which are generally overlooked or taken for granted. Firstly, as we have already said, the relationship between nature and hypostasis was originally formulated at Chalcedon in order to express a dogma about the Divine Being; although most Patristic writers also distinguish between human nature and human hypostasis, it is only in the twentieth century that the Chalcedonian relationship between the Divine Hypostases and their nature came to be generally accepted as also valid at the human level.

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<sup>158</sup> The distinction between hypostasis and individual seems to have been dogmatically created by Fr Sergii Bulgakov, in his 1917 *The Unfading Light*.

<sup>159</sup> *Rozhdenie*, pp. 46-47. Archim. Sophrony applies the distinction between individual and hypostasis even eschatologically, so that he refers to ‘non-universal hypostases’ or ‘human individuals’; in the framework of his theology, these are paradoxical beings, expressions of the unsolved tension which characterizes Archim. Sophrony’s theology of salvation: ‘As long as human hypostases do not overcome the limitations of individualism, they will remain unable to appropriate that “universal fullness” of which speaks Saint Gregory, and to bear in authentic manner all the plenitude of being. Non-universal hypostases, the so-called “human individuals”, will not attain the complete universal unity in their relationship with their brethren, and will remain only partially united, in the limits of their possibility.’ – *Rozhdenie*, p. 88.

Secondly, even this human version of the Chalcedonian dogma refers only to the relationship between nature and hypostasis, and makes no mention of the energy or life proper to one's nature. Traditionally, hypostaticity is discussed in relation to the Divine Being, and it exclusively expresses the relationship between a hypostasis and its own nature. There is no mention in the Chalcedonian doctrine of the Divine Persons about energy and its relationship with either nature or hypostasis. This is a second twentieth-century development of the concept of hypostaticity, based on a creative mixture of Chalcedonian and Palamite doctrines, which is especially characteristic of Fr Sergii Bulgakov and sophiology.

We have seen, so far, that Archim. Sophrony, in line with all main twentieth-century theologians, follows Fr Sergii in his dogmatic distinction between individual and hypostasis. We also noted that, in spite of the high recurrence of the term and the centrality of the topic, Archim. Sophrony does not give a direct definition of hypostasis, but prefers to define it indirectly, either by referring to the above-noted distinction between hypostasis and individual, or by substituting hypostasis with the dynamic concept of hypostaticity, or the personal principle. These indirect definitions demonstrate that Archim. Sophrony receives the generalised theological presuppositions of twentieth-century personalist theology, and that he uses unreservedly its usual terminology. However, these definitions also seem to suggest that Archim. Sophrony inherits Fr Sergii Bulgakov's sophiological perspective of personhood, and that his understanding of hypostasis is developed in the larger framework of a theology of energy, rather than the Patristic manner of defining a hypostasis by relating it to its essence.

### **Archim. Sophrony's History of the Revelation of the Personal Principle**

To advance our discussion, it is useful to look at Archim. Sophrony's history of the revelation of the hypostatical principle. It is not our intention to include here an exhaustive account of the evolution of the concept of personhood; others have done it before<sup>160</sup>, and it would add very little to the focus of our discussion. However, an examination of Archim. Sophrony's own version of the chronology

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<sup>160</sup> For a study of personhood in relation to Orthodox Theology, see Metropolitan Hierotheos, *The Person in the Orthodox Tradition* (Birth of the Theotokos Monastery: Levadia, 2002); for an account of the Patristic meaning of hypostaticity, see Peter Bouteneff, 'The Human Person and the Person of Christ According to the Cappadocians', *Sobornost* 21, 1 (1999), pp. 22-36.

of the hypostatical revelation will confirm the conclusions suggested by the previous section, namely that, in the general context of twentieth century interest in human hypostaticity, Archim. Sophrony co-relates the Chalcedonian understanding of Christ's Person with St Gregory Palamas' doctrine of the uncreated energies. This approach to defining hypostaticity, through a co-relation between Chalcedon and Palamas, is not new, as it was set up decades before by Fr Sergii Bulgakov as one of the long-term aims of future theology<sup>161</sup>.

Archim. Sophrony's personal views on the history of Personal revelation are not the result of scholarly work, but a biblical chronology of several events which he reads as Divine revelations of the hypostatical principle to humanity. This history starts with Genesis, focuses on Moses' revelation of the 'I AM' name of God and on Christ's Incarnation, and ends with the perfect revelation of the Eschaton. As we go through this minimalist biblical history and Archim. Sophrony's interpretation of it, it will become clearer that this history of revelation also represents a parallel history of *sobornicity* and, especially so, a history of sophiology, thus revealing the essential rapports Archim. Sophrony sees between hypostaticity, *sobornicity* and sophiology. While the rapport between Person and *sobor* simply applies to the human level the Chalcedonian relationship between Divine nature and its Three Persons, the rapport between hypostaticity and sophiology is much more interesting and represents the result of the co-relation between the Chalcedonian and Palamite theologies we have mentioned before.

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<sup>161</sup> 'The fundamental idea of Palamism is that, alongside God's transcendent "essence", there exists His manifold revelation in the world, His radiation in "energies", as it were. But Palamas's doctrine of essence and energies is not brought into connection with the dogma of the Trinity, in particular with the doctrine of three hypostases as separate persons and of the Holy Trinity in unity ... The sophiological interpretation and application of Palamism are yet to come in the future. By accepting Palamism, the Church has definitely entered onto the path of recognizing the sophiological dogma. But the theological realization of this recognition still requires a long path of intellectual labour.' – *The Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 18-19.

## 1. History

According to Archim. Sophrony's reading of the Scripture, the history of the revelation concerning the personal principle started at the very moment of Creation<sup>162</sup>, but the most theologically fertile example remains the Sinaitic Revelation given to Moses. The self-revealed Name of God – as 'I AM' – is one of the most frequently recurrent themes in Archim. Sophrony's theology, both in his written works and his spoken lectures to the Essex community. Apart from this Sinaitic Revelation, he also makes mention of various other hypostatic manifestations of the Divine Being, such as the personal manner in which God creates Man, and the encounter between Abraham and the three angelic Persons<sup>163</sup>; however, none of these are of such comparative theological importance as the 'I AM' name of God.

The dogmatic importance of the hypostatical revelation influences the course of world history and culture<sup>164</sup> – 'within the Church or outside it'<sup>165</sup> – to the extent that Archim. Sophrony differentiates between civilizations and individuals<sup>166</sup>, according to their level of knowledge and understanding of

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<sup>162</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 51; *We Shall See Him*, p. 193.

<sup>163</sup> *Rozhdenie*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>164</sup> *Rozhdenie*, pp. 51-53. Also: 'Every manifestation of God to man affects the destinies of the whole world' – *We Shall See Him*, pp. 216-17. Overall, Archim. Sophrony argues that the dogmatic quality of the Divine revelations to humanity alters the course and the inner value of human history itself. Christ's incarnation, for instance, affected both the personal history of the Theotokos and the general history of the human race: 'her whole life was transformed. And with her, and thanks to her, the history of the world stepped into a new orbit immeasurably more grandiose than ever before' – *We Shall See Him*, p. 217; Also: 'one single human person, who received the highest possible knowledge of the Eternal God, changes the worth of the whole earth'; the value of earth 'is equal to the value of the most perfect man. Thus, when the Lord was with us on earth, the value of earth was equal with that of the Lord' – *Rozhdenie*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>165</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 6.

<sup>166</sup> For instance, he even differentiates between the 'various Fathers and preceptors of the Church down the ages [who] have preached the revelation of our likeness to God', because 'not all of them possessed equal knowledge of God and humankind'; *We Shall See Him*, p. 192.

the personal principle. In the history of mankind, he makes a major distinction between the civilizations prior to Christ and the ones following Him. Even after Christ's Incarnation and the complete revelation of the Personal Divine Being, Archim. Sophrony categorises various nations according to their response to the Christological Revelation of the hypostatical principle.

Thus, within the Old Testament peoples, he distinguishes between the people of Israel, pagan peoples and the Greek people. Interestingly, rather than focusing on their negative aspects, he prefers to identify the Christological aspects of their respective theologies, which allows him to see the work of God even in that part of humanity which was neither Jewish, nor was to become Christian<sup>167</sup>. This attitude allows him to write, for instance, that:

The superiority of the metaphysical conception regarding being over pagan polytheism resides in the fact that it correctly discerns the eternal unity of Being. The superiority of the second, that is of pagan polytheism, under its best aspect, over pantheism, consists in the fact that it understood personhood as a deeper ontological principle of being, while thought is one of the Energies, one of the manifestations of that personal principle.<sup>168</sup>

Within Archim. Sophrony's history of the personal principle, the Divine name of 'I AM', which was revealed to Moses on the Sinai Mount, is given most attention, in part because of its autobiographical importance. Although it remains an incomplete revelation, the Sinaitic 'I AM' already bears in itself the potential of the complete Personal Revelation of the Incarnation:

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<sup>167</sup> This attitude is consistent with his ecclesiological view that one can identify something common with the Orthodox faith in all religious manifestations, a view which is shared both by Fr Sergii Bulgakov (see his theory of the *Ecclesia extra-Ecclesia*) and by St Silouan the Athonite (see his response regarding the right missionary approach to the non-Orthodox).

<sup>168</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 53; Similarly, starting from their level of appropriation of the revelation of the hypostatical principle, Archim. Sophrony distinguishes between Christians and non-Christians, Orthodox and non-Orthodox – *Rozhdenie*, p. 65.

‘The personal principle in man contains, first and foremost, his likeness to Him Who revealed Himself to us under the Name *I AM*<sup>169</sup>, and again ‘The revelation “I AM THAT I AM” shows the hypostatical dimension in the Divinity to be of fundamental significance.’<sup>170</sup>

The revelation is also one of anthropological importance, because, as we have seen in the previous sections of this chapter, hypostaticity is one of Archim. Sophrony’s three fundamental interpretations of the doctrine of creation according to the Divine image; consequently, Archim. Sophrony can induce that:

Proceeding from the marvellous revelation I AM THAT I AM, we experience and live man, created ‘in the image, after the likeness’, first and foremost as *persona*. ... Only as a personal being can man recognise his Prototype – the Living God.<sup>171</sup>

Thus, Archim. Sophrony argues, the Sinai moment contains a partial revelation together with the promise of its future fulfilment<sup>172</sup>. Moses himself, in a gesture followed by other Old Testament prophets, recognises the imperfection of the revelation entrusted to him, and points to a future perfect completion of it through another Prophet. Nevertheless, although only a potentiality, the content of the Sinaitic Revelation was enough to set apart the people of Israel among the pagan peoples, and to prepare it for the coming of the promised Messiah.

As a consequence, the Incarnation of one of the Divine Persons was of absolute necessity in order to complete the revelation of the hypostatic principle both in the Creator and the created being. Apart from the redeeming and deifying aspects of the Incarnation, Archim. Sophrony stresses the revelatory importance of the event. It is in Christ’s Incarnation that Divine-human commensurability is revealed, and it is in His Person that the hypostatic principle is revealed as the Divine ‘image’ according to which humans were created. The Incarnation makes it possible that

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<sup>169</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 192.

<sup>170</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 193.

<sup>171</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 194.

<sup>172</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 52.

humanity should know both God and itself ‘no longer in the thick darkness of Sinai but in the light of Tabor’<sup>173</sup>. Thus, he writes:

Moses, that unique genius, could not grasp all the profundity of the ‘I AM’ that appeared to him ... The true content of the Sinaitic Revelation continued undiscovered for centuries, and the hidden God was contemplated in darkness ... The law given through Moses contained seeds which would mature to prepare people to accept the incarnation of God and enable them to recognise the Prophet Whom Moses foretold ... Christ revealed to us the Mystery of Primal Being; of Him Who was ‘in the beginning’: Three Persons, not to be amalgamated one into the other, are One Being, were, however, plurality of differentiation is no contradiction.<sup>174</sup>

Without Christ, humanity’s knowledge of the Divine Being would not have been able to go beyond the level we see in the Old Testament. Archim. Sophrony makes frequent use of a comparison between the heno-theistic vision of Islam and the Christian monotheism precisely to underline this inability to surpass Mosaic theology without a correct appropriation of the Incarnation. Through the Person of Christ, the event of His Incarnation contains in itself the surplus of knowledge regarding the Divine Being that allowed for exceeding the limits of the Sinaitic Revelation of the Old Testament admitted by Moses, and still kept in Judaism and Islam. If the Sinaitic event reveals God as ‘He Who Is’, the Incarnation adds the new revelation of Christ the Son of Man, being ‘He Who Is’ in a human body, as a proper human being; this point is used again by Archim. Sophrony to apply anthropologically the Christological revelation of hypostaticity: ‘In prayer like the Gethsemane prayer we are given existential experience of the hypostasis – *persona* ... Now in Christ man, too, may say “I am.”’<sup>175</sup>

The ‘I AM’ Name of God, as revealed to Moses and later incarnated in Christ, points to the two rapports of hypostaticity we mentioned at the beginning of this section: hypostaticity in relation to essence, often expressed through the idea of *sobornicity*; and hypostaticity in relation to energy, often expressed through Divine Life, Archim. Sophrony’s favourite name for the third mode of

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<sup>173</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 214.

<sup>174</sup> *We Shall See Him*, pp. 214-15.

<sup>175</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 220.

existence, and its various manifestations as Love, Self-Emptying, Prayer etc. Let us now revisit the history of hypostatical revelations we have just seen through this lens of interpretation, so as to clarify further these two ontological rapports.

## **2. Hypostasis versus essence and how this rapport is revealed through Christ**

Archim. Sophrony's comparative notes on Christian mono-theism, on the one hand, and Jewish and Islamic heno-theism, on the other hand, give us a clear view of the relationship he sees between a hypostasis and its nature. Based on these notes, one could argue that Archim. Sophrony introduces a distinction between a Christian hypostasis and a non-Christian hypostasis, and that, in a certain sense, he understands the uni-hypostatical God of the Old Testament as not properly personal.

‘In the heno-theistic and uni-hypostatical perspective of Islam, and even that of the Old Testament, such identity of Person and Essence is understood as total, to the absence of any difference between them.’ In comparison, ‘In trinitarian mono-theism this identity is a maximal antinomy, as the principle of the Person, in the context of Triunity, cannot be reduced to Essence. The Holy Trinity, as one and simple Being, appears as a unity of a very different kind, which simultaneously presupposes absolute identity and also absolute difference.’<sup>176</sup>

The ultimate difference, therefore, lies in whether or not hypostaticity can be ‘reduced to Essence’, which depends on whether the Divine Being is defined as one nature and one hypostasis, or as one nature and a plurality of hypostases. In the first case, the one hypostasis is not a proper person, at least not in the Christian sense Archim. Sophrony uses the concept, as it lacks the inter-essential (ousia) relationships of a *soborny* being.<sup>177</sup> Only the second being is a personal God, and His hypostases are proper Persons, involved in *soborny* relationships within their nature.

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<sup>176</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 65.

<sup>177</sup> Interestingly, Archim. Sophrony sees in these ‘heno-theistic limitations’ the reason why the Chosen People was so attracted to pagan worship; without the complete revelation of the Tri-unity of God, Israel was instinctively searching for the Tri-une God in the pagan poly-theism of their contemporaries; *Rozhdenie*, pp. 51-52.

Thus, Archim. Sophrony's history of the revelation of the personal principle becomes a history of the revelation of the Divine *Sobor* and the plurality of Divine Persons. The complete revelation of the hypostatical principle comes through the revelation of the Tri-Hypostatic God, as the prototype of being in one essence and a plurality of hypostases. However, as the following section will demonstrate, such a definition of the hypostasis, exclusively by reference to its nature, does not exhaust Archim. Sophrony's understanding of the Christian revelation concerning the Divine Being and, implicitly, concerning hypostaticity. A third different moment of existence, that of energy, is therefore introduced into Archim. Sophrony's history of hypostaticity, so that the 'absolute identity and also absolute difference' of Persons within the Divine *Sobor* can become possible.

### **3. Hypostasis versus energy and how this rapport is revealed through Christ**

In consequence, Archim. Sophrony's history of the revelation of Personhood can also be read as a sophianic history of the revelation of the Divine Energies to man. This process of revelation pre-dates Christ's incarnation and even includes the 'I AM' Name of God; thus:

The revelation 'I AM THAT I AM' shows the hypostatical dimension in the Divinity to be of fundamental significance. The principle of the *Person* in God is not an abstract conception but essential reality possessing its own nature and energy of life.<sup>178</sup>

Significantly, Archim. Sophrony mentions that of these two, nature and energy, 'the essence is not of primary or even pre-eminent importance in defining Persons-Hypostases in their reciprocal relations.'<sup>179</sup> The central role in defining what a Person is belongs to the moment of energy, a statement which demonstrates Archim. Sophrony's reception of Fr Sergii Bulgakov's sophiological perspective on hypostaticity. This is no accidental statement; his theology abounds in attempts to define various aspects of theology by means of referring to the third mode of existence. Archim. Sophrony was aware of this source of his theology and there are some rare cases when he openly refers to Fr Sergii Bulgakov's work; thus, in relation with what has just been said regarding 'Persons-Hypostases in their reciprocal relations', he writes the following short paragraph, which

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<sup>178</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 193.

<sup>179</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 193.

could be read as a personal comparative view on Lossky's focus on the pre-eminence of essence in defining hypostaticity, and Fr Sergii Bulgakov's turn away from essence towards energy:

Often our thinking underlines the unity of Essence: God-The Trinity is understood as one absolute Objectiveness in three Absolute Subjects. Transferring the accent from essence to hypostasis, which is closer to the revelation of 'I AM', leads to the idea that the Absolute Subject contains in Itself: *I, you, he, we*. This theory was developed especially in the work of proto-presbyter professor Sergii Bulgakov.<sup>180</sup>

Fr Sergii's 'tendency to emphasize the personal principle, as fundamental in Divine Being'<sup>181</sup> is in full accord with Archim. Sophrony's central idea that 'the hypostatic dimension in the Divinity [is] of fundamental significance'<sup>182</sup>, to the point that he can claim that: 'the Hypostasis-*Person* is the inmost principle of Absolute Being – its first and last dimension'<sup>183</sup>.

To conclude, it becomes obvious that, after he used the comparison between Christian mono-theism and what he defines as Jewish and Islamic heno-theism to single out the role held by essence in defining hypostaticity, Archim. Sophrony adds another layer to his definition of Person, by turning the discussion towards the third 'pole' of existence, that of the energy. In what follows, we shall see that, without a perfect appropriation or actualisation of this mode of existence, personhood becomes an impossibility. Archim. Sophrony uses two examples to clarify his thinking regarding the importance of energy for the Christian revelation of personhood. First, he seems to introduce another original distinction between hypostasis, in its Chalcedonian meaning, and person, in its twentieth century understanding. Then, he turns to a comparison between the ontological state-of-being of God and that of fallen humanity, which he uses to underline the different rapports which there are between God and His energy, and man and his energy. Overall, the central role played by the moment of energy in what started simply as a re-visiting of the Chalcedonian meaning of hypostasis, is the effect of Archim. Sophrony's sophiological heritage.

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<sup>180</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 28.

<sup>181</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 28.

<sup>182</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 193.

<sup>183</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 191.

## Archim Sophrony: between Chalcedonian hypostaticity and Modern personhood

Archim. Sophrony's sophianic interpretation of what it means to be a hypostasis, ultimately introduces a distinction between the Chalcedonian meaning of hypostasis and his understanding of Person<sup>184</sup>, based on the quality of the intra-essential relations between hypostases, or, in other words, on the existence of energies, most frequently referred to as Love. Thus, he writes:

The fundamental content of this life [Divine Life, energy] is love: God is love (I John 4:8). The personal being realises himself through loving contact with another person or persons.<sup>185</sup>

The underlying idea is that a nature can have a multitude of hypostases which, nevertheless, are not ontologically *united*, in the sense that they are not dynamically equal with each other and their *sobor*. This can happen, Archim. Sophrony argues, because nature itself does not *unite*, it does not generate by itself the mutual perichoretic relations between Persons which make it possible for each of them to live all the others as the content of its life. What unites is the moment of energy, whose most profound manifestation is love; without it, there can be no perichoretic unity, and without unity there can be no ontological one-ness.

The implication of this distinction is that, to some extent, Archim. Sophrony challenges the validity of the classical understanding of hypostasis when applied to the Divine and the human Beings. At Chalcedon, a hypostasis was defined exclusively by means of reference to its nature, with no mention of energy, which renders the Chalcedonian hypostaticity valid in relation to inanimate beings, but invalid – or, at least, incomplete – in relation to living beings, such as God and man. The third mode of existence only became a central theological concept after St Gregory Palamas' distinction between energy and essence. Even so, St Gregory made no effort to apply his theology to the Chalcedonian meaning of hypostasis; we have already seen that the aim to co-relate the two

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<sup>184</sup> The distinction is merely methodological and used only here, to demonstrate the importance of energy in the process of defining hypostaticity; in practice, Archim. Sophrony always uses the two terms – hypostasis and person – as perfectly synonymous concepts.

<sup>185</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 194.

was set out as a necessary step for Christian theology only at the beginning of the twentieth century, by Fr Sergii Bulgakov, and was taken up by the next generation of Orthodox theologians.

The co-relation between Chalcedon and St Gregory Palamas concerns all aspects of theology; however, as is always the case with Archim. Sophrony, his main focus remains Christology<sup>186</sup>, from which he extends his conclusions on to the human level, based on his maximalist interpretations of the doctrine of creation in the Divine image. After having looked at the methodological distinction he introduces between hypostasis and Person in order to demonstrate the central role of energy in defining hypostaticity, let us see in the following section how this reflects on Archim. Sophrony's theology.

### **Man: a being in-the-making**

The standard theological meaning of hypostasis was imposed by the Chalcedonian formula of 'three Hypostases in one Ousia' as the dogmatic description of the Christian God. Divine Energies (or actions) were not then part of the theological discussion, so there is no mention regarding the subject. However, even after St Gregory Palamas' distinction between energy and nature, there is no direct need to clarify further the meaning of hypostaticity in relation to the Divine Being, because all three Divine Persons perfectly actualize their nature and fully experience their Divine Life; in the Divine Being there is, according to St Gregory's theology, a perfect identity and co-relation between essence and energy.

In comparison, things differ when we look at the modern understanding of hypostasis. Because twentieth-century theologians no longer use the concept in relation to the Divine Being, but try instead to apply it to humanity, there appears the need to distinguish between the various 'hypostases' according to their 'energetic quality'. Unlike the Divine Persons, human beings actualize their nature only in part, and to various degrees one from the other. For that reason, Archim. Sophrony understands human hypostaticity, at least in its earthly form, more as a process of evolution, than as an ontological state of being, as with the Divine Being.

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<sup>186</sup> As is also the case with Fr Sergii Bulgakov - see *The Lamb of God*.

Man, in his being, is preceded by a different Being, which to man is revealed as an unavoidable ‘Fact’, a ‘Given’, a certain ‘Principle’, which, from the outside, as it were, limits man’s freedom to *self-determination*. Man, in his development, discovers the characteristics of his own nature, thus going through a certain process – an evolution, which is absolutely inexistent in the Divine Being.<sup>187</sup>

The need to distinguish between ousia and energy gains much more importance at the human level than within the Divine Being, because the ontological state of fallen humanity leads to a difference, even if only temporary, between human nature and its corresponding energy. Thus, depending on the quality of the rapport between a human hypostasis’ nature and energy, some human hypostases seem ‘more hypostatical’ than others, to the extent that Archim Sophrony can differentiate between proper human hypostases and ‘non-universal hypostases, the so-called “human individuals” (who) will not attain perfect universal unity in their rapport with their neighbours and will remain only partially united, in the limits of their ability.’<sup>188</sup>

It should be emphasized that this paradoxical difference no longer refers to the Chalcedonian rapport between hypostases and their nature; all human hypostases belong to and share the same common nature and, since nature cannot be fragmented, they all are hypostases according to the traditional meaning of the concept. If human nature could be fragmented, the resulting ‘ousia’ would be something completely different from human nature. Similarly, any hypostasis sharing in a fragment of human nature (assuming this would be possible) would simply not be human.

Thus, the difference ‘in quality’ between the various human hypostases cannot be justified by means of their relationship with their proper essence. Instead, the modern usage of the concept makes it possible to locate this difference in the dynamic quality of this relationship, which is expressed through the manner in which they actualize their nature. Consequently, Archim. Sophrony founds his distinction between the hypostatic quality of various human beings on their appropriation of energy, which leads to the above-mentioned paradoxical conclusion that some human beings are ‘more hypostatic’ than others.

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<sup>187</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 58.

<sup>188</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 88.

This original difference in quality between hypostases created the need for original terminology. First, twentieth-century theologians were faced with the need to provide a new word describing those hypostases (in the Chalcedonian sense) which do not fully actualize their nature and, in consequence, are no longer proper hypostases according to the modern meaning of the concept. This terminological vacuum was filled by the introduction in the field of theology of the word *individual*, which was borrowed from French existentialism, most probably by Fr Sergii Bulgakov.

Secondly, there was also a need to explain this difference dogmatically between hypostases and individuals, which leads to a terminology of fracture, applied either to human ousia or its energy. Some theologians, Fr Sofrony included, who were not systematically consistent with their terminology, applied this terminology of fracture at the level of ousia, so that we read about how human nature is ‘broken’ into pieces. For instance, while he develops his idea that Christ’s commandments are not merely moral rules, but have ontological value<sup>189</sup>, Archim. Sophrony writes that:

The second commandment – ‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’, makes whole again the ‘consubstantial’ human nature, broken by sin, to the effect that the complete human being (existence) becomes the property of each human hypostasis.<sup>190</sup>

As it becomes obvious from the larger framework of Archim. Sophrony’s theology, this misuse of the idea of ontological fracture is merely a terminological deficit. In fact, following Fr Sergii Bulgakov, the fracture is nothing but a methodological device to express the distinction between the unity of the Divine Life as hypostatized by the Divine Persons, and its ‘split’ into a variety of manifestations (graces) when hypostatized by human beings. As such, Archim. Sophrony’s terminology of fracture is envisaged not in relation to human ousia, but at the level of energy, in the sense that human beings share more or less in *the life* proper to their ousia: what is truly made ‘whole again’ is ‘human being (existence)’, not human essence. From another perspective, though,

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<sup>189</sup> See, also: George Mantzarides, ‘Les commandements de Dieu en tant qu’energies divines’, *Buisson Ardent* 4 (1998), pp 53-62.

<sup>190</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 60. Also, in his description of the ontological role of obedience: ‘Cutting our own will before our brother, we overcome that ‘fragmentation’ which was brought through Adam’s fall into our nature, which was one (whole) in the beginning.’ – *Rozhdenie*, pp. 137-38.

this is not to say that the energy of life is itself fractured, but that human beings actualize this life only in part during their earthly life.

This is an essential point, which will be developed further. The ‘fragmentation’ which corresponds to the personal degree of hypostatization only affects the existence *in time* of a human being; the eschatological (perfect, saved) Person, that which Archim. Sophrony calls hypostasis, perfectly shares in this Life, without any fragmentation or partiality. Rather than expressing an ontological fragmentation of energy, this terminology of fracture refers to a process of human self-awareness, of growth into an ontological state which already subsists, but is not fully actualised. We find the same idea in Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s writings on the rapport between Divine Sophia and Creaturely Sophia; fragmentation, in his case, is more a question of diversity and multiplicity, as opposed to the absolute unity and one-ness of the Divine Sophia.<sup>191</sup>

By comparison, Archim. Sophrony’s thoughts on the subject are more inconsistent and unclear. Although his writings provide us with clear indications that he shares Fr Sergii’s theological vision, he avoids Fr Sergii’s clarity on the subject and prefers to remain ambiguous, because the ultimate effect of these statements can only be that all humanity is already saved, and all that remains is for each human hypostasis to become aware of their salvation. Although, at times, he clearly writes that ‘neither diminishing, nor any sort of alterability have any place in the energy of unshakeable Life’<sup>192</sup>, Archim. Sophrony’s notes regarding the ontological nature of the fragmentation of energy are most frequently derivative; as such, his general vision can only be induced from the larger context of his theology. For instance, we have seen Archim. Sophrony’s idea that ‘man, in his development, discovers the characteristics of his own nature, thus going through a certain process –

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<sup>191</sup> See, for instance, his discussion on the Patristic theology of sophianicity of the world, in *Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 54-6. On the rapport between Divine and Creaturely Sophias, he writes, for example, that ‘the multi-thematic character character of being, which is contained in the divine world of the integrally wise multi-unity, is decomposed here into a multiplicity of becomings. Succession in time and connectedness in space are included here. A peculiar new life arises, a new self-creativity of the creaturely Sophia by the powers of the Divine Sophia.’ - p. 55.

<sup>192</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 100.

an evolution'<sup>193</sup>, which points to a process of self-discovery, similar to that found in Fr Sergii's writings.

At other times, he seems to suggest that experience of energies, as the Divine Life, is given at some moment in human earthly existence, in the sense of something new being added to our humanity; however, this is contradicted by his own theology of time, according to which, 'chronologically', the event of divinization 'by its nature appertains to meta-history, since it concerns our entry into eternity already actualized.'<sup>194</sup> However we solve this contradiction, Archim. Sophrony is quick to mention that the experience of the Divine Life is not permanent while still alive; this leaves him with the need to find a way to express how the fullness of grace is given to man, then somehow 'hidden' from him or again made inaccessible to him.<sup>195</sup> His solution is yet again that of Fr Sergii Bulgakov, namely that, after having been given experience of the Divine Energies, these are already ontologically united with human nature, and man has to undergo a process of self-awareness. For instance, he writes that:

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<sup>193</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 58. A similar conclusion can be derived from the direct relationship Archim. Sophrony sees between knowledge and existential experience: *to know God is to live God*. However, although God is always absolute in His revelations to men (that is, His Divinity, which is imparted to man, is never 'fragmented' or 'broken'), man's reception of these Divine Revelations is always incomplete; implicitly, this incomplete, fragmented knowledge reflects a similarly incomplete experience of the complete and un-fragmented Divine Energy: 'In actual fact, in His every manifestation to man God remains one and the same; but we do not apprehend Him as we should; we do not include Him in His Absoluteness in the confines of the earth. Yet we "see" Him, be it only "through a glass, darkly" (I Cor. 13:12). And this "glass" is not always equally "dark", depending on the extent to which we keep the commandments of Christ, in which God's revelation of Himself is given to us.' – *We Shall See Him*, p. 158.

<sup>194</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 214.

<sup>195</sup> Archim. Sophrony says that there are two reasons why this happens: first, because earthly men cannot survive a prolonged experience of Divine Energies; secondly, for a Divine 'pedagogical' purpose: 'only alternating influxes of grace and then abandonment will teach him how to tell the difference between Divine action and his own efforts.' – *St Silouan the Athonite*, p. 173.

At some point, the Light shows infinity to our spirit but then inevitably recedes. True, somewhere in the depths of our hypostatic being this Light, which appeared in a flash but is eternal by nature, lingers, seen ‘through a glass, darkly’ (I Cor. 13:12).<sup>196</sup>

In a different place, he expresses this paradoxical departure of energies by writing that, after ‘the tangible form of the pre-eternal God in the greatness of His love wounds our soul’<sup>197</sup>, ‘grace departs, at any rate in its “tangible” strength’. In other words, grace does not *really* depart, it remains united with human nature, but this ontological state is hidden from man, is made ‘untangible’ to his senses.

Regardless of how he tries to relate to it, the idea of fragmentation of energy is ultimately not acceptable to Archim. Sophrony, although he frequently refers to it<sup>198</sup>. Both he and Fr Sergii Bulgakov understand Divine Energies in the same manner, as Divinity Itself in Its immanent mode of existence; as a result, It cannot be ontologically ‘broken’, just as one cannot ‘break’ Divine nature into parts or fragments. Rather, there can be envisaged a difference in the way Divine Life makes itself manifest: unitary, in the Divine Being (corresponding to Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s description of the Divine Sophia), and in multiplicity, yet without ontological fragmentation, at the level of the human being (corresponding to Fr Sergii’s Creaturely Sophia).

Implicitly, the apparent fragmentation of energy, corresponding to a lifetime process of self-awareness and hypostatic growth, affects all human beings exclusively during their earthly life.

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<sup>196</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 61.

<sup>197</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 89.

<sup>198</sup> I would also suggest that the obvious tension in Archim. Sophrony’s treatment of this subject could also be explained, at least partially, through his lack of a unitary approach to theology as a whole. As we have said in our introductory chapter, Archim. Sophrony is a rare case of an ascetic trying to give a written theological form to his personal experience. At the same time, however, he is the spiritual leader of a monastic community, and, as a result, his theology is affected at times, by the unfortunate mix of his eschatological, purely ontological vision, and his spiritual, ascetical duties to his earthly community. In other words, it becomes apparent that Archim. Sophrony switches between two registers and tries to express in the ‘created language’ of his earthy brothers his eschatological vision of a perfect, eternal, even uncreated, anthropology.

Archim. Sophrony repeatedly argues that this process of self-discovery also includes the prototypical Son of Man, Christ Himself, Whose ‘human nature ... although en-hypostatized by the second Person of the Holy Trinity, was not spared the necessity of a process of becoming, of actualisation. As long as all things had not *finished* (John 19:30), Christ-Man lived in a state of “growth” (cf. Luke 4:1-13; Heb. 2:18) and even agony (Luke 22:44).’<sup>199</sup> Strictly speaking, as long as they live their earthly existence, no human being is properly hypostatic; perfect hypostaticity is only possible after death, and this is valid in relation to Christ, as well:

the Lord rose from the dead and His risen body acquired the attributes of the spirit. This means that so long as we are invested with a body not transfigured by resurrection we cannot avoid painful faltering in our following after Christ.<sup>200</sup>

After the Resurrection, however, Christ’s energy becomes His absolute property as a human hypostasis, too. One of Archim. Sophrony’s favourite ways of arguing for this statement is to start from an interpretation of Christ’s Ascension<sup>201</sup>, and then generalize its consequences to the extent of the entire human race. Thus, he writes that:

We were given a task: to become entirely alike to the Only-begotten Son of God. After the fulfillment of His earthly mission, He, from now, also as a human being, sat at the right side

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<sup>199</sup> *Rozhdenie*, pp. 70-71. This state of growth reflects the fact that ‘in Him, there was a certain ‘split’, as the result of the non-commensurability of the two essences, the Divine and the human. After the Ascension, however, this non-commensurability disappears, and *Jesus Christ, the Man*, becomes like God, “sitting at the right hand-side of the Father”, now also according to the human essence.’

<sup>200</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 61.

<sup>201</sup> This is also one of Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s most frequent New Testament references, which he uses precisely in the same way as Archim. Sophrony.

of the Father; in other words, He became like Him – the Father, through the content of the Life without end.<sup>202</sup>

Living the same Divine Life does not merge the two essences into one, as we have already seen; however, this common Life implies the commensurability of the two essences, in the sense that human essence can contain in itself the fullness of the Life proper to the Divine essence.

In conclusion of this section, we have seen that Archim. Sophrony follows the theological line set out by Fr Sergii Bulgakov, and that his Christology, although not in disagreement with Patristic dogmas, nevertheless outgrows them. We have also demonstrated that the primary source of this dogmatic development is Archim. Sophrony's theology of co-relation between the Chalcedonian meaning of hypostasis with St Gregory Palamas' distinction between energy and essence, in the larger context of twentieth-century usage of the concept of hypostasis in relation to human nature. Finally, we have shown that the ultimate result of this process of dogmatic co-relation is Archim. Sophrony's idea that human hypostases are dynamically *equal* with Christ's Divine-Human Hypostasis and among themselves, in virtue of their common moment of energies.

A further implication of the same process of co-relation between Chalcedon and Palamite theology is the ontological *identity* between the humanity and the Divine being, based on the nature of the Divine Life which they have in common. However, this inter-essential relationship will be the focus of Chapter Four. For the time being, let us return to the first effect, the intra-essential rapport between human hypostases and the church, and examine its ecclesiological implications.

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<sup>202</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 29. And, further: 'Jesus Christ, as Man, after His Ascension sat at the right side of the Father; in other words, he became like Him, without changing the created human nature, which He took upon Himself, into uncreated Divinity ... The Lord, also as Man, truly "crossed the threshold" (cf. Heb. 6:19), and lives without change the fulness of Divine Being: both as the Without-beginning Son, Only begotten according to Divinity; and as Human, entirely deified, yet without changing the human essence into the essence of the First-Being of God'; *Rozhdenie*, pp. 30-31.

#### IV. Ecclesiological implications

The dynamic identity between Christ and all human hypostases reflects the characteristic relationship between Persons, and that between Persons and their *Sobor*, which is always a relationship of love, self-emptying and appropriation of the other Persons as the content of one's being. This manner of inter-relating is not specifically human, but a reflection of the type of inter-relations which exist within the Holy Trinity. Thus, in Christ, the entire Trinity is contained, and that is also true in relation with the Father and the Holy Spirit; in love, the Divine Persons contain each other, They are the content of their own life, and are defined precisely by means of Their inter-relation.

The Hypostasis in the divine Being we do not think of as static, self-contained principle. This might be possible in the perspective of the henotheism of Islam, and even within the bounds of the Old Testament, but can in no way apply to the Trinity, as revealed to us, the Triune totally dynamic Being. We have learned to see these dynamics in the love that is the most profound moment in the *fact* of eternal Self-determination of the Persons of the Holy Trinity.<sup>203</sup>

Archim. Sophrony's whole discussion regarding the inter-relations of the Divine Persons and its implications at the human level of existence are deeply indebted to Fr Sergii Bulgakov's development of the theme. We have already seen that Archim. Sophrony himself acknowledges this inheritance when he defines hypostaticity through the idea that 'the Absolute Subject contains in Itself: *I, you, he, we*', a theory which 'was developed especially in the work of proto-presbyter professor Sergii Bulgakov.'<sup>204</sup>

Christ's living the fullness of Divinity is manifested in a two-fold manner: on the one hand, it implies Christ's dynamic 'equality' with the Holy Trinity; on the other hand, because of this equality, Christ 'contains' in his Hypostasis the other Two Divine Persons. This, of course, can also be said about the Father and the Holy Spirit, as the Divine Hypostases are not subject to the limitations imposed by created logic:

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<sup>203</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 205.

<sup>204</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 28.

The dogma concerning the Holy Trinity ... reveals to us that each Hypostasis is perfect God, as Each of Them contains in itself the complete fullness of Divine Being, subjects it in an absolute manner, and, as consequence, is ‘dynamically’ equal to the Triunity. *Who saw me, saw my Father* (John 14:9) – by these words, Christ advises us to understand that among Hypostases there exists an absolute identity, which nevertheless does not exclude the unrepeatable, irreducible character of Each of Them.<sup>205</sup>

Again following Fr Sergii<sup>206</sup>, Archim. Sophrony argues that human hypostaticity, as well, combines such ontological completeness with the preservation of personal distinctiveness: while the hypostaticity remains ‘untransferable’, it nevertheless ‘blissfully contains in itself all heaven and earth’<sup>207</sup>. Thus, ‘mankind is called upon to become One Man after the likeness of the Oneness of the Trinity’; reflecting what has just been said regarding the Holy Trinity, human ‘multi-hypostatic unity’ also implies that the Person ‘really does live all humanity as one life, one nature in a plurality of persons’<sup>208</sup>:

Man-Hypostasis, according to the image and likeness of Christ-Man (1 Tim. 2:5), in his complete, final development, appears as the bearer of all fullness of Being, both Divine and created, as god-man. In the Holy Trinity each Hypostasis bears in Itself the complete absolute fullness of the Other Two, without annulling Them, without reducing Them only to the ‘content’ of Its life, but also Itself entering entirely Their Being, thus strengthening Their hypostaticity. The multi-hypostatic being of Man is the same: each person is called to bear in itself the being of *the-whole-humanity*, in no way annulling the other persons, but entering their lives as its content, and thus, strengthening their personhood. This is how the one being is built, as expressed in the dogma of One Essence in Three Hypostases. Mankind must

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<sup>205</sup> *Rozhdenie*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>206</sup> See, for instance: ‘The whole and a particular variant, the genus and an individual, exist with one existence, are inwardly one. ... each human individual, being a generic being, is at the same time personal and *all-human*.’ – *Bride of the Lamb*, p. 110.

<sup>207</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 199.

<sup>208</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 216.

become one essence in a multitude of hypostases: here we have the creative idea of God, Who made Man in His image and likeness.<sup>209</sup>

The fundamental idea is that the multiplicity of hypostases should not be understood in the sense of separate entities, elements in a series<sup>210</sup>, but rather in the antinomic language of the church dogmatics: multi-unity, without separation, without confusion etc. Thus, Archim. Sophrony can write that ‘Hypostases, each being an infinitely great being, unique in its hypostaticity, do not follow arithmetical rules:  $1+1+1=3$ .’<sup>211</sup>

It is essential to understand that hypostatization within a human Person of the whole Church is a different theme from the subject of Church *sobornicity*, which refers to the different idea of the multiplicity of the hypostases which make up the Church. This is not a discussion of the church as the image of the Holy Trinity, but one focused on the idea that the Church is hypostatized by each of its members, reflecting the manner in which Each Divine Person contains within Himself the other two Divine Persons. The Hypostasis, therefore, becomes both the bearer of the common moment of energies (the dynamic aspect), and the ‘centre’ of the inter-*soborny* relations between all other hypostases of the same nature (the aspect which corresponds to the moment of essence); Archim. Sophrony often refers to this double manifestation of the hypostasis in a language of relationships, love and absence of hypostatic loneliness:

Another paradox – the Person in God we live is the bearer of absolute fullness of Being; and at the same time the Person does not exist alone ... The Holy Trinity, God of perfect love, is precisely thus. Perfect love does not live locked in itself but in the other Person, in

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<sup>209</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 97.

<sup>210</sup> Compare with Fr Sergii’s idea that ‘humanity, like each individual human being, must not be understood as a series of individual units, attached one to the other by virtue of a kind of similarity (that would be heretical homoiousianism instead of orthodox homoousianism). It must be understood only as a whole: the entire natural Adam lives in every human being.’ *Bride of the Lamb*, p. 110.

<sup>211</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 65.

other Persons. The whole conjunction of Being obtains as the imprescriptible possession of each of the Three Hypostases.<sup>212</sup>

From this perspective, each human being contains the All-Adam, that is the Church in her *sobornicity*<sup>213</sup>. Of course, as we have seen, the distinction between *sobornicity* and sophiology can only be operated in the abstract, for its methodological usefulness: ontologically, living the whole Church and containing her whole hypostasis are necessarily interconnected realities. In other words, the distinction we have seen in the first chapter between the *soborny* All-Adam and the sophiological Whole-Adam expresses a difference in their *mode* of being, not one of ontological substance.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 230. This *hypostatical paradox* of ‘multiplicity in oneness’ is looked at in comparison with the different *soborny paradox* of ‘one in multiplicity’ which will be the subject of our next chapter: ‘As one God He is also the Trinity of Persons. In his final actualization man, too, must become One Man in a plurality of hypostases’ – *We Shall See Him*, p. 230.

<sup>213</sup> As Fr Sergii Bulgakov writes: ‘Humanity is not only hypostatic multiplicity but also hypostatic multi-unity; it is the integral Adam. Adam is not only a certain human person but also the human multi-unity, the all-person, in the image of the one but trihypostatic God. Adam, like every human person in Adam, exists not only in and for Himself but also together with others, as a member of a multihypostatic all-unity.’ *Bride of the Lamb*, p. 110.

<sup>214</sup> Again, Archim. Sophrony’s ideas should be seen in the wider, sophiological context of Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s theology. Thus, for instance, the above-mentioned distinction between All-Adam and the Whole-Adam have a clear equivalent in Fr Sergii’s distinction between the *sobornicity* and sophiology of the Holy Trinity: ‘One and the same Sophia is possessed in a different way by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and this threefold “otherness” is reflected in our definition of Sophia. We should learn to think of the Divine Sophia as at the same time three-fold and one. The divine tri-unity is mirrored in her with all its characteristics. There is, however, a difference to be observed in logical emphasis when interpreting on the one hand the *tri-unity* of the *three* hypostases, and on the other the *tri-unity* of the single Divine Sophia. In the first case we are contemplating the personal hypostases of the Holy Trinity, which differ from one another – *three* which are one; in the second case, there is only the one substance, whose being is determined in a threefold manner. The tri-unity of the hypostases is reflected in the threefold modality of the one Ousia-Sophia of the Godhead.’ – *Sophia, the Wisdom of God*, pp. 37-8.

But this poses a new difficulty, to which we shall now turn. Once again, the historical reality of human ontology does not match the eschatological perfect ontology of the Holy Trinity, and the perfect correspondence between *sobornicity* and sophianicity we see in the Holy Trinity is not reflected at the human level of existence. That is to say that the All-Adam is not dynamically equal with the Whole-Adam, because of a difference of ontology. While the moment of energy belongs to Divine ontology and, as such, is characterized by the pre-eternal perfection of Divine realities, the moment of *sobornicity* corresponds to human nature and, as such, belongs to created ontology; by consequence, while the sophianic aspect of the Church is pre-eternally perfect, her *soborny* aspect is only actualised in time, with each newly born human being, from generation to generation.<sup>215</sup> For this reason, the Church is not yet realized, at least not in her *sobornicity*, so that she still awaits the actualization of her potentiality. Archim. Sophrony expresses this problematic inter-dependency between the sophianic one-ness and the *soborny* multi-hypostaticity of the Church through a discussion of the unity of the Church; without the Christ-like hypostatization by each human person of the All Adam, the Church's unity and oneness is impossible:

Reasonable man has to become perfect after the image of the Triune Divinity. This is the meaning, the purpose and the task of Christ's Church. 'That they all be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us...' (John 17:21). It is clear that every member of the Church must come to fullness of likeness to Christ, even to identity.

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<sup>215</sup> The same vision of an eternal Church awaiting its hypostatization by all human persons is also present in Fr Sergii Bulgakov. See, for instance: 'God knows and has His creation by a single all-embracing act, which for creatures is disclosed only in temporal succession. In the sense, one must accept with necessity that the creative act by which God establishes being contains *all* humanity, the integral Adam in the present, past, and future: integral humanity supratemporally *is* in God and for God. Therefore, its appearance in time is possible only in individual persons and generations ... *all* of humanity, the integral Adam, exists in and for God; but for itself and for creation in general, this all-humanity is actualized in time.' *Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 118-19. Fr Sergii uses the difference between the two accounts of creation to support this: the first account 'speaks of the creation of man in general, or of the all-man', and only in the second account of creation 'after the fall, does the particular man Adam appear, and then Eve' – *Bride of the Lamb*, p. 110.

Otherwise, there will be no unity of the Church in the image of the oneness of the Holy Trinity.<sup>216</sup>

Saying that the Church is not yet actualised is not saying that the Church does not yet exist; the Church does exist, as she is eternally actualised in the perfect Human Hypostasis of Christ. Paradoxically, although she still awaits her personal actualization by all the other human hypostases *in time*, she nevertheless exists *outside time*, in and through Christ. Archim. Sophrony uses two main arguments for this statement: first, he refers to the theological argument of the unchangeable character of Christ's eternal Hypostasis; secondly, he uses the ascetical experience of the Divine grace to argue for the co-existence of two layers of existence: temporality and eternity.

The first argument can be reduced to the idea that Christ, as one of the Divine Persons, is eternally the same; no change can be introduced in His Being. This, corroborated with Archim. Sophrony's claim that the God Who was revealed to us through the Incarnation is identical with God-in-Himself, implies that, in Christ, outside the categories of time and space, the All-Adam eternally exists in God-like perfect manner.<sup>217</sup> Consequently, in Christ's eternal hypostatization of the Church, all human hypostases find their beginning, or, rather, they are revealed as 'without beginning'. Their call to fulfil their own hypostatization, the reality of which transcends the earthly categories of space and time<sup>218</sup>, pre-dates the creation in the time of the world<sup>219</sup>. This is directly connected with Archim. Sophrony's theme of 'the primary creative idea of God concerning Man'<sup>220</sup>:

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<sup>216</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 108.

<sup>217</sup> 'The likeness of our nature to God generates a thirst in us ... to aspire to Divine perfection. This perfection is not in ourselves but in the Father, the Source of all that exists.' – *We Shall See Him*, p. 112.

<sup>218</sup> Christ, 'even as Man, He became supra-cosmic, transcending this world. And everyone who believes in Him ... also becomes supra-cosmic like Christ.' – *We Shall See Him*, p. 74. Also: 'in pure prayer man is outside all earthly categories ... He is 'a new creature' in Jesus Christ' – *We Shall See Him*, p. 91.

<sup>219</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 24.

<sup>220</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 44.

It is often wiser to think on the Father's mighty, pre-eternal design for us. To know that even before the foundation of the world we were chosen to be perfect (cf. Matt. 5:48; Eph. 2:10 and 1:4-5) is vital if we are to live as we should. To minimise God's initial idea for us is not just an error but a really black sin.<sup>221</sup>

This perfect human prototype can only be identified as the eternal hypostatization of the All-Adam in Christ. It must be pointed out, however, that the existence 'without beginning' of the Church in Christ is not the same as the idea of pre-existence. Archim. Sophrony understands 'beginning' as a quality, in the sense of ontological source, not in a chronological sense. Thus, 'beginninglessness' refers not to time, to something of the created essence, but to an ontological beginning in that which is Divine, the uncreated Divine Life in which the created essence will also partake:

When the uncreated Light finds a dwelling-place in us life without beginning is imparted to us. By virtue of this, those who are saved become 'without beginning' (not in essence but by grace).<sup>222</sup>

Thus, the All-Adam, all human beings, take their ontological beginning from Christ's Hypostasis, 'Who IS, the foundation of all that exists, the First and the Last'<sup>223</sup>, Which exists pre-eternally

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<sup>221</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 40.

<sup>222</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p 45.

<sup>223</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 107.

and Tidy indejn pre-eternally Hypostatizes the Church.<sup>224</sup> This pre-eternal All-Adam, already hypostatized by Christ, is the ontological ‘place’ of all human hypostases, the Kingdom of God. In conclusion, the Kingdom of God, which Archim. Sophrony defines as ‘the ontological union of all who are saved’<sup>225</sup>, already exists in God and is ‘present everywhere’:

The Kingdom is present everywhere but entrance into it depends wholly on God, for it is not something that exists ‘objectively’ but is He Himself, Who has the power to take us to Himself or – which is the same thing – come to abide in us with an eternal abiding. Then we are in Him, and He is in us; and His Life becomes our imprescriptible life.<sup>226</sup>

Archim. Sophrony’s second argument for the pre-existence outside time of the All-Adam is the living experience of the Divine Light, which constitutes an ‘anticipation of the Kingdom’<sup>227</sup> by the deified ascetic. Fundamentally, this means that when the human being is given experience of the Uncreated Light, he enters Divine ontology, and transcends the attributes of created time and space.

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<sup>224</sup> The idea that man is ‘without beginning’, as well as the understanding of his ‘begininglessness’ as an ontological quality, founded in God’s Own Being, rather than the starting point of a chronological series, is found in Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s work as well. In *Bride of the Lamb* he dedicates an entire subchapter to the subject of ‘The Eternity of Creation and the Temporality of Its Being’ (*Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 56-79), which develops all the ideas we find in Archim. Sophrony’s understanding of time. For instance, concerning the world’s ontological (not chronological) beginning in God’s Being, he writes: ‘The entire positive force of the creaturely world’s being is divine, is Sophia in her creaturely mode, for, in itself, ‘nothing’ has no force of being. The being of the creaturely world, its origination, is, first of all, an act in God Himself, His Self-determination, resulting in the origination of creaturely being, of the world. As such an *ontological prius*, the act of creation in God, as divine self-determination, precedes creation itself, which is, first of all, the imparting of the image of the Divine Sophia to the creaturely Sophia. This creation in God evidently occurs in God’s own eternity. And this eternal, supratemporal, and extra-temporal act of creation in Sophia lies at the basis of the creation of the world in the strict sense, that is, in the sense of being as temporal becoming.’ – *Bride of the Lamb*, p. 62.

<sup>225</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 120.

<sup>226</sup> *We Shall See Him*, pp. 131-32.

<sup>227</sup> See the section of this theme, included in *Rozhdenie*, pp. 100-01.

This particular manifestation of the hypostatical principle, namely the reception within man's hypostasis of the Divine Life is perhaps the most celebrated aspect of Archim. Sophrony's theology. The 'anticipation of the Kingdom' should also be read in direct connection with Archim. Sophrony's interpretation of the Lord's Prayer<sup>228</sup>.

We have seen, thus, how Archim. Sophrony uses these two arguments – the unchangeable character of Christ's pre-eternal hypostatization of the All-Adam, and the living experience of the Kingdom of God as 'the ontological union of all who are saved' – to support the idea that the All-Adam is eternally pre-hypostatized by the Second Person of the Holy Trinity; consequently, this means that, in Christ (that is, in Divine ontology, beyond the chronological existence of the world) the *soborny* aspect of the Church matches the perfection of her Divine, sophiological aspect.

However, this ontological 'match' has so far only been realized in Christ's Divine-Human Hypostasis. By comparison, all other human hypostases are subjected to a process of growth and evolution, reflecting their actualisation of the hypostatical principle. As we have seen, Archim. Sophrony writes that even Christ's humanity was not spared of this growth into its proper ontology until after the Resurrection. This lack of correspondence between ecclesiological *sobornicity* and ecclesiological sophianicity is solved through what could be called Archim. Sophrony's 'dynamics of love', to which we shall now briefly turn.

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<sup>228</sup> Archim. Sophrony defines the Kingdom which is to come as 'the ontological union of all who are saved' (*We Shall See Him*, p. 120) while, 'in invoking our Father by the word "our" we think of all mankind and implore grace for all men.' – *We Shall See Him*, p. 113. Thus, when the living experience of the Kingdom is imparted to the deified man, he has existential experience of this Kingdom which is 'the ontological union' of the saved *Sobornost* (either as a part of humanity, or as the whole of mankind), before the real actualisation of this *Sobornost* (some of whose members are still to be born).

Love is one of the main attributes (or manifestations) of the Divine Life<sup>229</sup>, alongside Light, Freedom and Humility (Self-emptying or Kenosis). Its main quality, Archim. Sophrony argues, is that it has the power to reunite the ‘broken’ human nature ontologically, and consequently to facilitate living the fullness of the Divine Life and the hypostatisation by each human being of the All-Adam.

Love transposes the person’s being in the person of the beloved, thus appropriating for itself the life of the beloved, which shows that *the person* – I, can be entered through love.<sup>230</sup>

The importance of Love for the hypostatical growth of human beings is revealed by the role Love has in the Divine ontology of the Holy Trinity. While in the Holy Trinity, this process of mutual self-emptying in Love is perfect in its manifestation, leading to a perfect hypostatisation of the Divine *Sobor* by each of its Persons, things differ for the Created Being. The Divine mutual inter-hypostatisation of the Holy Trinity by Its Three Hypostases is an eternal, perfect Act, in which no change, either diminishing or increasing, has any place.

By contrast, evolution and growth are precisely the characteristics of inter-hypostatisation of the All-Adam by its members. The ‘mechanics’ of this ontological growth are revealed by Christ in His two central commandments: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and

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<sup>229</sup> ‘The love towards God commanded of us by Christ ... draws the spirit of man into the expanses of Divine eternity ... This kind of love is an attribute of Divinity. When the force of it touches the human heart, it opens the heart to infinity, bestows the joy of lovingly embracing all creation, the whole world. The fullness of imperishable love for God and our neighbour is connected in some marvellous fashion with a feeling of repulsion for oneself amounting to hatred. But this is sacred hatred, God’s gift to us. Through it we overcome our death, caused by the fall of Adam. Through it we are effectively introduced into eternity, since this love is only possible if God Himself unites with us and becomes our life’ – *We shall See Him*, p. 199.

<sup>230</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 59. Also: ‘The attitude of love is natural for the *persona* made in the image of the God of love. He does not determine himself oppositively, by contraposing himself over against the ‘not I’. Love is the most intrinsic content of his essence. Embracing the Whole World in prayerful love, the *persona* achieves *ad intra* the unity of all that exists. In the creative act of his becoming, he aspires to universal unity *ad extra* also. In love lies his likeness to God Who is love [cf. I John 4:16].’ – *We Shall See Him*, pp. 196-67.

with all your mind' (Deut. 6: 5; Mark 12: 30) and 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Lev. 19: 18; Mark 12: 31). Archim. Sophrony develops an original, ontological reading of these two commandments, which can be reduced to two basic ideas. First, both commandments are interpreted as Self-revelations of God to humanity, and, as such, they tell us something about the inner life of the Holy Trinity. Second, in virtue of creation 'according to the image' and because both commandments are directed to humans, it follows that whatever principles they reveal about the dynamics of Divine Life, man is called to apply those principles unto his own life.

While the first commandment can be interpreted either as a revelation of Divine sophianicity or as a proof of the ontological distance between Creation and its Creator<sup>231</sup>, Archim. Sophrony singles out the second of Christ's commandments as a revelation of the hypostatical principle: the mutual hypostatization of the Divine *Sobor* by each of the Divine Persons is set before man as the culmination of his journey to salvation.

The second commandment: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself', points through the word *as (like)* not only to the measure of degree of love, as to the deep ontological communion of our human being. When fulfilled in the human being, this commandment leads to the fact that all humankind becomes *one man*.<sup>232</sup>

The inner inter-relations among the Divine Persons, Archim. Sophrony argues, are primarily defined by a process of self-emptying in love of each Divine Hypostasis and the reception of the

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<sup>231</sup> Concerning the first commandment, Archim. Sophrony notes that 'it is not said: 'Love God as thyself', which is pantheism. This commandment tells us about the degree of love. It allows us to know God as *Love*, but, at the same time, it also shows the boundary between man and God. It communicates to us the Divine Life, but does not eliminate the difference in essence.' – *Rozhdenie*, p. 59.

<sup>232</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 59. Interestingly, the later version of the text (going back to an 1988 French version) includes a footnote with a reference to Vladimir Lossky's treatment of the hypostasis in his *Essai sur la Theologie Mystique de l'Eglise d'Orient*. This reference does not exist in the original version, although Archim. Sophrony must have known Lossky's work at the time his article was published in *Messenger de l'Exarchat*, in 1950; Lossky's *Mystical Theology* had been published six years before, in 1944, and the two theologians were colleagues in the editorial board of the *Messenger de l'Exarchat*.

other two Divine Persons as the content of Its life<sup>233</sup>. This process of kenotic love is precisely what the second commandment reveals about the Holy Trinity and, therefore, what it asks of humanity.<sup>234</sup>

Archim. Sophrony's interpretation of the second commandment leads to a new difficulty, this time regarding the limits of this process of hypostatization; if each human being is called to hypostatise the full All-Adam, it follows that all those who are saved, in virtue of this complete hypostatization, become the eternal bearers of the fullness of the All-Adam and live all its hypostases, from the first to the last born, as the content of their personal life. In other words, they become like Christ in His Divine Humanity, and thus, like Christ, they also hypostatize the pre-eternal Church.

Archim. Sophrony is consistent in not lowering the limits of hypostatization; following both the universalist theology of Fr Sergii Bulgakov and the ascetical aphorisms of St Silouan the Athonite<sup>235</sup>, he argues that hypostatisation is ontologically without limits, in two senses: that each Person hypostatizes the complete All-Adam, and thus includes all of humanity, and that the Person also hypostatizes the Divine Life (as the corresponding sophiological aspect of the Church, the Whole Adam), in virtue of which the human Person enters the categories of Divine ontology.

## V. Conclusions

The central aim of this section was an investigation of Archim. Sophrony's theology of the hypostasis, in order to support the first fundamental claim of this thesis concerning the hypostatical moment of the Church. As we advanced in our argument, we needed to build an argument for several other secondary claims. Thus, we have seen that Archim. Sophrony makes use of a

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<sup>233</sup> Because of 'the absolute realisation (actualisation) of love within the Holy Trinity ... each Face-Hypostasis is revealed as the bearer of the whole plenitude of Divinity, dynamically alike to the whole oneness of the Three.' – *Rozhdenie*, p. 59.

<sup>234</sup> Self-emptying as perpetual self-creation becomes one of Archim Sophrony's main ascetical themes; on this topic, see, for instance Soeur Minke, 'Vivre en chretien est impossible, on ne peut que mourir en chretien', *Buisson Ardent* 4 (1998), pp. 26-34.

<sup>235</sup> Archim. Sophrony is in perfect accord with St Silouan's idea that one's love must necessarily include one's enemy, because 'all men, all humanity is my neighbour, my life.' - *Rozhdenie*, p. 104.

maximalist interpretation of the doctrine of creation according to the Divine image, which he corroborates with an original anthropological application of the Palamite distinction between essence and energy, in order to argue for three main interpretations of the Divine image in man: the hypostatical principle, the *soborny* principle and the moment of energy. In his attempts to describe the ‘inexpressibly splendid image of Primordial Man’<sup>236</sup> Archim. Sophrony seems to write the same statement in three manners: total likeness with Christ; total likeness to the Holy Trinity; and total likeness with God; in fact, these are different theological claims, each of which identifies one aspect in the Divine Being – ‘the Principle of All Principles’<sup>237</sup> – which is then reflected as one of the three central elements of ‘image and likeness’: hypostaticity; *sobornicity*; and sophianicity, respectively.

Once these have been demonstrated, we moved further to show that Archim. Sophrony’s Christology outgrows its Patristic equivalent, as a result of a creative co-relation of the Chalcedonian understanding of hypostasis with St Gregory Palamas’ theology of the Uncreated Energies. In other words, instead of defining Christ’s hypostaticity through the classical rapport between essence and hypostasis, Archim. Sophrony uses the corresponding rapport between energy and hypostasis. In doing so, he continues Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s life-long project to correlate the Patristic distinction between hypostases and essence, with St Gregory Palamas’ doctrine of energy. Based on this twentieth-century Christology, Archim. Sophrony develops a definition of hypostatization which is manifested under two inter-dependent moments: sophiologically, in the sense that Christ lives the full Divine Life of the Holy Trinity, and *soborny*, in the sense that Christ’s Hypostasis bears within Itself the other Two Divine Hypostases, thus becoming dynamically equal with the Holy Trinity.

The concluding step in our demonstration was to look at how Archim. Sophrony uses Christ’s hypostatization of the Holy Trinity as the proto-type of a similar process on the human level; thus, each human person must hypostatize the All-Adam, becoming dynamically equal with the Church.

In Man’s multi-hypostatical existence, each Person is called to contain in itself the whole plenitude of all-human existence, not at all rejecting the other Persons, but entering their life as their essential content. (...) Thus is built that one being, which is expressed in the

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<sup>236</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 46.

<sup>237</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 24.

dogma concerning one Essence in three Hypostases. Humankind must become one essence in a multitude of hypostases: this is the creative thought of God, Who made man after His image and likeness.<sup>238</sup>

As would be expected, Archim. Sophrony develops his theology of the hypostasis and the hypostatical principle mostly in his anthropological writings. However, we have seen that, as he measures Man against Christ, the Son of Man, a series of ecclesiological statements are also incurred, culminating with the idea that the human Person hypostatizes the All-Adam and thus becomes dynamically equal with the Church. While he defines hypostaticity by means of the rapport it creates between the All-Adam and each of its hypostases, Archim. Sophrony implicitly says something about the Church, as well.

Previous scholars have looked at Archim. Sophrony's claim that a Person contains the whole Church, and have elaborated on its anthropological implications. Throughout this section, I wanted to look at the same claims about hypostaticity, yet with a set of new, ecclesiological questions. Instead of asking 'What does it say about Man, that he is dynamically equal with the Church?', I wanted to ask the inverted question: 'What does it say about *the Church*, that it is fully hypostatized by each of its members, that it is dynamically equal with Man?'

The answer consists in a mutual relation of inter-dependency between the Church and each human hypostasis. Each human being's 'rebirth' from the imperfect state of individual to the Divine ontology of the Person ultimately depends on his ability to hypostatize the Church; conversely, the Church's process of actualisation in time, her transition from the prototypical perfection she pre-eternally has in Christ's Hypostasis to her eschatological perfection depends on the ability of all of her members to hypostatize it and, consequently, to actualise her in time. This rapport of interdependency between the Church and each of her hypostases emphasizes the value and importance of each human being; in a certain way, the eschatological perfection of the Ecclesial Being depends on the actions of each man, from the first Adam to the last man to be born.

The ontological inter-dependency between the Man and the Church, which is implied by Archim. Sophrony's theology of the hypostasis, has different implications in rapport with Man and, respectively, the Church. Thus, to become a hypostasis, man must become 'dynamically equal' with

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<sup>238</sup> *Dukhovnie Besedi* Vol. II, p. 22.

the Church, he must appropriate that extra-temporal pre-eternal Divine perfection of the Life of the Church.

We have also pointed out that there remains an unresolved tension in Archim. Sophrony's work between the universalist implications of his own theology of the hypostasis and his desire to keep his theology in line with Patristic theology. The source of this tension, at least partially, is the theological mixture between Archim. Sophrony's ascetical mindset and the sophiological foundation of his theology.

Finally, as we move forward with the demonstration of our central argument, namely the hypostatization of the Church by each human Person, we have also noted the overall formative effect on Archim. Sophrony's theology of his reception of Fr Sergii Bulgakov's sophiological principles. The Essex Elder remains greatly indebted to Fr Sergii, whose influence can be traced both in the general lines of his theological vision, and in the most creative and original elements of Archim. Sophrony's theology. We have seen, for example, that the central claim of this section, the hypostatization of the All-Adam, is a recurring theme in Fr Sergii's theology, especially in *Bride of the Lamb*, his last complete volume. Apart from this central common trait, we have also seen that Fr Sergii also precedes Archim. Sophrony in his maximalist interpretation of the doctrine of creation, in his anthropological use of the Palamite distinction between three moments of existence, and in the attempt to advance Christological theology through a co-relation of the Chalcedonian dogmas concerning Christ's Hypostasis and St Gregory Palamas' theology of Uncreated Energies.

### **Chapter Three**

## **The Church as All-Adam: An Ontologically *Soborny* Being**

## Chapter Three

### The Church as All-Adam: An Ontologically *Soborny* Being

#### I. Introduction: Aims and Methodology

##### Aims

In the previous chapter we have looked at the direct connection Archim. Sophrony sees between ecclesiology and anthropology, and we have showed that, in his vision, the Church has a hypostatical mode of existence. The aim of the present chapter is to show that, apart from being hypostatical, but in strict relation to it, Archim. Sophrony's ecclesiology is also ontologically *soborny*. Our purpose for this chapter is, therefore, twofold: first, to prove that Archim. Sophrony's church is a *soborny* being; second, to show that Archim. Sophrony's ecclesiological *sobornost*, that is, what he means by *sobornost*<sup>239</sup> when he refers to the Church, is an ontological concept. Once again, as was also the case with our first chapter, a third aim of the chapter is to emphasize Archim. Sophrony's reception of Fr Sergii Bulgakov's own use of the concept of *sobornost*.

As we advance in our topic, we shall discover that the *sobornost* carries an anthology of different meanings, which Archim. Sophrony receives from Russian theology and culture. We shall also reveal an inherent tension in Archim. Sophrony's writings, resulting in a clash between his ontological vision of the *sobornost* and its universalist implications, and the more ascetically oriented tone of his Talks to the Community.

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<sup>239</sup> Primarily, *Soborny* is the Russian translation of the Greek *katholikos* in the Creed.

## Methodology

Before we start our analysis, a few words are needed about the structure of this chapter. Generally, it follows the logic of its double aim; consequently, the first part focuses on demonstrating that Archim. Sophrony envisages the Church as a *soborny* being, while the second part qualifies the meaning Archim. Sophrony attaches to the *sobornost* when he applies it ecclesiologically.

Thus, the first part is titled ‘The Church: A *Soborny* Being’ and is structured around the analysis of Archim. Sophrony’s first major published work, his article on ‘The Unity of the Church’. This ecclesiological study knows two highly different versions: one published in *Messenger de l’Exarchat* 2-3, in 1950; the second, heavily re-written, published in 1958, in *Contacts: Revue bimestrielle des Orthodoxes français* 21-4. Having two versions of the same ecclesiological text proves extremely useful for our purpose; through a comparative analysis of these texts, we shall see what Archim. Sophrony decided to keep or to delete from one version to the other. This will provide us with a unique chance to see how his ecclesiological thought evolved, and will highlight the fundamental importance of *sobornost* in relation to his ecclesiology. We shall see, for instance, that one of the main changes in the revised 1958 version of the text addresses precisely the concept of *sobornost* and its sometimes contradictory meanings.

Starting from this, in the second part of our chapter, titled ‘The Church: An Ontological *Sobor*’, we shall re-direct our discussion to a qualification of the meaning of *ecclesiological sobornicity* in Archim. Sophrony’s larger body of work. As we have already mentioned, Archim. Sophrony attaches a number of different meanings to the concept of *sobornost*, some of which are even openly contradictory. Because of this, a theoretical introduction into these different meanings of *sobornost* is needed. To provide this, the second section of the chapter contains a brief historical account of the stages of evolution undergone by *sobornost* in Russian culture; each of these cultural stages of the *sobornost* is paralleled by an analysis of how that particular meaning of the concept is reflected in Archim. Sophrony’s theology. Ultimately, we shall discover that, while Archim. Sophrony makes use of several different interpretations of *sobornost*, when it comes to his ecclesiological work, he exclusively applies the ontological *sobornost* developed by Fr Sergii Bulgakov at the beginning of the twentieth century.

## II. The Church: A *Soborny* Being

### Introduction: Russian émigré Churches and Their Journals in the Late 1940's

This section of the chapter focuses on the two published versions of Archim. Sophrony's only ecclesiological study, 'Unity of the Church', and aims to demonstrate two things: that he envisages the Church as a *soborny* being; and that the changes he made in the second version of the article say something precisely about the nature and meaning of the *sobornost* he refers to in relation to the Church.

Before we embark on this comparative analysis, we need to say something about the context in which Archim. Sophrony wrote and published this essay. First, we must see who were the main actors in the Russian drama of those decades: which were the Russian émigré Churches in Paris in 1947? Who and what were their main representatives and publications? Most importantly, how did Archim. Sophrony relate to all of these, and how did the nature of his relationship with these groups affect his theology?

This becomes especially relevant for our discussion if we consider the deeply polemical nature of 'Unity of the Church', which makes it clear that Archim. Sophrony was actively involved in the ecclesiological discussions of the time. It must also be remembered that, in 1947, when Archim. Sophrony returned to Paris, after having spent over two decades on Mount Athos, the ecclesiastical context of the Russian Diaspora was entirely different and much more complicated than it was in 1925 when he had left for Greece. At the time, most Russian émigré theologians were caught in a system of seemingly never-ending dissensions over ecclesiastical authority, and Archim. Sophrony experienced first-hand the effects of these tensions.

## 1. The Karlovci group

Apart from Metropolitan Evlogy's Russian Diocese, the only other major Russian ecclesial organization in the diaspora in the 1920s was the Karlovci Synod, headed by Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky<sup>240</sup>, a highly respected theologian and a charismatic leader. However, mostly because of the group's deeply monarchist views and its violent public opposition to the Russian Patriarchate, Moscow finally condemned the Karlovci group in 1922, giving Metropolitan Evlogy complete authority over all Russian parishes in Western Europe. By 1926, Metropolitan Evlogy and Metropolitan Platon, head of the Russian Diocese in North America, also broke their official connections with the Karlovcians. Both Metropolitans had been directly appointed by Moscow, so that the previous Patriarchal condemnation, and the Karlovcians' continuous aggressive attitude, contributed to this state of affairs. By the end of the third decade, the large majority of the Russian Diaspora – in terms of sheer numbers, but also for its cultural significance – was under the authority of Metropolitan Evlogy<sup>241</sup>, while the Karlovci group was slowly heading towards complete separation from the entire Orthodox body.

The war years proved beneficial for the evolution of the Karlovici group. In the late 1930s, Serafim Lade, a German man converted to Orthodoxy was made Metropolitan of the organization, apparently at the initiative and with the help of the Nazis.<sup>242</sup> Toward the end of the war, from 1943 to 1945, things got even better for the Karlovcians, who had the strong support of the Nazi Government; as Pospelovsky notes:

‘with Nazi support ... the Synod uncanonically deprived Metropolitan Evlogy of Paris of jurisdiction over his parishes in Germany. After the Nazis had come to power, almost all

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<sup>240</sup> See Pospelovsky, Vol. I, pp. 128–133.

<sup>241</sup> Pospelovsky describes the situation of the late '20s like this: ‘The intellectual centres of the Russian diaspora were Paris, Berlin and Prague, in that order, while numerically the largest concentrations of Russians in Europe were in the Baltic states and in Poland, followed by France’. Pospelovsky, vol. 1, p. 132.

<sup>242</sup> Pospelovsky, p. 223.

Evlogy's remaining parishes in Germany were taken away from him and handed over by the Nazis to the Karlovician Bishop Tikhon of Berlin'.<sup>243</sup>

Canonically, though, the Karlovici Synod found itself in its most difficult situation yet; the collaboration with the Nazis and the ban it put on concelebrating with Moscow Patriarchate clergy and the clergy of any other church recognizing the Russian Patriarchate, meant that the group had practically cut all its canonical, and even administrative relations with the entire Orthodox world.

## **2. Metropolitan Evlogy and his Russian Diocese**

When Archim. Sophrony was still in Paris, in the early 1920s, Metropolitan Evlogy Georgievsky<sup>244</sup> was under the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate and was the ecclesiastical leader of the large majority of Russian parishes in Western Europe, including all those functioning in Paris. At the time, the newly established Theological Institute of Saint Serge was also under the authority of the Russian Patriarchate, just as were all of its students. As we have already seen, Metropolitan Evlogy's position was significantly made stronger by the fact that Moscow had banned the Karlovici group in 1922, leaving him the only recognized authority of the Russian Diaspora in Western Europe.

However, this fortunate situation was not to last very long. Shortly after Archim. Sophrony had left for Mount Athos, Patriarch Sergii issued his ill-fated Declaration of Loyalty of 1927; this was sent to Metropolitan Evlogy, together with the request that all émigré clerics sign a pledge of loyalty<sup>245</sup> to the Soviet State. Initially, the request was refused by the Metropolitan in Paris, but when he was allowed to replace the pledge of loyalty with a text (which he was allowed to formulate himself) by which all clergy under his authority simply accepted not to interfere within political affairs, he eventually gave in. Shortly after this, though, Evlogy took part in a series of public lectures and sermons in England in which he spoke against the violent persecutions of the Church in Russia. This in turn created significant tension between him and the Russian Patriarch, which would lead to

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<sup>243</sup> Pospelovsky, pp. 222-3; for how this was done, see Vol. II, p. 262.

<sup>244</sup> See Pospelovsky, vol. I, pp. 133-42.

<sup>245</sup> See Pospelovsky, p. 133.

his eventual ban by Moscow. As a result, in 1930, Patriarch Sergii of Moscow formally condemned him and gave Eleftery of Lithuania authority over all parishes previously under Evlogy.

Consequently, Metropolitan Evlogy turned to the Patriarch of Constantinople, who received him and all his parishes under the Ecumenical Patriarchate; from then on, the organization functioned as the Archdiocese of Paris and Western Europe until 1965.

### **b. The Russian parishes under the Moscow Patriarchate**

Officially, this new ecclesial faction of the Russian Diaspora appeared as the direct result of the 1930 condemnation of Metropolitan Evlogy by Patriarch Sergii, and included well known theologians like Vladimir Lossky and Leonid Uspensky. Its authority extended, however, mostly after the Second World War, when the Church in Russia showed an apparent revival.<sup>246</sup> At the same time, after the experience of the war, Stalin understood that he could use the church as an important part of his foreign policy, so that the Soviet power adopted a new approach towards the church and her clergy. These signs of a temporary revival of the Mother Church and the outbreak of nationalistic feelings generated by the Soviet success in the War led to a significant change of attitude of the members of the Russian émigrés towards Soviet Russia and the Moscow Patriarchate.

This change of heart became obvious after the election of Aleksey as the new Russian Patriarch in 1945, after Sergii's death. The same year, Metropolitan Evlogy and his parishes rejoined the Moscow Patriarchate, and a request for his release was sent to the Ecumenical Patriarchate by him and Patriarch Aleksey. However, Evlogy died the next year and was succeeded by Metropolitan Serafim Lukyanov, who was highly unpopular with the Russian émigrés and described by Pospelovsky as 'formerly a Karlovcian of the most aggressive kind and of an actively pro-Hitler orientation during the war'.<sup>247</sup> As a result, in October 1946, the Extraordinary Diocesan Council in Paris decided to remain under the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, under the leadership of Vladimir of Nice. By this time, Constantinople had given no answer to the late Evlogy's request for release, so the émigré church was still officially under the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which

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<sup>246</sup> Pospelovsky notes that the reopened churches were mostly on the territories which had been occupied by the Germans and those immediately close-by, not within Russia itself.

<sup>247</sup> Pospelovsky, p. 270.

immediately validated Vladimir's election as the new Metropolitan. This, of course, led to a ban of Vladimir and his other two bishops by Patriarch Aleksey<sup>248</sup>, and the two Russian Churches in Paris – the one under Moscow authority, the other under Constantinople – continued to function as separate ecclesiastical bodies.

#### **4. Conclusion: Russian ecclesiastical groups in the Diaspora and their journals in the late 1940s**

To conclude, by 1947, when Fr Sophrony found himself again among the Russian Diaspora in Paris, things looked drastically different from twenty years before. At that moment, no fewer than three ecclesiastical Russian groups were active within the Russian Diaspora in the West. Most importantly, Metropolitan Evlogy, under whose jurisdiction Archim. Sophrony had been before leaving for Athos, was no longer under the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate. The same applied to the St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, which had joined the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1930, following the scandal brought about by the late Patriarch Sergii's Declaration of Loyalty to the Soviet State.

These ecclesial groups were not only different, but also at war with each other, each claiming its own exclusive dogmatic right to function and actively seeking to prove the dogmatic error of the other groups. The most common way to fight was to argue for the non-canonic character of the opposing groups; this was done both from the pulpit, through the usual sermons, and by means of published papers in their respective theological journals. Naturally, a strong voice was that of the Theological Institute of Saint Serge. Members of the Institute published their papers mostly in *Put' (The Path)*<sup>249</sup>. The Russian Patriarchate was also represented, mostly through *Messenger de l'Exarchat du Patriarche Russe en Europe Occidentale*, a vocal advocate on behalf of the

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<sup>248</sup> As Pospelovsky points out, although Vladimir and his bishops – Ioann and Nikon – were no longer recognized after 1947 as part of the Moscow Patriarchate's clergy, Aleksey's reaction was surprisingly more moderate than Sergii's decisions from 1930 and 1931; this time, no ban was proclaimed, leaving the door open for future reconciliation. Pospelovsky, p. 270.

<sup>249</sup> For more on the importance of *Put'* in the context of Parisian theology, especially in relation to Fr Sergii Bulgakov, see Antoine Arjakovsky, 'Le pere Serge Boulgakov et sa place dans l'histoire de l'Eglise', *Le Messenger Orthodox* 152 (2012), pp. 35-43.

Patriarchate, publishing in both Russian and French. This journal is especially relevant to this thesis, as this is the journal where Archim. Sophrony published his articles in the 1950s.<sup>250</sup> Although less influential, we should also note *The Double-headed Eagle (Dvuglavnyi oriol)*, a journal close to the Karlovci group, especially known for the ‘wild campaign against the Paris St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute, the famous theologian Fr. Sergius Bulgakov and the YMCA Press, accusing them all of Judeo-Masonic connections’.<sup>251</sup>

These journals are of particular interest to us, because they have preserved for us an unspoiled image of that theological controversy over ecclesial authority, but also because, shortly after his return to Paris, Archim. Sophrony found himself involved in this written theological propaganda.

This was the context in which the Russian theologians in Paris were developing their work at the end of the 1940s, when Archim. Sophrony joined the editorial board of *Messenger de l’Exarchat* and became part of this ecclesial war. As expected, this whole discussion concerning Orthodox ecclesiology was bound to be affected, if not even deformed, by contemporary controversies and personal attitudes. As we shall see, Archim. Sophrony himself got caught in this theological battle which clearly affected his first original theological writings.

### **Contemporary Ecclesiological Discussions in Paris and Archim. Sophrony’s Involvement**

As we have already mentioned in our introductory chapter, ecclesiological questions represented the main topic of the theological debate of the Russian Diaspora; within the written output of this debate, the overwhelming majority of the published essays and articles were focused on two central issues – the question of ecclesial authority over the Russian Diaspora and, as an aside stemming from this, a search for a dogmatic definition of the church. However, given the overwhelming importance of the question over ecclesial authority, the search for a dogmatic definition of the church was bound to be centred on her meaning as an institution, rather than anything else.

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<sup>250</sup> Nicholas Sakharov writes that Archim. Sophrony was ‘the main editor of *Messenger* between 1950 and 1957, alongside Vladimir Lossky (*I Love, Therefore I Am*, p. 32); however, I have found no mention of this in the actual issues of the journal.

<sup>251</sup> Pospelovsky, pp. 131-2.

On the one hand, that part of the Russian Diaspora which migrated under the Patriarchate of Constantinople claimed the exclusive authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate over all territories outside the geographical boundaries of the existing Orthodox countries. In their view, Russians who lived their lives outside Russia automatically entered the canonical territory of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In opposition, those Russians who remained faithful to the Moscow Patriarchate did not recognize the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate over non-Orthodox territories. The discussion was started by Patriarch Sergius himself, with a series of addresses to the Ecumenical Patriarchate which were included in the *Journal of the Russian Patriarchate*<sup>252</sup> in 1931, its first year of publication. These theologians, among which Archim. Sophrony eventually found himself, argued against this canonical claim of Constantinople by using mostly a comparison with the ‘colonial’ claims of Catholic Rome. They built their arguments on a rather deformed Orthodox perception of Catholic theology, while capitalizing on the latent dislike most Orthodox had for the Roman Church, by transferring this dislike on to the Ecumenical Church and, implicitly, on to the group of Russians who recognized her authority. Prof Troitsky’s work at the time offers a typical example of how a theologian could use this sort of rhetoric. The articles he contributed to the *Messenger de l’Exarchat*, including in the years when Archim. Sophrony was involved in the editing of the journal, abound in pages denouncing the ‘papal claims’ of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Archim. Sophrony himself is not at all far from this ecclesiastical understanding. His first major article, an ecclesiological study, was published in the *Messenger de l’Exarchat*, in 1950. Its complete title is ‘Unity of the Church according to the Unity of the Holy Trinity – Orthodox Triadology as model for Orthodox Ecclesiology’ and was published in both Russian and a French translation, spread among three issues of the journal. In the following pages, we shall look more closely at this very important article and we shall see that the vocabulary and logic behind the institutional ideas of the article are identical with those expressed by Prof Troitsky. The authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate over the Diaspora is rejected in the strongest terms. All common arguments are used to argue against the canonical claims of Constantinople – ecclesiological heresy, papal behaviour, comparisons with the Catholic Church and so on. And yet, even at this very early stage, over thirty

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<sup>252</sup> The *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* appeared with very long periods of interruption (up to eight years in one case) from 1931. In this journal, from its first year of publication, started the public debate regarding Constantinople’s right to receive Evlogy’s Western Russian parishes under its authority and the larger question of the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate over Orthodox churches in non-Orthodox territories.

years before the article would eventually be rewritten and published in its final form, the principles of Archim. Sophrony's ecclesiology are already present. Ironically, although they were used as the ultimate argument to support the approach he took at the time regarding the institutional church, these latent principles would eventually develop and lead Archim. Sophrony to understand that they also oppose his own recognition of the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate. Ultimately, the same principles, at this time only germinating, would mean that he totally renounced the common understanding of the church as an institution and would focus on his own, personal vision of the church as a being.

### **The Publication of 'Unity of the Church according to the Unity of the Holy Trinity – Orthodox Triadology as Model for Orthodox Ecclesiology'**

From the very start, we must point out the special character of 'Unity of Church', which is Archim. Sophrony's *only* piece of work to see publication in two highly different versions. The most circulated text today is the 1988 French version which was included in 'La félicité de connaître la voie'. A translation into Russian of this version is also included in a 1999 collection of Archim. Sophrony's articles published as *Birth Into the Kingdom which Cannot be Moved*<sup>253</sup> (by the Monastery in Tolleshunt Knights); subsequently, this has become the text quoted from by all authors, scholarly and spiritual, interested in Archim. Sophrony's theology. However, this later version is a re-print of a 1958 text<sup>254</sup>, which was in itself a rewrite of the drastically different

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<sup>253</sup> The book has not been translated into English yet; the English translation of the title belongs to Nicholas Sakharov. For this chapter, I have used my own translations from French. Because French is the common language of all three versions of the text (1950, 1958 and 1988) I have used mostly the French texts; however, where necessary and where fundamental concepts are used, I have also compared the French text with its Russian original.

<sup>254</sup> This version was published only in French, in Paris, under the title 'Unite de l'Eglise à l'Image de la Sainte Trinite: Triadologie Orthodoxe Comme Principe de l'Ecclésiologie'<sup>14</sup>. All the major changes we see in the final 1988 version are already present here, especially the central shift from a predominately polemic paper, dealing mostly with institutional matters, to an exclusively theological text, with no mention of inter-ecclesial controversies and completely focused on theological questions.

original from 1950. This original version of the article was published under the same title in *Messenger de l'Exarchat*, in both Russian and French.<sup>255</sup>

Another noteworthy observation concerning 'Unity of the Church' is that, apart from Archim. Sophrony's editing and introduction to St Silouan's notes<sup>256</sup>, this is his first important original piece of theological writing to see publication.<sup>257</sup> As such, it reflects Archim. Sophrony's search for a personal voice, able to express his theological vision, but it also proves the extent to which he was influenced by the agendas of those surrounding him and by the whole controversy concerning ecclesial authority over the Russian Diaspora in the West.

The 1950 version is also his only written text in which he tries to apply his spiritual vision of Man and the Church *in a scholarly manner*. His future articles and books will increasingly leave way for the spiritual manner of expression he felt most comfortable with.<sup>258</sup> While he is slowly distancing

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<sup>255</sup> The Russian version of the article was included in 'Messenger de l'Exarchat', numbers 2-3, 1950, while the French translation ('Unite de l'Eglise, Image de la Sainte Trinite') was published entirely in issue no 5, 1950, after having been postponed twice due to its length.

<sup>256</sup> The first official edition of St Silouan's Notes was published after 'Unity of the Church', in 1952; however, a mimeographed version of the Saint's work had already appeared in 1948.

<sup>257</sup> 'Unity of the Church' is the second article Archim. Sophrony contributed to *Messenger de l'Exarchat*; the first one was 'Holy Silence', published in the first number of the journal.

<sup>258</sup> His essay on 'On the Necessity for Three Renunciations, According to St John Cassian and St John of the Ladder', and his article on 'The Principles of Orthodox Asceticism', which was originally delivered as a lecture in Paris, in November 1952, are the only other two pieces of writing where he returns to the scholarly style of the 1950 version of 'Unity of the Church'. As a comparison, in 'The Principles of Orthodox Asceticism', Archim. Sophrony quotes or references, among others: John of the Ladder; Methodius of Olympus; Clement of Rome; Cyprian of Carthage; Gregory of Nyssa; Isaac the Syrian; Gregory the Theologian; John Cassian; various Desert Fathers (Pimen, Pafnutius), Ignatii Briantsianinov; Theophan the Recluse etc.; this 1952 essay contains, perhaps, more quotations and references to Patristic sources than the entire volume *We Shall See Him As He Is*. There is a clear evolution of his writing style, from the systematic, scholarly-oriented style of his 'Messenger' collaborators to the less formal, ascetical style of his later work. However, not even these two articles return to the polemical tone of 'Unity of the Church.'

himself from these contemporary controversies, he also becomes gradually focused on the community growing around him, first in France and later in England. This is also reflected in a shift of perspective in his subsequent writings, and the ecclesiological vision he started from is gradually replaced by a more ascetical, anthropological one. This makes ‘Unity of the Church’ Archim. Sophrony’s only scholarly and *predominantly ecclesiological* article. As we shall see, reflections and developments of the ideas and principles he puts forward in this article are to be found in every single other piece of writing published in the following decades, but rather than being applied ecclesologically, they are going to reflect the new monastic context in which Archim. Sophrony would live until the end of his life, and will be expressed through the ascetical-anthropological language which suited the pedagogical and formative purposes of his later writings.

Given the consistent differences we shall see between the two versions of the article, one could wonder why Archim. Sophrony chose to keep the same title. It would have been much easier, and any dangerous confusion between the two texts would have been avoided, had he simply chosen to leave aside or rewrite the first pages these two versions have in common. Because he did not make that choice, and insisted to keep the same title, one must conclude that in Archim. Sophrony’s vision the two texts have a sort of internal connection, and that one cannot simply ignore one and choose the other. The final 1958 version of the article is enriched and has something to gain by being compared to its previous forms. Rather than dealing with one piece of writing, I find we must accept that we have to work with two very different texts, which nevertheless are united by their title, subject, several pages and the will of the author to be seen in sequence.<sup>259</sup>

Let us return for now to this first text, and see how it evolved in the eight years between its first publication, in 1950, and its 1958 revision. The choices Archim. Sophrony made regarding what to keep unchanged, which parts of the text to cut and which to add will tell us a lot about his vision of the church and how this vision found its expression. It should be pointed out that this is the only text which allows for such an extended comparative analysis between three different published versions of the same text. Archim. Sophrony’s habit of constantly rereading and making corrections

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<sup>259</sup> If anything, if we base our analysis on the content of these texts, one could easily argue for the existence of a third, drastically shorter version of the same text, written shortly before Archim. Sophrony’s death as his theological ‘Testament’ to the monastic community in Tolleshunt Knights (*Rozhdenie*, p. 189-191). Strikingly, these last written pages contain the very same concerns and theological principles already present in his first major published text, some forty years before.

on his own texts is well known; we can trace differences between each republication of his works, even between the original text and its translations in various languages. He would change his text depending on the culture, religion and spirituality of each nation; the same thing happened during the deliverance of his talks to the Tolleshunt Knights community, when he would adapt his discourse to those present there. However, no text has seen such dramatic changes from one rewrite to the other as ‘Unity of the Church’.

### **‘Unity of the Church’: 1950 Original Text**

The first version of ‘Unity of the Church’ is an ecclesiology essay of over twenty five pages long, the most part of which deals with the institution of the Church, and is focused in particular on the question of ecclesial authority over the Russian Diaspora.<sup>260</sup> The Russian version comes with a note from the editor, which, apart from the introductory paragraph regarding the publication of the French translation, also includes a brief abstract of Archim. Sophrony’s article.<sup>261</sup> This abstract allows us to sum up the main idea of the article in the author’s own words; he writes:

‘The purpose of the Church is to introduce its members, the believers, in the sphere of divine life. For this reason it is essential that, in its historical life it should reveal the image of this divine life. The divine revelation expressed through the dogmatic teaching of the Church speaks of an inconceivable perfection of the divine tri-unitary life ... The interior life of the Trinity does not allow for a shadow of submission, or “subordination” ... Starting from these essential principles of the life of the Church, the author affirms that all pope-ism, be it of the first Rome, of the second or third Rome, or of any other big or small city, is contrary to the nature of the Church, as it introduces in its life the principle of subordination

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<sup>260</sup> In contrast with the usual practice of the journal, the article was published initially only in Russian, without a French translation. The fact is explained in a note from the editor at the end of the journal, announcing that, due to its length, the French translation of Archim. Sophrony’s text would be published in the following number. Eventually, it would be postponed once more, and only published in the fifth number of *Messenger de l’Exarchat* that same year.

<sup>261</sup> There is no reason to doubt that the abstract, written in French, is the work of Archim. Sophrony himself; he could speak fluent French and, if Nicholas Sakharov is right, he was also part of the editorial board of *Messenger de l’Exarchat*.

and thus destroys its catholicity, which reflects the Catholicity and Consubstantiality of the Holy Trinity.’<sup>262</sup>

The article indeed follows the structure indicated in the abstract. The opening part, just over eight pages long, is intended as a brief introduction into the Orthodox dogma of the Holy Trinity. This is the section which will be kept in the 1958 revision. It is structured around the Greek version of the ‘Athanasian’ Creed, in order to draw out two principles of divine life – personhood and *sobornicity*. Based on an understanding of the life of the Church as the image of the intra-trinitarian divine life, these two principles are then applied ecclesialogically. The aim is to prove that any form of ecclesial subordination of one church to another is contrary to these revealed principles. The implication is that any claim of authority of a church over another, or any ‘pope-ism, be it of the first Rome, of the second or third Rome’ contradicts the Orthodox dogmatic teaching regarding the ‘catholicity’ (translated as ‘*soborny*’ in Russian) of the Church, and thus, is a heresy.

### **1. Introductory part: An account of Archim. Sophrony’s central theological principles**

Our aim here is to underline the fact that these eight introductory pages, which account for about a third of the total length of the article, already contain all the fundamental ideas which Archim. Sophrony would continue to develop in his subsequent writings. In a striking proof of the unity of his theological vision, we shall encounter the very same principles and concepts included in his ‘Testament’, over four decades later. In these forty years, not much was added to this original vision, except perhaps the importance of asceticism. As an aside, it is worth noting that, although not present in ‘Unity of the Church’, the ascetical element of Archim. Sophrony’s theology is also present from the very beginning of his writing career, as we can see from his introduction to St Silouan’s writings and also in another long article ‘On the Principles of Orthodox Asceticism’, which was published in 1953, in numbers 13 and 14 of *Messenger de l’Exarchat*<sup>263</sup>.

The central axiom of these first pages is the doctrine of creation according to the Divine image. Although it receives several interpretations, the idea is mostly used in the sense that the Church-as-

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<sup>262</sup> ‘Note de la Redaction’, *Messenger de l’Exarchat* 2-3 (1950), p. 94.

<sup>263</sup> The article was published in 1953, after a public reading the previous year (in Paris, on November 30, 1952); see note on p. 41, *Messenger de l’Exarchat* 13 (1953).

Being eschatologically shares the divine life of the Holy Trinity, which makes it imperative, that in historical time the Church-as-institution reflects the principles of this divine existence.

The theology of the image Archim. Sophrony develops in ‘Unity of the Church’ would not change until the end of his life. His three fundamental interpretations of the doctrine of the image are already present and used here – Humanity-as-Church is the image of the Holy Trinity, Man-as-Hypostasis is the image of Christ, while the Life of the Triune God is also the true life of Humanity. The first interpretation of the doctrine of the image makes use of the *soborny* principle, while the second applies to the human level the principle of Divine Personhood. The third usage of the image differs from the previous two in that it speaks more of an *identity* than a reflection or image; the same Divine Life belongs to both God and Man; there are not two identical lives, but one life lived (actualized) by two different beings, in two different manners – divinely and creaturely.

The distinction between Humanity (or Pan-humanity) and Man is of essential importance, as it reflects the more subtle difference between the *Sobor* and its Hypostases which is the departing point in separating ecclesiology from anthropology. The two concepts are constructed by starting from the divine realities concerning the Holy Trinity made known through dogmatic revelations. This methodology basically consists in an analysis of the dogmatic sentences concerning God in order to draw some general principles, which are later applied anthropologically in virtue of the doctrine of creation according to the divine image. Referring to the fact that man acquires his knowledge in time, as the result of a complex process of evolution, whereas in God such evolution (as a sign of imperfection and non-actualization) does not exist, Archim. Sophrony writes that:

‘One must always remember these things when thinking about God, so that we do not fall in the error of anthropomorphism. Although man is created in the image of God, he often reverses the hierarchy of life, as it wants to attribute to God notions inspired to him by his self-knowledge. Man starts then creating God according to his own image and likeness. The opposite way is the way of the Church. It is not we who create God according to our image,

but rather, following Christ's commandments, we discover in ourselves the attributes of our nature which is created after the image of God.'<sup>264</sup>

This theological methodology, culminating with the idea of the ontological identity between God and Man, will eventually get to be known as anthropologic maximalism.<sup>265</sup> Archim. Sophrony

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<sup>264</sup> *Messenger de l'Exarchat* 5 (1950), p. 40. As we shall see in Chapter Four, this quote reflects Archim. Sophrony's opposition to what he calls the 'apophatic exaggerations' of some contemporary theologians. Most probably, the quote refers to Vladimir Lossky and his theology of 'Divine darkness', which Archim. Sophrony never agreed with. Rather than darkness, Archim. Sophrony writes, experience of the Divine Light is a '*luminous breakthrough* into Heaven "where God is".' – *We Shall See Him*, p. 158; he claims that 'darkness', as an expression of apophatic theology, is suited only to safeguard the absolute transcendence of the Divine essence, but he is utterly against an apophatic reading of the Incarnation, and contemplates Christ only as 'Light in which there is no darkness at all' – *We Shall See Him*, p. 233.

<sup>265</sup> See also Nicholas Sakharov's treatment of 'Fr Sophrony and the Deification of Man', in *I Love, Therefore I Am*, pp. 146-159, especially the section on 'The Roots of Maximalism: Fr Sergius Bulgakov?' which, despite a pertinent analysis of the major influence Fr Sergii had on Archim. Sophrony's theology in its first part, is affected by the author's general intention to distance Archim. Sophrony from the 'questionable' theology of his former confessor. His idea that 'the same maximalist vocabulary in Fr Sophrony does not carry the same meaning' is based on two 'major points of difference between Bulgakov's and Fr Sophrony's understanding of human deification' which the author simply states, without taking the time to argue for them. Thus, the first 'major point of difference' between the two theologians is that 'Fr Sophrony takes explicit care to safeguard the ontological difference between God and Man', by stating the ontological difference between their respective essences; however, we find the same statement in Fr Sergii's writings, including in his last book, *Bride of the Lamb* (pp. 61-2). Secondly, Nicholas Sakharov argues that, 'Fr Sophrony's maximalism comes not from the stock of philosophical ideas, as in Bulgakov, but from the patristic tradition, confirmed by ascetic experience.' (*I Love*, p. 155); however, a brief look at the two theologians confirms that Archim. Sophrony uses precisely the same patristic writers and the same Scriptural passages as Fr Sergii to argue for his maximalist theology. The author's attitude is especially confusing, given the fact that he has a correct understanding of Fr Sergii's theology, as becomes obvious from the following pages.

would remain faithful to this way of developing theology until the end of his life, following two other major contemporary theologians, Fr Sergii Bulgakov and Nicolai Berdiaev.

If we leave aside the polemics concerning the question of ecclesial authority over the Russian Diaspora, the theological core of ‘Unity of the Church’ can be reduced to the idea that a *Sobor* and each of its Hypostases are dynamically equal in Love. In order to see what each of these terms mean for Archim. Sophrony, we need to start with the concept of Love and understand how he makes use of it. This becomes especially relevant when we consider that Love has remained at the centre of Archim. Sophrony’s theology throughout his entire life as the main ‘methodological tool’ in one’s knowledge and contemplation of God. Because ‘God is Love, [He] cannot be known and contemplated otherwise except through love and in love.’<sup>266</sup> However, in Archim. Sophrony’s language, love is not limited to the human psychological feeling of affection. Love has the power to reunite the inner lives of people, and ultimately can lead to the rehabilitation or reunification of the whole human nature. He writes that ‘love has the effect of transposing the existence of the person who loves in that of the loved one. The person, the Ego, is thus penetrable by Love.’<sup>267</sup> Even within the existence of the Holy Trinity, Love is what unites the Three Divine Persons into the same one Being, while also allowing for their Personal differentiation. Love, ‘this attribute of the Divine life ... is the foundation of the unity which makes the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity but one single Being.’<sup>268</sup> And a bit further, regarding the identity without confusion of the Three Divine Persons, he writes:

‘The absolute perfection of the love within the Trinity reveals the perfect co-penetration of the Three Persons, to the degree that there is but one will, one action, one glory, one power, one Divinity, one Existence. This is because each Person-Hypostasis is the beholder of the whole plenitude of Divinity and dynamically equal with the unity of the Three.’<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> *Messenger* 5, p. 39.

<sup>267</sup> *Messenger* 5, p. 41.

<sup>268</sup> *Messenger* 5, p. 40.

<sup>269</sup> *Messenger* 5, p. 41.

With this in mind, Archim. Sophrony interprets Christ's commandments to His disciples as descriptions of the perfect divine manner of existence, which is also revealed as the human ideal existence, and which is attainable through love and in love.

The ontological principles which determine the interior life of the Triune God are also proper to humanity, to the degree that following the path set forward by Christ's commandments, man discovers in himself 'the attributes of our nature which is created after the image of God.'<sup>270</sup> Thus, each of Christ's two commandments reveals a particular aspect of this ontology of love. The first commandment – *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind* – underlines the difference of nature between God and humanity, by emphasizing the fact that one is not to love God merely as oneself (which would lead to pantheism) but with one's whole being. The image is that of something smaller opening up to its maximum potentiality in order to receive something which is immensely bigger than itself. However, apart from this comparison of natures, Archim. Sophrony writes that the ontological effect of the first commandment is a transposition of God's divine existence in the life of the loving human being, so that 'it makes us participate in the divine life, but does not lead to the disappearance of the difference in nature.'<sup>271</sup> This idea, based on Christ's first commandment, will stay with Archim. Sophrony for the rest of his life, and will find further developments in his subsequent work. Ultimately, this transposition of the divine life into the existence of human hypostases will lead to his famous statements concerning the dynamic identity, which is identity of life (energy or *dynamis*), between God and Man.

If Christ's first commandment works in a vertical plane, uniting God with Man, the second commandment – *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself* – is applied to the horizontal plane of

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<sup>270</sup> *Messenger* 5, p. 40.

<sup>271</sup> *Messenger* 5, p. 41.

humanity<sup>272</sup>. In this commandment, which sets out the ideal human existence, Archim. Sophrony sees a reflection of the manner of love which exists within the Holy Trinity. Its ontological significance is that:

it indicates first of all a profound ontological community of all our pan-human existence, of our consubstantiality (*To homoousion*). Realized in life, this commandment leads to the fact that all humanity is but ONE SINGLE MAN.<sup>273</sup>

Ultimately,

the observance of the second commandment – *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself* – re-establishes the consubstantiality of the human nature, which is broken by sin, to the point where the plenitude of human existence becomes the possession of each human person.<sup>274</sup>

After this brief exposition of the ontological importance of Love and the ways in which Christ's two commandments apply this divine attribute on the human level, Archim. Sophrony moves forward to the central idea of the article, that of the Church as Pan-humanity or All-Man. In effect, he distinguishes this ecclesiological Being, characterized primarily by *sobornicity*, from the multitude of human hypostases, which are characterised primarily by personhood. Of course, these two principles – *soborny* and personhood – presuppose each other; indeed, in a perfectly actualized being, such as the Holy Trinity or the Church, in her eschatological perfection, the *Sobor* is ontologically identical ('dynamically equal') to each of its Hypostases, while preserving Its distinction. He writes:

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<sup>272</sup> As we saw in the previous Chapter, although the second commandment is *applied* exclusively intra-essentially, to the level of one essence (either Divine, or human), the effects of its application are inter-essential, by creating a rapport between the two different essences. This is due to Christ's Divine-human Hypostasis, Who belongs to both natures and thus, He is part of both *Sobors* – the Holy Trinity and the Church – creating, as it were, a hypostatical 'meeting point' between the Divine and the human *Sobors*.

<sup>273</sup> *Messenger* no 5, p. 41 (italicization and capitalization belong to the original text).

<sup>274</sup> *Messenger* 5, p. 41.

Realized to its absolute perfection, this commandment shows that MAN IS ONE, one in his essence and multiple in his hypostases. Therefore man, in the image of the Holy Trinity, is a consubstantial and soborny (catholic) being. When love will be realized in all its plenitude, each hypostasis, in virtue of its belonging to the plenitude of the soborny unity, will represent the accomplishment of all humanity, and will be dynamically equal to all humanity, to the ONE and UNIVERSAL MAN, in the image of the Perfect Man – Christ, Who contains within Himself the All Man.<sup>275</sup>

This culminating paragraph, which also works as the conclusion of the first section of the article, represents a miniature summing up of Archim. Sophrony's entire vision. One can already recognize in these early lines the central themes and concepts of his theological work. Already here he makes mention of, and distinguishes between the two principles of Divine Life – the hypostatical principle (or personhood) and the soborny principle (or sobornost, catholicity) – which also become the principles of human existence due to the doctrine of creation in the divine image. These two principles reflect the identity without confusion between each of the Divine Hypostases, but also between the Divine Sobor, the Holy Trinity, and Its Three Persons. The same ontological identity without confusion is then applied on the human level, so that Archim. Sophrony further distinguishes between the soborny being of the Church as One Man – 'in the image of the Holy Trinity, (...) a consubstantial and soborny (catholic) being', 'one in his essence and multiple in his hypostases' – and the multitude of hypostases of this human Sobor. In their eschatological perfection, each of these human Persons 'will represent the accomplishment of all humanity, and will be dynamically equal to all humanity, to the ONE and UNIVERSAL MAN, in the image of the Perfect Man.' Also already present in this short passage are the different manners in which Archim. Sophrony interprets and applies the doctrine of the divine image; depending on what his subject of interest is, the divine prototype is either the Holy Trinity or Christ's Hypostasis. Thus, when he refers to the Church, the ecclesiological image is that of the Holy Trinity; by comparison, when he writes on anthropological themes, he uses Christ as the divine prototype of man. Another aspect of the divine realities which is reflected on the human level is the 'dynamic' quality between the divine Sobor and Its Three Persons; similarly, the same rapport of dynamic equality is projected between the human Sobor, the Church, and the multitude of its hypostasis.

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<sup>275</sup> *Messenger* 5, p. 41.

In conclusion of this section, we have seen that that Archim Sophrony's central theological concepts and ideas are already present in the short length of these eight introductory pages, alongside the seeds of many others. One can already discern, for instance, Archim. Sophrony's understanding of knowledge; the limitation of human reason and a vision of knowledge which is attainable exclusively through revelation are clearly at work throughout these pages.<sup>276</sup> Also, there is already present a clear enough theology of the image and a brief discussion of God as Pure Fact or Pure Act. All these theological threads will find further development in Archim. Sophrony's subsequent work in the decades to come; for now, it is sufficient to underline that there is very little, if anything, which is not already present in these very first pages of his writing career. Such consistency of vision and belief is rare, and one is left with not much to do when following Archim. Sophrony's writings except to observe how these ideas unfold and how they always seem to find a practical application for the ascetic life of the monastic community surrounding the elder.

On the other hand, it is also worthy of note that this consistency implies that by the time Fr Sophrony returned to Paris, or perhaps even earlier, prior to his departure to live as a hermit in the desert of Mount Athos, his theological vision was already completely shaped. If one wanted to identify the sources of this vision, one should look for them sometime before 1947, and definitely

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<sup>276</sup> Apart from the complete disappearance of the original polemical tone of the 1950 version of the article, the most important addition to its 1958 rewrite is a development of these epistemological seeds; as we shall see in Chapter Four, 'Unity of the Church' perfectly expresses the connection Archim. Sophrony sees between experience and what he terms 'existential knowledge', and may, in consequence, be read either as an ecclesiological or an epistemological essay.

not after his return to Paris.<sup>277</sup> This observation will prove particularly useful in what follows, as we shall try to see how ‘Unity of the Church’ has changed over the following decades and what Archim. Sophrony’s reasons for this rewriting were.

## **2. The deleted text: a refinement in Archim. Sophrony’s understanding of *sobornicity***

We have already pointed out that, apart from the introductory part of the original article, the remaining text was entirely left aside and replaced with new content by 1958, when it was republished as ‘Unite de l’Eglise à l’Image de la Sainte Trinite: Triadologie Orthodoxe Comme Principe de l’Eclésiologie’. After having seen what survived this rewriting, let us now take a brief look at what Archim. Sophrony chose to take out in the process, and try to understand his reasons for doing so. The aim of this section is to demonstrate that Archim Sophrony’s decision to delete the text is linked with a refinement of his understanding of *sobornicity*, more precisely of the fundamental difference between Alexis Khomiakov’s social *sobonost* and Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s ontological *sobornost*.

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<sup>277</sup> If we consider Archim. Sophrony’s notes written during his stay on Mount Athos, it is easy to prove that his *theological* vision was already shaped long before his return to Paris. These notes remain unpublished to this day, yet, fortunately, Archim. Sophrony includes several quotes from them during his Talks to the community, and even in the 1958 rewrite of ‘Unity of the Church’. A precise assessment of the chronology of Archim. Sophrony’s theological vision is important because it helps us to identify its sources correctly; if Archim. Sophrony’s theology was already formed in the 1930s and early 1940s, as these notes demonstrate, the whole theory concerning Lossky’s influence on his thought collapses, while the argument of his reception of Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s theology is strengthened. These Athonite notes are also important because they express Archim. Sophrony’s belief in a necessary dogmatic ‘minimum’ for one’s salvation, in perfect accord with Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s dogmatic minimalism. See, for instance, *Rozhdenie*, p. 64, where he writes that ‘Christian faith is founded on two fundamental dogmas: 1) the dogma concerning Divinity in Three Faces – the consubstantial unseparated Trinity; 2) the dogma of two natures and two wills, the Divine and the human, in the one Hypostasis of the incarnate Word.’; see, also, *Rozhdenie*, pp. 68-70; also, *We Shall See Him As He Is*, p. 231, where he ‘sums up’ Christian ‘dogmatic cognition’.

In his description of the original version of the article, Nicholas Sakharov writes, as an aside, that ‘the other three parts of the article are dedicated to questions of contemporary church politics.’<sup>278</sup> Although this is correct, a more detailed account of the content of the remaining two thirds of this ecclesiological essay is necessary in order to understand Archim. Sophrony’s vision of the Church. These lost pages become especially important when we consider that Archim. Sophrony never again returned to matters of inter-ecclesial relations, ecclesial authority, the significance and functioning principles of the institutional church, or the principle of autocephaly. It is also of interest to see who are Archim. Sophrony’s sources, especially since they seem to change from one version to another; the quotations included in the article and the footnotes to the main text will help us identify these sources.

Overall, there are nineteen pages which did not survive the 1958 rewrite. Of these, almost fourteen pages are dedicated to an analysis of contemporary ecclesial subordinationalism and the principle of autocephaly. This part of the article is built on the previous principle of *sobornicity*, which is applied ecclesialogically in order to formulate a definition of autocephaly; like most articles published in *Messenger de l’Exarchat* during those two decades, the main purpose of the whole text is to build a dogmatic argument against the claims of authority made by Constantinople over the Russian Diaspora. As we shall see, Archim. Sophrony is far from being original in his argument; in fact, he uses the classic tactics already employed by the theologians on his side of the controversy, mostly comparisons between Constantinople and the Roman Church, accusations of heresy and a total lack of critical thinking about the ‘orthodoxy’ and the ecclesial position of their own group.

These pages are a typical polemical piece of writing, exhibiting all the rhetorical exaggerations, pathetic tones and critical lack of balance of the genre. As Nicholas Sakharov rightly observes, the article, especially in this polemical section, ‘reflects the influence of current theological debates: many themes are paralleled in contemporary theologians, notably Lossky.’<sup>279</sup> Rather than the theological themes, more striking is the influence of the polemical rhetoric and of the tone of these contemporary debates on Archim. Sophrony’s writing. Also, the text is clearly written with the intention to provide a structured, even scholarly argument, which is again a unique feature of this particular version of the article. In the future, Archim. Sophrony would stay away from scholarly

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<sup>278</sup> *I Love, Therefore I Am*, p. 32.

<sup>279</sup> *I Love, Therefore I Am*, p. 32.

writing, and would purposely defend a more inspired and non-systematic manner of writing.<sup>280</sup> This difference in style is obvious not only when we compare ‘Unity of the Church’ with his other texts, but also when we look comparatively at the two versions of this same article.<sup>281</sup>

Immediately after the introductory part of the article, Archim. Sophrony dedicates two pages to a justification of the polemical argument to follow. There are two important elements in this section. Firstly, we find here for the first time Archim. Sophrony’s understanding of what could be termed

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<sup>280</sup> He does so in many places; see, for instance, his comparisons with the Patristic style of writing in *Letters to Russia*, or his passionate argument against systematic theology, which ‘is not the authentic theology, understood as existential knowledge of God ... Such theology, unfortunately, rather turns the mind and heart of the one who learns from life in God, becoming a philosophy, a scientific discipline, an intellectual equilibristics, radically disfiguring absolutely everything that was given by God in tongues of fire, in an indescribable revelation of Light.’ – *Rozhdenie*, p. 35.

<sup>281</sup> As an example, the 1950 original text includes a footnote to the ‘Athanasian’ Creed, pointing out that although most of the Creed belongs to St Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, ‘certain passages of this Trinitarian and Christological treatise exhibit a perfection and precision which can only be attributed to a later age’ (in *Messenger de l’Exarchat* 5, p. 35, Note (1)). This sort of scholarly footnote, which one could expect from Lossky and the other academic theologians surrounding him, is something totally uncharacteristic of Archim. Sophrony’s later writing style. The same can be said of the entire text, especially in relation to the high number of footnotes and quotations from *contemporary* theologians, another feature which will completely disappear from his following works.

‘dogmatic development.’<sup>282</sup> Secondly, it is interesting to note the people he chooses to reference and quote. The first thing which strikes someone used to Archim. Sophrony’s permanent reference to the Patristic period in his later writings, is their complete absence from these fourteen pages. There is not one single line cited from a Patristic work and hardly any mention of their names, except for a list of people to have suffered in order to protect the dogmatic truth of the Church. The whole discussion over ecclesial authority and autocephaly is kept within its contemporary context and all references and quotations are from modern theologians, the large majority of which are Russian: Schmemmann; Troitsky; Zenkovsky; Tychkewitch etc.

### 3. The Question of Khomiakov

Clearly, the most surprising feature of the original 1950 text is the overwhelming presence of Alexis Khomiakov. Out of all contemporary and Patristic authors referenced in this first version of the article, Khomiakov is the most frequently quoted and referenced theological authority. Khomiakov is referenced five times – twice as ‘the great Khomiakov’ and a third time as ‘the great theologian Khomiakov’. There are also three generous quotations from his work ‘L’Eglise latine et le Protestantisme au point de vue de l’Eglise d’Orient’, one of which is chosen as the concluding paragraph of the entire article.

However, this situation changes abruptly eight years later, when the article is republished in a deeply revised version, with *no* mention of Khomiakov and all references and quotations from his

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<sup>282</sup> This basically means that, while the Church contains in her teaching the fullness of the dogmatic truth at any time in her existence – ‘the fullness of dogmatic life in the Church is never interrupted, never diminished’ (p. 42) – she nevertheless pays particular attention to certain aspects of this teaching depending on the needs and questions of each age, ‘so that it avoids the danger of diminishing the integrity of the truth by one error of detail’ (p. 42). Obviously, the contemporary need is to fight the ‘great danger [which] threatens the dogma concerning the Church precisely within the Orthodox Church’, namely the ‘papal’ claims of authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate over the territories outside the traditional Orthodox countries. Also present here, although more implicitly than explicitly, is Archim. Sophrony’s insistence on ‘the exceptional importance of the dogmatic element for our salvation’ (p. 43); over the following decades, this would become the pivotal link between his dogmatic theology and the pastoral teachings to his monastic community.

work left aside. Even more intriguingly, while the name of ‘the great Khomiakov’ completely disappears, other, less-preeminent names are kept in the 1958 rewrite. The concluding paragraph, a quote from Khomiakov, is also replaced with a different text, this time a quotation from Fr George Florovsky, who was not quoted or referenced even once in the original text.

Although Khomiakov’s name was not the only one to be entirely left aside in the 1958 rewrite, his case is the most difficult to explain. It is relatively easy to understand why most of the other names referenced in this section – such as those of Schmemmann, Tychkewitch, Patriarch Athenagoras, Troitsky, Zenkovsky and others – are left aside in the new version. These people form the very context of the ecclesiastic controversy which prompted Archim. Sophrony to write and publish the article; once the subject of this controversy is no longer the purpose of the article, it is only natural that all references to them should be dropped. Yet this argument does not apply to Khomiakov. Unlike these contemporary authors, he is a nineteenth-century theologian, and was not directly involved in the ongoing polemic. Moreover, Khomiakov could still be relevant to Archim. Sophrony’s argument for a Trinitarian vision of the Church even outside the context of that contemporary controversy, a fact proven by the fact that Archim. Sophrony continued to reference Khomiakov in his later life.<sup>283</sup>

The solution to this puzzle is provided by the fact that, in his editing process, Archim. Sophrony dropped not only the references to Khomiakov himself, but also the ideas which Archim. Sophrony founded on his social understanding of *sobornost*. The significant theological difference between these two texts concerns Archim. Sophrony’s views on the meaning of the local church and on the more general subject of autocephaly. Of course, this evolution of thought is reflected directly in the way Archim. Sophrony uses the work of Alexis Khomiakov, especially his writings on a Trinitarian social vision of the Church.

In conclusion, my understanding is that, once Archim Sophrony found his way out of the ecclesial polemics of the day, he was able to distinguish clearly between Khomiakov’s social *sobornost* and Fr Bulgakov’s ontological *sobornost* and decided that the latter better suits his ecclesiological

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<sup>283</sup> According to Fr Rafail Noica’s commentary in his conference ‘Din ce moarte ne-a izbavit Hristos’ (The death from which Christ saved us’) held in Alba-Iulia, 2005. Fr Rafail Noica was one of Archim. Sophrony’s closest disciples; until the Elder’s death, he was also a member of Archim. Sophrony’s monastery in Tolleshunt Knights.

thought. Once again, this does not mean that Khomiakov is entirely rejected; instead, Archim. Sophrony has the theological subtlety to discern between the two versions of the *sobornost* and to use Khomiakov's theory in relation to historical, social realities, and not *ontological* ones. This initial distinction between two different meanings of *sobornicity* will be further refined by Archim. Sophrony in his future writings. For this reason, one cannot properly address the question of ecclesiological *sobornicity* in his work without a comprehensive understanding of the variety of manners in which he applies the concept of *sobornost*, which is what we shall turn to in what follows.

## II. *Sobornost*: An Anthology of Meanings and their Relevance to Archim Sophrony's Ecclesiological Thinking

As we have seen, the Slavophile theologian Alexis Khomiakov is the most often referenced authority in Archim. Sophrony's first published article, yet by the second version of the paper *all of them* disappear. My opinion is that this decision has very little to do with a shift in Archim. Sophrony's theological thinking, and more to do with understanding that Khomiakov's *social sobornost* was of limited use to his theology.

The most important element of evolution is his departure from a pseudo-Slavophile understanding of the *sobornost* and his complete adherence to Fr Bulgakov's ontological development of the concept. Between the first two versions of the article – the 1950 'Unité de l'Eglise, Image de la Sainte Trinité'<sup>284</sup> and the 1958 'Unité de l'Eglise à l'Image de la Sainte Trinité: Triadologie Orthodoxe Comme Principe de l'Ecclésiologie'<sup>285</sup> – the most important change had already happened, while the variations in the subsequent editions are mostly minor rewrites and matters of translations.

My suggestion is that the disappearance of all references to and quotations from Khomiakov has less to do with cleaning the article of its tones of contemporary polemics and more with the disappearance of another element in Archim. Sophrony's *theological* argument for a Trinitarian understanding of Man and the Church: the principle of autocephaly. In Archim. Sophrony's trinitarian conception of the church, autocephaly is essentially connected with the idea of *sobornost*, more exactly with the social *sobornicity* of Khomiakov, so let us follow the evolution of Archim. Sophrony's own understanding of the *sobornost* and autocephaly, and Khomiakov's relevance to the discussion.

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<sup>284</sup> The first version of the article was published in Russian in *Messenger de l'Exarchat* 2-3 (1950); the French translation we use here followed in *Messenger de l'Exarchat* 5 (1950). We have chosen to use the French version at this point, in order to ease the comparison with the 1958 text, which was only published in French.

<sup>285</sup> Published as an independent study, and also as an article included in *Contacts: Revue bimestrielle des Orthodoxes français* 21-4 (1958).

## Introduction

Although almost entirely neglected in its relation and relevance to Archim. Sophrony's theology<sup>286</sup>, *sobornost* is one of the fundamental concepts that shape his vision. Interconnected with and at times even seemingly synonymous with other key concepts, such as person or Divine image, *sobornost* has somehow escaped the attention it deserves from previous scholars looking at Archim. Sophrony.

In consequence, the first thing one observes when looking at the concept of *sobornost* in the work of Archim. Sophrony is the multitude of ways in which he understands and applies it. Very much like the doctrine of creation according to the Divine image, *sobornost* proves useful as the prototype or the principle behind many other different ideas.<sup>287</sup> Because of the flexibility of the concept and Archim. Sophrony's own creative use of it, any attempt to formulate one single definition of *sobornost*, meant to justify all its various functions, is rendered impossible. A wide collection of diverse concepts, ranging from the likes of autocephaly and local churches, as we have just seen, to

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<sup>286</sup> Nicholas Sakharov addresses *sobornicity* in relation to Archim. Sophrony's theology in his chapter on 'Image and Likeness', especially the section on 'Trinitarian Unity and the Concept of Sobornost', in *I love, Therefore I Am*, pp. 131-33. Archim. Zacharia Zacharou's doctoral thesis and his other books never address the question of *sobornicity*. The number dedicated to Archim. Sophrony by *Buisson Ardent: Cahiers Saint-Silouane L-Athonite* 10 (2004) contains several studies concerning his theology, none of which focuses on *sobornicity*. Similarly, out of the thirty-six papers contributed to the Conference dedicated to Archim. Sophrony's theology, only two approach his use of *sobornicity*: Constantine Scouteris, 'The Trinitarian Theology of Elder Sophrony (The Orthodox Doctrine of the Trinity as the principle of Ecclesiology)', pp. 181-91; and Nicholas Sakharov, 'The Prayer for the Whole World and the Eschatological Perceptions in Elder Sophrony', pp. 511-19. However, they are not studies of *sobornicity* per se; they make no mention of the variety of interpretations and applications *sobornost* has in Archim. Sophrony's work, and are built on the false assumption that *sobornicity* carries only one meaning.

<sup>287</sup> He writes, for instance, that: 'Many believers found spiritual joy discovering the reflection of the 'principle of the Trinity' in created existence, on different levels. Especially blessed is to build the Church "in the image of the Holy Trinity", based on the Revelation concerning "man" – humanity.' *Rozhdenie*, p. 29.

his thoughts regarding Russia, monasticism, pan-humanity or the Church find their theoretical argumentation in one interpretation or another of what a ‘*sobornyy*’ being is. This multitude of *sobornyy* realities highlights the various manners in which Archim. Sophrony understands and applies the concept of *sobornost* in his work; we have already seen how, at times, its meanings differ to the point of becoming contradictory from one sentence to the other.

It becomes essential, therefore, to be able to distinguish between the different interpretations *sobornost* is given in Archim. Sophrony’s theology. Without the ability to make a clear distinction between the different meanings of the *sobornost*, one can easily draw conclusions which not only do not correspond to Archim. Sophrony’s thought, but outrightly oppose it. Furthermore, one also has to be able to link each of these varied interpretations of *sobornost* to the particular concepts it functions as argumentation for. Thus, for instance, we cannot hope to find the *sobornyy* argument for Archim. Sophrony’s theology of the Person by looking at the meaning he applies to *sobornost* in his writings on monasticism or the Russian church.

The roots of the wealth of meanings *sobornost* carries in Archim. Sophrony’s writings are to be found in the long and complicated history the idea of *sobornicity* has in the Russian culture. It is not our intention to present this history here; however, the anthology of meanings and theoretical applications *sobornost* has known throughout Russian history provides us with a very useful tool for identifying the ways in which these meanings and usages are employed (or not) by Archim. Sophrony.

### ***Sobornost* – several initial considerations**

From the start, there are a few background aspects to the emergence and evolution of *sobornost* we need to underline. First, it must be noted that the history of *sobornost*, up to the late twentieth century, is an exclusively Russian process. This reality accounts for two important aspects of Archim. Sophrony’s theology. On the one hand, it becomes easier to understand the influence *sobornost* had on Archim. Sophrony’s thinking and its overwhelming presence in his writing from the very beginning of his theological career. On the other hand, the specifically Russian character of the concept partly explains the common theological language used at the beginning of the last century by theologians who strongly disagree with each other. In an environment which was already

linguistically homogenous, given the general influence of existentialist philosophy, *sobornost* (like *hypostasis*, as well, but for different reasons) helped create a common theological language which often shields very different opinions; the result is a network of inter-references which at times only apply on to the level of the language, but not on to that of their actual meaning.

A second notable characteristic of the history of *sobornost* is that this is *the history of an evolving idea*, rather than a history of terminology. Looking back into Russian history, one cannot identify a chronology of the linguistic notion of ‘*sobornost*’ per se; instead, a chronology of the idea of *sobornost* comes to life. This *soborny* principle knew a long series of various semantic incarnations throughout Russian history, and it is the history of this principle, expressed through several different terms, which concerns us here.<sup>288</sup>

Finally, we have to notice that given the long process of evolution *sobornost* has undergone in Russian history, one can identify changes – some slow and logical, others sudden and unexpected – both in the nature of the *soborny* principle itself, and in *the linguistic forms* it generated. As we shall see, the same variety of *soborny* terms and meanings is present in Archim. Sophrony’s writings, which makes it all the more necessary to draw an outline of these different concepts and their respective usages.

Overall, the *soborny* principle was a coagulating factor in the history of Slavic peoples. A brief chronology of the ways in which it was understood in Russian history and the corresponding manner in which it was employed by Archim. Sophrony will be the focus of the next section of this

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<sup>288</sup> This distinction between *sobornost* as a principle and *sobornost* as a term is present also in Archim. Sophrony’s writings. The very noun allows for this duality of meaning, as the meaning of ‘*sobornost*’ expresses a dynamic reality, rather than a finite one; this explains Archim. Sophrony’s frequent use of the word ‘principle’, in an attempt to distinguish between ‘sobor’ and ‘the principle of the sobor’, the ‘soborny principle’ or ‘sobornost’. Reflecting the evolution of *sobornost* in Russian culture, he sometimes uses the term directly, while other times its presence is only manifested in the reasoning behind the terminology, as the underlying principle of the writing.

chapter. Broadly, *sobornost* has known three main periods of evolution<sup>289</sup>: a political and ethnic period; a social and nationalistic period; and a theological-ontological one. Each of these periods apply the *soborny* principle to different areas of the Russian society and gives birth to specific linguistic terms. Initially, *sobornost* started as ‘Holy Russia’ (the political *sobornost*), then it grew into ‘obshchina’ (the *sobornost* of Khomiakov and 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia), and, after a hugely creative and all-embracing period at the beginning of the twentieth century, it evolved into the ontological *sobornost* of Fr Sergii Bulgakov and Nicolai Berdiaev.

In what follows, we shall read through Archim. Sophrony’s major writings and try to identify if, how and to what purpose he uses these different versions of the *sobornost*. In doing so, we shall clear the way – terminologically and ideologically – for a proper assessment of his ecclesiology.

### **Archim. Sophrony and *Sobornost***

Reading Archim. Sophrony’s work with the Russian history of the concept in mind, one can identify at least five different ways in which he makes use of the *soborny* principle. Some of these are common to most Russian theologians active in Western Europe in the first half of the twentieth century, others are applications of less popular developments which have not found their way into mainstream theology. Interestingly, there are meanings of *sobornost* which cannot be found in his theology, or which are openly rejected, in spite of their huge popularity within Russian theologians then and now.

Before we focus more specifically on each of these *soborny* applications, let us briefly enumerate them for sake of clarity. Firstly, one can identify a highly diluted version of the political and ethnic *soborny* prototypes, in reference to Russia and the Russian Church. Secondly, we have already seen how the influence of Alexis Khomiakov and his version of the *sobornost* are reflected on Archim. Sophrony’s ideas concerning autocephaly and local churches. Thirdly, Khomiakov’s

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<sup>289</sup> In the greater frame of Christian history, the story of the *soborny* principle starts with the Chalcedonian dogmas referring to the Person of Christ and the relationship between Person and Nature in The Holy Trinity. It is not my purpose here to expand on this, but the Chalcedonian context should be kept in mind, as it justifies some of the most striking evolutions the *sobornost* principles have undergone.

*sobornost* is also the influence behind Archim. Sophrony's writings on monasticism as a *soborny* community. Further still, we can identify a rare type of psychological *sobornost*, which also finds its application in his writings on monastic life. Finally, and most importantly, Archim. Sophrony makes use of the ontological layer of *sobornost* developed for the first time by Fr. Sergius Bulgakov and Nikolai Berdiaev at the beginning of the century.

Over the following pages, we hope to demonstrate Archim. Sophrony's great ability to distinguish between the interpretative layers of *sobornost* and to find the proper application of these for one of the topics he addresses in his writings. We shall see how the entire collection of meanings of the concept is reflected in his work, either in a negative way, as in the rejection of the political and ethnical versions of the *sobornost*, or positively, as is the case with the last three *soborny* applications we have listed above.

## **1. *Sobornost* as a Political and Ethnic Concept**

### **In Russian history**

Starting with the fifteenth century, the self-understanding of the Russian people began to take on a much clearer and distinct shape. This was not brought about by a major internal event in their own history. Instead, dramatic political changes of the larger world map created a context to which the Russians merely responded. Up until the seventeenth century, Russians have continued to build and nuance their self-definition on the basis of this hypothesis: they were no longer an 'illuminated' people, a people whose light came from Byzantium and the Orthodox faith of the old empire, but the only heirs of both Byzantium and Israel. Thus, the first application of the *soborny* principle in Russian history had a preponderantly political and ethnic nature.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Historically, this long period can be sub-divided in two phases, matching the shift that occurred in Russian self-consciousness at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the Romanovs came to power. Thus, we can speak of a predominantly political stage, from the fifteenth century up to the reign of Ivan the Terrible, and a more ethnical understanding after the change of dynasties.

The Council in Florence and the fall of Constantinople had changed the balance and the illuminated people discovered itself as the new light-bearer<sup>291</sup>. This affected everything. The Russian were now meant to live the life of the only real Orthodox people, as they had to witness to their faith in front of the world. From now on, it was only through them that salvation remained attainable to this world, and only if they, the Russians, succeeded in their newly-found mission of converting the world to the true Christian faith.<sup>292</sup> Of course, this national self-awareness did not happen at once and, as always, it was not an exclusively theological process. As the centuries went by, politics, sociology and even economics have made their mark on the Russian version of the Third Rome. The same had happened to the previous two Romes, and the utopia of a Byzantine ideal, in which Church and state evolved together in a ‘symphonic’ tandem, was the engine behind the whole Russian society.

So it was only normal, in such a context, that the Russian Tsar should eventually be regarded as the God-sent emperor for the Third Rome, just as the rulers of the previous two Romes. This was nothing more than a simple attempt to adjust the pre-1453 Byzantine system to Russian conditions. Byzantium had fallen, but its mix of theology and politics survived and immigrated to a safer place. The political implications of such a transfer have been present from the very beginning, even to a greater extent than in the Byzantine version. Unlike Byzantium, Russia did not simply inherit the status of ‘Third Rome’, but even more than that for, in contrast with the old Empire, fifteenth-

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<sup>291</sup> The ‘holy’ epithet (with the variation ‘illuminated’) used to describe Russia is to be encountered as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, attesting to its presence in the public consciousness even during the 14<sup>th</sup> century – Michael Cherniavsky, “‘Holy Russia’: A Study in the History of an Idea’, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (Apr., 1958), pp. 617-37 (pp. 619-20).

<sup>292</sup> Not at all by accident, the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century is also the period when the first eschatological ideas appear in Russia; the first Russian ‘end of the world’ date (1492) belongs to this period - Pierre Kovalevsky, ‘Messianisme et Millenarisme russes?’, *Archives de sociologie des religions* 5 (Jan. – Jun., 1958), pp. 47-70 (p. 48).

century Russia was not just a true Orthodox people, but also the only Orthodox people<sup>293</sup>. As the centre of Orthodoxy, Russia had become the heir of Byzantium<sup>294</sup>. As the only free Orthodox people, it had also inherited the status of the chosen people, heir also of Israel. This spiritual inheritance is clearly stated, for example, in Philoteus' letter<sup>295</sup> to the Grand Prince, Basil III<sup>296</sup>; significantly, the future act of recognition of the Russian patriarchate quotes almost verbatim monk Philoteus' letter, referring to the Third Rome and his vision of tsar as universal emperor.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> The reason for this is that, for Orthodox Russia, Byzantium had not fallen once, but twice: historically, but also, and most importantly, dogmatically. The official political fall of Constantinople in 1453 was seen as secondary in importance to its dogmatic fall, which was the 1439 Council of Ferrara-Florence—‘a fact which many Russians interpreted as God’s punishment for its association with the Roman Church’; Vasily Zenkovsky, ‘The Spirit of Russian Orthodoxy’, *Russian Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Jan., 1963), pp. 38-55 (p. 39).

<sup>294</sup> ‘Messianisme et Millenarisme russes?’, p. 47.

<sup>295</sup> Most obviously, the Pskov monk couldn't have written such a letter without the more or less direct support of his hierarchical superiors. More probable is the fact that this spiritual descent of the Russian people from the ancient Palestine was already a well-known and popular belief. As a monk, Philoteus must have been in close contact with a great many number of simple people, Russian peasants who most definitely shared the same vision of their nation.

<sup>296</sup> ‘[I write] to you, the Most bright and most highly-throning Sovereign, Grand Prince, Orthodox Christian tsar and lord of all, reign-holder of the Holy oecumenical and Apostolic Church of God of the Most Holy Virgin... which is shining gloriously instead of the Roman or Constantinopolitan [one]. For the Old Rome fell because of its church’s lack of faith, the Apollinarian heresy; and of the second Rome, the city of Constantine, the pagans broke down the doors of the churches with their axes... And now there is the Holy synodal Apostolic church of the reigning third Rome, of your tsardom, which shines like the sun in its Orthodox Christian faith throughout the whole universe. And that is your realm, pious tsar, as all the empires [tsardoms] of the Orthodox Christian faith have gathered into your single empire... you are the only tsar for Christians in the whole world... Listen and attend, pious tsar, that all Christian empires are gathered in your single one, that two Romes have fallen, and the third one stands, and a fourth one there shall not be.’; ‘Holy Russia’, pp. 619-20.

<sup>297</sup> Zernov, *The Russians and Their Church*, p. 69.

This double inheritance – of both Byzantium and Israel – created a very strong spiritually-supported link between salvation and the Russian political boundary. The Russian Tsar was ‘the Orthodox and Universal Emperor’ and Moscow was the Third Rome<sup>298</sup>; it was only natural that the Russians themselves would soon become the chosen people. As such, a deep feeling of correspondence was created between being a true Christian and being Russian.<sup>299</sup> The key aspect in this equation is the order or its phrasing: ‘being a Christian equals being a Russian’ or, to express it differently: ‘to be a Christian one must be a Russian’.<sup>300</sup> However, once it became obvious that a character like Ivan the Terrible could not possibly be imagined as a God-sent Holy Tsar<sup>301</sup>, it was just as natural to move forward from the ideal of a Holy Tsar to that of a Holy Russia<sup>302</sup>.

As this happened, around the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the next, a change in the essence of the *sobornost* also took place. As the *soborny* principle moved forward to be applied to the Russian people itself, rather than its leader, *sobornost* gained a new ethnic layer to its previous political meaning. Thus, the gradual evolution of the Third Rome image during the fifteenth and

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<sup>298</sup> ‘Holy Russia’, p. 620.

<sup>299</sup> This is a very important point, as the equation will reappear (in a quite different political context) at the beginning of the twentieth century.

<sup>300</sup> The important and defining element here is not the Christian side of the equation, but the Russian one. This is consistent with the larger context in which this equation appeared. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Russians were looking for a self-definition, and they made use of Orthodox history and dogmatics to define themselves. When they equated Russianism with Christianity, fifteenth century Russians have, in fact, reduced the larger notion of Christianity to the lesser and more limited concept of Russianism (or, rather, Slavism).

<sup>301</sup> Ivan the Terrible’s reign was the particular historical moment that marked this change in the nature of the *soborny* principle, but the trend toward a replacement of the tsar with his people (as the locus of Russian holiness) had already been present for some time. The shift from an emphasis on the tsar as the embodiment of holiness to the holiness of the whole of the Russian people had its political motivations, as well; indeed, some historians have seen in the very idea of a ‘Holy Russia’ a deeply anti-tsarist slogan<sup>301</sup>. The idea seems to be confirmed by the fact that the concept is completely absent from all official documents and correspondence, in spite of its presence and usage among the simple people; ‘Holy Russia’, p. 622.

<sup>302</sup> ‘Holy Russia’, p. 621.

sixteenth centuries led to the seventeenth-century ethnic concept of a Slavic Rome, and so the focus shifted toward the complementary concept of a pan-Slavic wholeness<sup>303</sup>.

The Byzantine imperial theology that had been inherited by the Third Rome in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had meant a deification of the state in the person of its Tsar. Starting with the seventeenth century, after the Romanovs took power, the holiness of the Russian state is no longer exclusively located in its leader, but also (and mostly so) in the Russian people itself. The change was also reflected in the linguistic history of the *soborny* principle and, under the Romanovs, ‘Holy Russia’ started to be employed in the official state documents as well<sup>304</sup>.

It is especially important to understand that at that moment in history ‘Holy Russia’ was not a nationalistic concept, but an ethnical one. There was a clear difference between Russia as a separate political state and Russia as the ideal wholeness of all Slavic peoples. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ‘Holy Russia’ referred to the latter, and it meant the *soborny* unity of all Slavs.<sup>305</sup> Russia as the ‘holy land’ is not as much a political, as an ethnical ideal, and so it perfectly parallels the old ideal of the chosen Israel and its ‘holy land’. The ‘Holy Russia’ of the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries is the result of a specifically Slavic ethno-messianism.<sup>306</sup>

### **Relevance to Archim. Sophrony’s ecclesiology**

Not at all surprisingly, the political and ethnical glorification of Russia built around this tradition of thought has been the most popular *soborny* application in Russian culture, with at least traces of it

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<sup>303</sup> ‘Messianisme et Millenarisme russes?’, p. 51.

<sup>304</sup> ‘Holy Russia’, pp. 622 - 623.

<sup>305</sup> Already in the seventeenth century, the distinction between Russia-the-state and Russia-the-Slavic-ideal is so generally accepted that it interferes in inter-state affairs, as is evident from the Moscow-Don relationships, for example; ‘Holy Russia’, pp. 624–625.

<sup>306</sup> Interestingly, this unity of the Slavs into one *soborny* wholeness was not always located on the Russian geographical territory; see ‘Messianisme et Millenarisme russes?’ and George Guins, ‘The Degeneration of ‘Pan-Slavism’, *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Oct., 1948), pp. 50-9.

to be found in the work of the most pre-eminent figures of Russian culture. To some extent, this proto-version of the *sobornost* has found its way also in the work of Archim. Sophrony; however, its influence is minimal, and the whole concept of Holy Russia is consistently and strongly rejected by Archim. Sophrony, rather than embraced. I also claim that there is nothing in Archim.

Sophrony's writings to support the idea that this type of *sobornicity* has any role to play in his understanding of the Church. As I shall try to show briefly over the following pages, he only uses the framework of this fifteenth-century level of the *sobornost* to argue for two very specific and limited purposes: firstly, the general idea that kenosis is a sign of spiritual glorification and, as such, Russia becomes one of God's chosen people through the imposed martyrdom of the Communist persecutions; and secondly, the need to recognize in the elected Russian Patriarch the necessary centre of unity of the newly freed Orthodox Church in Russia.

Before we move on to look at these two ideas into more detail, it should be pointed out that most of the references to Russia, Russian *sobornicity* and the Russian Patriarchate are to be found almost exclusively in his secondary work, mostly letters to friends and family (most of whom were living in Russia, so mentions of the country are natural), biographical notes (which would naturally lead to Russian references given his own nationality) and the spiritual talks he delivered to the monastic community in Essex (many of which are occasioned by visitors from either Russia or another persecuted nations). It is worth keeping these things in mind, as all these works were intended for private use (the talks to the community themselves took place only between the members of the community and, very seldom, particularly close friends of the community) and were definitely not intended for publication – indeed, all of them have been published posthumously.<sup>307</sup> Even so, the references to Russia are comparatively rare and clearly do not occupy a place in the foreground of his theology. If anything, his mentions of Russia are secondary effects of his theology (such as a *soborny* example of Christic kenosis extended to the level of a large community) rather than independent concepts per se.

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<sup>307</sup> At times, Archim. Sophrony clearly indicates that he does not wish for his spoken talks to be published, which is consistent with his extreme attention for the written word; thus, in one of his talks he says that 'perhaps this word will be published in some journal. I myself do not want it in the papers, not even in those of the Patriarchate'; Sophrony Sakharov, *Dukhovnie Besedi*, vol. I, (Palomnik: Essex, 2003), p. 36.

The forms of this nationalistic and ethnic *sobornicity* we can find in Archim. Sophrony are permanently rejected and too sparse and diluted to allow us to use them as principles of his ecclesiological thinking. He has a deep love for Russia as his native country, but this love is strictly and consistently kept within its natural boundaries and should only be looked at in the larger context of his writings against nationalism, phyletism or statism, which occur as early as 1950, in his first published article. When he refers to Russia as the Third Rome, he does so only to reject the concept and to oppose the idea that salvation is restricted within either geographical or ethnical limits.

In Archim. Sophrony's vision, 'the experience of confession and martyrdom'<sup>308</sup> which the Russian Church had during the decades-long persecution of the Communist regime, made manifest, in a *soborny* manner, the self-emptying of Christ. In one of his talks to the community he expresses this idea as follows:

'The Russian Church experienced a special self-emptying in its sufferings for the name of Christ. And this led to the fact that now, before the Russian Church is posed the question of perfection, which follows from the eternal spiritual law: "Plenitude of self-emptying predates plenitude of perfection"'<sup>309</sup>

However, this 'question of perfection' is definitely not an exclusively Russian experience, but it applies to all nations who have known the suffering of martyrdom. In a different place, he asks of his community to 'pray for the whole Orthodox Church: whether in Yugoslavia, in Bulgaria, in Romania, or in Russia, or Greece, or America'.<sup>310</sup> In this example, Archim. Sophrony does not apply *sobornicity* in order to argue for the superiority of the Russian nation or church over any other nation or church; his *sobornicity* is kenotic and it refers to the process which, in certain historical contexts, unites a certain community in a Christ-like suffering and self-emptying.

This is a universal law of the spiritual life, which is not restricted to Russia in the twentieth century, but applies both on a personal and a *soborny* level – be in a particular state, nation, church or even

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<sup>308</sup> *Dukhovnie Besedi*, vol. I, p. 24.

<sup>309</sup> *Dukhovnie Besedi*, vol. I, pp. 24-25.

<sup>310</sup> *Dukhovnie Besedi*, vol. I, p. 35.

monastery. The same law – ‘Plenitude of self-emptying predates plenitude of perfection’ – affects humanity at all times (he also mentions the martyrs of the first centuries) and places. Thus, for instance, he returns to his ideas regarding the *soborny* kenosis of Russia in his talk addressed to visiting clergy from Lebanon, to whom he says that ‘you live the same emptying, the same “kenosis” as in the Russian church’.<sup>311</sup> And, a bit further, he emphasizes that ‘we pray for you in the same spirit we pray for Russia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and all the other countries which suffered ecclesial catastrophes’.<sup>312</sup> In the same talk generated by the Lebanese guests, he refers to the Orthodox Church as ‘ours’, ‘our family’<sup>313</sup>, one in Spirit and belonging to all nations; he never limits Orthodoxy to Russia and never places Russia above the other churches. This is clearly not a case of national or ethnic *sobornost*, but a *soborny* application of kenosis, a collective experience of Christ’s Own kenotic Self-emptying; significantly, every time he talks about this *soborny* experience, he immediately refers to Christ’s example.

Similarly, the respect he shows for Tsar Nikolai and his martyred family is personal and never takes the form of a principle extended to all Russian monarchs. Careful reading of his talks to the community shows that there is also nothing to support the idea that, in a twentieth-century twist of the fifteenth-century concept, Archim. Sophrony replaces the God-chosen Tsar with the Patriarch. Truth be said, apart from the trust he shows in the Divine Providence for the Russian Church, Archim. Sophrony’s arguments for his call to unity around the Russian Patriarch of the time are extremely modest; the words he uses to describe the man are more of a practical, rather than spiritual nature. He sees the Patriarch as a ‘modest man [who] spent decades as one of the closest collaborators of the great patriarch Alexey I, and served throughout the whole patriarchate of the prayerful Pimen’.<sup>314</sup> The reasons for this repeated call to the Russian people to unite around the Patriarch have more to do with the historical context of the time than with a fifteenth-century understanding of *sobornicity*.

It must be remembered that these talks are given shortly after the fall of communism, when the ecclesiastical situation in Russia was very similar to what had happened after the Bolshevik

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<sup>311</sup> *Dukhovnie Besedi*, vol. I, p. 49.

<sup>312</sup> *Dukhovnie Besedi*, vol. I, p. 50.

<sup>313</sup> *Dukhovnie Besedi*, vol. I, p. 50.

<sup>314</sup> *Dukhovnie Besedi*, vol. I, p. 34.

Revolution, earlier that century. In the early 1990s, the Church in Russia was again broken into several distinct factions, and Archim. Sophrony's insistence on unity has more to do with opposing this process of ecclesial disintegrating and the importance of one Orthodox Church united around the Patriarchal figure than with the fifteenth-century idea of a people united around the God-elected Tsar.<sup>315</sup> We can safely conclude, therefore, that political, ethnical or national *sobornicity* had no influence on Archim. Sophrony's theology. Moreover, these interpretations are consistently and repeatedly rejected; the *soborny* aspects of his ecclesiology have more to do with the nineteenth and twentieth century developments of the concept of *sobornost*, to which we now turn.

## 2. *Sobornost* as a Slavophile concept

### In Russian history

And then there followed Peter and his drastic reforms. After its shifts and changes during the three centuries following the Fall of Constantinople, the *soborny* principle and all its semantic products have fallen in oblivion during the whole of the eighteenth century. 'In that age of borrowed classicism'<sup>316</sup>, none of the *soborny*-generated concepts managed to preserve its relevance and they all disappeared from both common and official usage.

The modern history of the *soborny* principle begins in the nineteenth century. First, there was Pushkin and then the Slavophiles of the third and fourth decades of that century.<sup>317</sup> It was through them that *sobornost* found its new incarnations, as varied and specific as the multitude of theologians, politicians, philosophers, journalists and novelists who took up the subject of Russia, Christianity, or Humanity. Although its best and most daring meaning was to be described only in the following century, it was during the nineteenth century that the *soborny* principle seemed to

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<sup>315</sup> See, also Nicholas Sakharov's 'Preface' to *Dukhovnie Besedi*, vol. I, pp. 11-23.

<sup>316</sup> 'Holy Russia', p. 626.

<sup>317</sup> For a study of nineteenth-century Slavophilism and its main characters, see Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1975).

have become both the central interest and the methodology of the Russian intelligentsia. The *soborny* principle was applied as the structuring principle for almost everything, from the unity of the Russians or that of the whole of Slavdom to the psychological life of the individual human being or the unity of the entirety of mankind<sup>318</sup>. As we shall see further on, this could easily be named the century of the *sobornost*, in the sense that it was during this period that the basis for its future development into ecclesiology was built.

Towards the beginning of the eighteenth century, the *soborny* principle had stopped being relevant to a Russian society that seemingly had given up its search for authenticity in favour of a clearer but rather alien Western identity. The last semantic incarnation of the principle before Peter's Reforms had been the ethnic messianism promoting a *soborny* unity of all Slavic people into one nation, a unity that had been geographically located mostly (but not exclusively) in Russia. When it re-emerged, about a century later, it did so precisely from where it had been left, and in almost the same messianic form.<sup>319</sup> This time, though, the Russians no longer imagined a preponderantly ethnical *sobornost*, but one that included a particularly strong nationalistic aspect among many others.

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<sup>318</sup> See Dostoyevsky's Diaries, quoted in 'Holy Russia', pp. 627 ff.

<sup>319</sup> Nationalist and religious messianism was especially prolific during 1835 and 1850, following an increase of national consciousness that had taken place in the twenties but still had not found its complete popular expression. There were several various factors that contributed to this return to the foreground of messianic ideas that had been common in Russian history in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Perhaps the most important exterior reason was the encounter between the young élite of the Moscow intelligentsia with the intellectual élite of nineteenth-century Germany. We know of meetings between some of the most active pro- and anti-Western Russian writers and German philosophers (Schelling, Heine and Hegel among them) from which the Russians borrowed their nationalist messianic thinking. On the other hand, we must not forget that internally, during that century, the Russians faced a return to the central questions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries regarding the meaning of Russia and the essence of the Russian people. To some extent, a reassertion of the same answer they had found four centuries earlier was to be expected—Russia was the holy land and Russians were the chosen people; 'Messianisme et Millenarisme russes?', p. 59.

Obviously, the historical roots of Russian nationalist messianism can easily be traced back through the preceding centuries. Still, pure nationalism only takes a definite shape during the nineteenth century mostly because of the underlying ideological confrontation between Russia, as the representative of the East, and the opposing Western world. Most scholars agree that this confrontation is an exclusive issue of the nineteenth century<sup>320</sup> and that it stands for all the other various nuances of the ideological clash, including the religious one. Ana Siljak rightly and succinctly observes that

‘a transformation in the approach to Russian history and culture occurred in the 1840s and especially in the 1850s, when ... casual references to the variegated nature of Russian national character became unfashionable. A new thinking emerged which equated history with destiny and considered geography the arbiter of a nation’s fate. Russian intellectuals were no longer content to see Russia as a medley of races but rather anguished over Russia’s essential nature: whether it was Eastern or Western, European or Asian. In this sense the Russian dilemma must be understood as essentially modern.’<sup>321</sup>

In an article dealing with messianic and millenarist movements in Russian history, Pierre Kovalevsky distinguishes between the religious messianism of the Slavophiles and the political messianism of the Westernizers. Nevertheless, the central subject of both sides was Russia, not the

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<sup>320</sup> Prior to this identity crisis and the parallel crisis it brought about in the East / West rapports, the Russians had been taken in the past with other identity and superiority conflicts, particularly clashes with their Northern neighbours, the Finns, on a South-North tension axis during the reign of Peter the Great. Even when such tensions had been turned towards the West on previous occasions, the differences and affinities between the two cultures had been much more harmoniously acknowledged and accepted; Ana Siljak, ‘Between East and West: Hegel and the Origins of the Russian Dilemma’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Apr., 2001), pp. 335-358 (pp. 337-339). Of course, there had also been the case when the West was simply enforced upon Russian society in the eighteenth century and it is obvious that the anti-Western reaction of part of the population was brought about precisely by Peter’s abrupt reforms.

<sup>321</sup> ‘Between East and West’, p. 337.

Orthodox Church—Orthodoxy was only a point of disagreement between the two alternative visions of Russia and its future.<sup>322</sup>

In fact, Russia returns to its self-understanding as the only heir to Orthodox Byzantium<sup>323</sup>, a claim that is being used this time against the non-Orthodox West. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Russians defined themselves as the true and only Orthodox people, a definition that was intended to identify them among the other Orthodox nations. This time, it is against the Catholic and Protestant West that Russia had to prove itself and this accounts for the strong polemical nature of the whole intellectual discourse of the nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia. Only naturally, this return to the discourse of previous centuries brought back into the foreground the old pan-slavic ideals. This time, though, pan-slavism was interpreted more as pan-russism, and the Slavophiles of the

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<sup>322</sup> ‘Deux grandes tendances se cristalliseront cependant des le milieu des «annees 40»: la tendance du messianisme religieux et particulierement celle d’un messianisme de l’Eglise Orthodoxe qui traitera des problemes nationaux du point du vue chretien, et la tendance du messianisme areligieux et souvent antireligieux, et en meme temps antitraditionaliste.’, in ‘Messianisme et Millenarisme russes?’, p. 61.

<sup>323</sup> Susanna Soojung Lim, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Summer, 2008), pp. 321-341 (p. 326).

nineteenth century differed greatly from the true Slavophiles of the seventeenth century. More or less openly, they are rather closer to Russophilism than proper Slavophilism.<sup>324</sup>

Khomiakov himself seems more interested in Russia than in Orthodoxy, and it was the glory and greatness of Russia, and not that of Orthodoxy that he proclaimed and protected in writings such as his 1831 ‘Ode sur l’insurrection polonaise’ (*Song on the Polish Insurrection*). It was an answer to the question of the meaning and mission of Russia, and not the meaning and mission of Orthodoxy that he was after. To a very large extent, Khomiakov made use of Orthodox dogmatics and religious

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<sup>324</sup> This particular point proved to be especially difficult to accept by those scholars who have later made use of the basic ideas of nineteenth century Slavophiles. But the truth remains that all of the main Slavophile representatives have taken a nationalistic stand when history asked for their reaction. In spite of many scholarly attempts to argue against this fact, there is nothing except pure Russophilism that can justify some of the writings or actions of the nineteenth-century Slavophiles. Kovalevsky called Khomiakov himself—generally accepted as the leader and among the founders of Slavophilism—‘the leader and founder of Orthodox messianism’. I would suggest that this is also only partially true, and that it may be more appropriate to speak of Russian messianism rather than Orthodox messianism in Khomiakov’s work; ‘Messianisme et Millenarisme russes?’, p. 60. Regarding the Pan-Slavic ideal, see also: ‘Tout en se considerant comme un peuple slave, les russes croyaient que leurs interets etaient beaucoup plus larges et lies aussi bien a l’Europe qu’a l’Asie. Ils estimaient, certes, que la protection des peuples slaves opprimes entrait dans les attributions de la Russie, mais n’impliquait nullement, comme le croyait Georges Krijanitch et quelques panslavistes du XIXe siecle, une federation d’Etats slaves sous l’egide de la Russie. Nous verons par la suite que les soi-disant “slavophiles” etaient plutot des “russophiles” et non des partisans d’une reunion de peuples slaves’, in ‘Messianisme et Millenarisme russes?’, p. 51.

terminology in order to find answers to the contemporary social and political questions surrounding Russia.<sup>325</sup>

A common solution among academics is the idea that neither Khomiakov (nor the rest of the Slavophiles) intentionally promoted a nationalistic enlargement of Russia over the territories of other nations, especially other Slavic peoples.<sup>326</sup> Instead, their ideas have been later perverted and wrongly applied<sup>327</sup>. That may be true to some extent, but that could not have been possible if their writings had not actually supported such an interpretation. It is also true that, given the polemical context in which they developed their ideas, certain tendencies have been emphasized more than they should have, while others have been more or less left aside. Nevertheless, when Khomiakov

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<sup>325</sup> In a very early study of the phenomenon, Spinka was right (even though somewhat harsh) in his observation that ‘Slavophilism united an ardent, emotional patriotism or nationalism with an equally zealous, uncritical valuation of the Russian Orthodox Church, even though there was among them a certain amount of cautious criticism of the excesses of the official ecclesiasticism. To them, a 100 per cent Russianism was indissolubly connected with a zealous profession of the Orthodox tenets, and an ecstatic admiration of the Old-Slavonic cultus ... In other words, Slavophilism represented a religiously sublimized nationalistic movement with a Russian god and Russian cultus quite different from other nationalistic tribal deities.’ Matthew Spinka, ‘The Russian Progressive Religious Thought’, *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 6, No. 6 (Nov., 1926), pp. 597-616 (pp. 603-604).

<sup>326</sup> To be sure, as we have already mentioned above, such kind of nationalistic disfigurations of the pan-slavic ideal are not to be found exclusively in the work of nineteenth-century Slavophiles; the phenomenon is not even restricted to Russian history. More or less, all the other Slavic nations, during the better periods of their history, have attempted or at least desired to unite forcefully the entire Slavdom under their particular reign (‘The Degeneration of “Pan-Slavism”’, pp. 53-54). Bulgarians, Serbians, Czechoslovakians and, especially so, the Poles, have taken turns at trying to enforce themselves upon the others, starting as early as the ninth century and up to the seventeenth, when the Russians had clearly become the absolute superior of all Slavic nations. For a brief account of the fight for supremacy amongst the Slavs between Poland and Russia, see ‘The Degeneration of “Pan-Slavism”’, p. 58.

<sup>327</sup> ‘The Degeneration of “Pan-Slavism”’, pp. 50-51.

poetically prophesizes that ‘the Slavic vultures shall bow before the vulture of the North [Russia]’ there is little space to interpret it otherwise than pure Russophilism.<sup>328</sup>

And yet, parallel to this shred of deformed Russophile pan-slavism<sup>329</sup>, the nineteenth-century *soborny* principle also found more profound and spiritual manifestations. All Slavophile writers had an understanding of Russia as some sort of representative (embodiment) of all humanity<sup>330</sup>. The underlying aspects and nuances of each individual author are, nevertheless, different and specific. Khomiakov’s perspective comes from the parallel he develops between the Jewish and the Russian nations as the chosen messianic people. Constantin Aksakov’s point of view is deeply limiting, as he reduces humanity to Russia—‘The Russian people ... is humanity’—in clear contrast with Dostoyevsky’s belief that ‘to become Russian ... means to become “panhuman” (*vsechelovek*)’<sup>331</sup>. These last two statements are semantically similar but their focus and meaning are radically different. While Aksakov reduces humanity to being Russian, Dostoyevsky argues for an enlargement of being Russian to the point of spiritually including the whole of humanity. The former is concerned with Russia, while the latter’s interest is humanity. These different interests and the perspectives they generate can be followed all through the rest of the nineteenth century and the following one. Eventually, the two threads of thought will separate and evolve independently, and will dominate the political and the theological developments of the twentieth century.

### **Relevance to Archim. Sophrony’s ecclesiology**

As we shall see, the Slavophiles’ developments of the sobornost found two applications in Archim. Sophrony’s theology. On the one hand, we shall look at his thoughts concerning local churches and autocephaly, as reflected in the first version of the ‘Unity of the Church’. However, this is not the only use Archim Sophrony gives to the nineteenth-century interpretation of sobornicity. The second part of this section will analyse how he applies the same concept in his writings concerning

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<sup>328</sup> ‘Messianisme et Millenarisme russes?’, p. 60.

<sup>329</sup> Gogol found the emergence of the phenomenon worthy of its own legend: see ‘The Degeneration of “Pan-Slavism”’, pp. 50-51.

<sup>330</sup> ‘Messianisme et Millenarisme russes?’, pp. 63 ff.

<sup>331</sup> ‘Messianisme et Millenarisme russes?’, pp 64-65.

monasteries and the ideal of monastic life; this is a secondary application of sobornicity, which was suggested a few decades earlier by Fr Sergii Bulgakov.

### **Sobornicity and autocephaly in the 1950 version of ‘Unity of the Church’: a mismatch of ontological and social interpretations of *sobornicity***

The social *sobornost* of the nineteenth century, especially as developed by Alexis Khomiakov, has struck a very sensitive chord with those authors inclined towards a nationalist view of Russia and, implicitly, of the meaning of Orthodoxy. Given Archim. Sophrony’s strict rejection of nationalism and all other forms of social limitations in Orthodox theology, one would expect that Khomiakov’s *sobornost* finds no place in his writings. Surprisingly, in his first ecclesiological article, the 1950 ‘Unity of the Church’, Khomiakov is one of the most frequently quoted and referenced theological authorities. Eight years later, this situation changes abruptly, as the article is republished under a deeply revised version, which contains no mention of either Khomiakov or the ideas founded on his social *sobornost*.

In the 1950 version of ‘Unity of the Church’ Archim. Sophrony sees autocephaly as a historical application (or reflection) of human consubstantiality: ‘the historical forms or principles which reveal to us this image [of the Holy Trinity] [are] the soborny principle and the principle of autocephaly. If we translate these terms on another level, we shall say: the principle of love and equality, that of freedom and consubstantiality. And again, by correlating these terms, we shall have: in the freedom of soborny love and the equality of consubstantiality.’<sup>332</sup> He writes about the autocephalous church as about a miniature version of the whole human nature; we find the same reasoning behind his writings on the monastic life and its purpose. The theological problem is that consubstantiality and humanity (both in its unity as the Church, and in its multiplicity of hypostases) are concepts of ontology, while autocephaly and local churches (or monasteries) are merely historical realities without ontological substantiality. Archim. Sophrony is aware of this difficulty and tries to offer a solution; already in the quoted passage he attempts to create a link between these two ‘levels’: ontology and spirituality. He continues in the same way on the next page, where he tries to connect the ‘spiritual existence’ of humanity with its ‘dogmatic conscience’;

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<sup>332</sup> *Messenger de l’Exarchat* 5, p. 44.

what he does not seem to observe is that reflection or connection between two levels of existence is one thing, while identity is an entirely different matter. He writes that:

‘... dogmatic conscience is organically linked with the entire ensemble of spiritual life. It is impossible to change the smallest thing in our dogmatic conception without changing to the same measure the image of our spiritual existence ... The dogmatic confession of the Church forms an indivisible organic ensemble and it is not allowed to treat separately the different parts of this confession. One deformed detail will influence the whole.’<sup>333</sup>

This idea of a reflection of one’s dogmatic understanding of his or her spiritual life is indeed sustainable and definitely not new; Archim. Sophrony will later reuse it as his main theological argument for his writings on monasticism as a world in miniature. However, the problem is that this is not how he applies it here; he makes a valid point of noting this reflection, but the argument does nothing to support the other link he creates, that between ecclesial autocephaly and human consubstantiality. The theological problem is that Archim. Sophrony builds his argument on a correlation between two different levels of existence: one belongs to ontology; the other merely belongs to historical ‘economy’. This confusion between ontology and history comes from a mix-up between two different meanings of the concept of *sobornost*. On the one hand, we have Khomiakov’s nineteenth-century social *sobornost*, where the unity of the Holy Trinity is used as a foundation for social (and national) unity; on the other, we have Bulgakov’s (and also Berdiaev’s) twentieth development of the ontologic layer of *sobornost*, which argues for the unity (and oneness) of the whole human race.

He continues his treatment of the subject by looking at the distinction between nationalism and autocephaly. He uses ample quotations from Basil Zenkovsky and Alexander Schmemmann, to argue that both these representatives of the Russian Diaspora under the authority of Constantinople ‘by confusing the idea of “autocephaly” with that of “nationalism”, in order to reject both of them in the name of “universalism”, they destroy the very principle of the structure of the Universal Church’<sup>334</sup>.

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<sup>333</sup> *Messenger de l’Exarchat* 5, pp. 44-5.

<sup>334</sup> *Messenger de l’Exarchat* 5, p. 55.

While the observation of the distinction between nationalism and autocephaly<sup>335</sup> is perfectly valid, Archim. Sophrony clearly minimizes the danger of nationalism, even by his own standards; in his later writings, nationalism becomes an ‘animal problem’, as un-natural as distinctions based on race.<sup>336</sup> Also, he does not observe that the same description he applies to nationalism – ‘an accidental detail of history’<sup>337</sup> – could easily be applied to autocephaly as well<sup>338</sup>. Both concepts lack ontologic reality and belong exclusively to historical time, and yet, while nationalism remains ‘an accidental detail of history’, autocephaly is linked with ontological concepts like *sobornost* and consubstantiality with no theological justification or further clarification of the difference.

On the last two pages of the section of the article dedicated to the inter-ecclesial polemics concerning the Patriarchate of Constantinople, Archim. Sophrony gives us his definition of autocephaly. In fact, reflecting the confusion between the two meanings of *sobornost* applied to the subject, we are given two definitions: one which is focused on the idea that all local churches are

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<sup>335</sup> From his discussion on nationalism, Archim. Sophrony moves on to draw ‘a history’ of the fight led by the Ecumenical Patriarchate against autocephaly. ‘The fight against this principle is in the nature of all papism’ (‘Messenger’ 5, 1950, p.56); the opposition against autocephaly is a common trait of the first Rome and the ‘neo-papists’ of Constantinople, the self-proclaimed second Rome. By comparison to these dogmatic ‘deformations’, Orthodoxy recognizes and preserves the principle of autocephaly as one of its vital elements, one which Archim. Sophrony describes as ‘not only the natural form of the life of the Church, to which it is essentially proper, but also the indispensable condition for guarding faithfully the tradition of the truth and the paths which lead to the knowledge of this truth.’; *Messenger de l’Exarchat* 5, pp. 57-8.

<sup>336</sup> ‘The world continues to live in the charmed circle of animal problems: economical problems, problems of class, of nationality, of race, and many others alike’ – *Rozhdenie*, p. 45. See, also, Nicolas Sakharov: ‘Por saint Silouane et pour le Pere Sophrony, le nationalisme suscite l’horreur: le nationalisme n’est rien de moins qu’une anti-Pentecote. Etre nationaliste, c’est defaire l’oeuvre d’unite que le Saint-Esprit cherche a accomplir.’ in Nicolas Sakharov, ‘Saint Silouane: Sur le Saint-Esprit’, *Buisson Ardent* 18 (2012), pp. 36-55 (p. 54).

<sup>337</sup> *Messenger de l’Exarchat* 5, p. 55.

<sup>338</sup> ‘The autocephaly of local Churches is neither historically nor spiritually the result of elements which are foreign to the Church, such as philetism, nationalism, statism or politics.’ *Messenger de l’Exarchat* 5, p. 58.

the possessors of the wholeness of grace<sup>339</sup>, and one built around the concept of consubstantiality of the human race, to which we shall now look a bit closer. This definition reads as follows:

‘The true meaning contained by the term “autocephaly” is the Orthodox conception of the consubstantiality of the Church, corresponding to the consubstantiality of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, which excludes Tertullian’s stoical idea regarding the divisibility of Substance into unequal parts.’ And again: ‘The principle of the autocephaly of local Churches teaches us their equality in dignity according to the image of the Divine Persons, and in its final realization it expresses our common hope of seeing not only all local Churches, but also each of Its members, all human person-hypostasis as the beholders of the whole soborny plenitude of the life of the Church, in the image of the Holy Trinity, in Which each Hypostasis possesses the complete absolute plenitude of the Divine Being; and that not through the exclusion or absorption of other Persons-Hypostases, but through abiding in the plenitude of the unity of Substance.’<sup>340</sup>

What we see is an argument for the local autocephalous church by appealing to the consubstantiality of the Church as a whole. The idea of consubstantiality within the Church is built on one of Archim. Sophrony’s interpretations of the doctrine of creation we looked at in the previous chapter – the Church is the image of the Holy Trinity, which means that the type of relationship which exists between the Divine Persons is reflected onto humanity as well. Therefore, since in the Holy Trinity ‘each Hypostasis possesses the complete absolute plenitude of the Divine

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<sup>339</sup> ‘The true meaning of this term [autocephaly] is the affirmation of the fact that the wholeness of ecclesiastic life is proper to any place where there is a Christian community which has an integral sacerdotium (Council of Bishops) and which guards the dogmatic teaching in its incorruptibility, and also the Tradition of the Soborny (Universal) Orthodox Church ... We see, therefore, that the principle of autocephaly is the historical expression of a conscience profoundly proper to the Church of the knowledge that grace is not diminished in any place.’ And further: ‘The principle of autocephaly expresses the conviction that the Soborny Church in each place appears in the plenitude of grace which is conferred onto It, and by the force of this wholeness of gifts, It is everywhere the One and Soborny Church. The principle of autocephaly teaches us that, in the Church, there is no place, no title, no race which has superiority in either power or doctrine over other places or other peoples.’ *Messenger de l’Exarchat* 5, p. 58.

<sup>340</sup> *Messenger de l’Exarchat* 5, p. 58.

Being', it follows that we are 'all human person-hypostases as the beholders of the whole soborny plenitude of the life of the Church, in the image of the Holy Trinity'. So far, Archim. Sophrony's argument is perfectly valid and is supported by the numerous Scriptural quotations he offers in the previous pages of the article. Although never mentioned by name, Bulgakov's theological influence is obvious here, just as it sometimes slips into Archim. Sophrony's ideas regarding the institutional church and her organization<sup>341</sup>.

The difficulty is that a local church is not a human being; in other words, a local church, even one which 'has an integral sacerdotium (Council of Bishops) and which guards the dogmatic teaching in its incorruptibility, and also the Tradition of the Soborny (Universal) Orthodox Church' is not a person-hypostasis. A local church is group of hypostases, a miniature social institutional-type (not ontological, that is) *sobor* within the living ontological-type of the pan-human *Sobor*. Unlike human hypostases and the Church, a local church does not have an ontological foundation, and it remains an exclusively historical reality; eschatologically, local churches simply do not exist.<sup>342</sup>

Paradoxically, Archim. Sophrony's manner of defining autocephaly by referring to the consubstantiality of the human nature introduces a new type of fragmentation of this nature, which does not exist in the Prototype of the Church, the Holy Trinity. The Trinitarian model presents us with the image of a *Sobor* which implies a certain type of co-existence of all its Members, all its Hypostases, a point which Archim. Sophrony correctly makes when he connects ecclesiology with anthropology: 'all human person-hypostases [are] the beholders of the whole *soborny* plenitude of the life of the Church, in the image of the Holy Trinity, in Which each Hypostasis possesses the complete absolute plenitude of the Divine Being'. However, when speaking of the

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<sup>341</sup> See, for instance, the similar vision the two theologians have regarding the relationship between autocephaly and each diocese. In a perfect reflection of Bulgakov's own vision, Archim. Sophrony writes that 'in the ancient Church, each Christian community was, in fact, autocephalous. History shows us that on the territory of the same state there can coexist several autocephalous churches' *Messenger de l'Exarchat* 5, pp. 58-9.

<sup>342</sup> As we shall see a bit further, starting from Khomiakov's social *sobornost*, Prince Eugene Trubetskoi worked out the 'soborny theory of man's consciousness', which is used by Archim. Sophrony as a secondary application of the *soborny* principle, mostly in relation to the monastic life, although it could be easily extended to other groups, as well.

‘CONSUBSTANTIALITY ... of the local Churches’<sup>343</sup> Archim. Sophrony seems to lose sight of the Trinitarian model, in which there is no other *soborny* being except that of all Three Divine Persons; no other combination of these Three Persons exists as a *sobor* – thus, for instance, the Father and the Son do not create a *sobor* without the Holy Spirit. In the same manner, the Church is the *soborny* being of the whole multitude of human hypostases (‘from the first Adam to the last born’ as Saint Silouan expresses it). No group or ‘selection’ of these hypostases, according to no criterion – territory, nationality, life-style (monastic or lay) – has ontological reality.

Dogmatic conscience and equality in dignity are entirely different things from consubstantiality and ontological *sobornicity*. A local church is in no way an ontological *sobornost*, although it can be defined as a social *sobornost*. Archim. Sophrony’s confusion comes from the fact that he tries to argue for Bulgakov’s ontological understanding of the *sobornost* with the arguments used a century before by Khomiakov to support his own social vision of the *sobornost*. For instance, after his definitions of autocephaly through consubstantiality and ontological *sobornicity*, which clearly descend from Fr. Bulgakov’s theology, Archim. Sophrony points directly to Khomiakov, not Bulgakov. In fact, Archim. Sophrony’s understanding of autocephaly creates a new sort of being, one which takes certain hypostatical attributes (such as consubstantiality) and others specific to *sobors* (such as being formed of a number of other hypostases). The local church becomes thus a sort of in-between being, pseudo-hypostatical in rapport with the Church, and pseudo-*soborny* in relation to its own hypostases.

The Human Being, according to the image of the Holy Trinity, can only know three moments of existence: *soborny* (the Church), hypostatical (each human Person) and energetic or dynamic (the Divine Life experienced in a creaturely manner); these distinctions between the human moments of existence are not present in the 1950 original text of the ‘Unity of the Church’, but they become the backbone of the future versions of the article. Not at all accidentally, these clarifications will lead to the abandonment of any ontological argument for the existence of the local church.

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<sup>343</sup> ‘We believe to have clearly demonstrated that in the absence of the principle of autocephaly, that is to say without confessing the CONSUBSTANTIALITY AND EQUALITY IN DIGNITY of the local Churches, and of all Episcopate in general, the true sobornicity of the Church, which is in the image of the Sobornicity of the Divine Being, disappears because of this ... By dismissing the FREEDOM OF THE CONSUBSTANTIAL SOBORNICITY AND EQUALITY IN DIGNITY, we shall inevitably lose the path to the knowledge of the Truth.’ *Messenger de l’Exarchat* 5, p. 59.

In the subsequent versions of 'Unity of the Church' the concepts of autocephaly and principle of autocephaly totally disappear and are replaced with *sobor* and the *soborny* principle. This reflects Archim. Sophrony's real theological interest, which is the meeting ground between ecclesiology and anthropology, a place where he can only operate with ontological terms, such as hypostasis and *sobor*, as defined by Bulgakov at the beginning of the twentieth century. Because of the inherent limitations of autocephaly, a local church cannot operate as an ontological *sobor*, just as it cannot be treated as a hypostasis; for these reasons, the entire question of ecclesial authority and local churches is dropped by Archim. Sophrony from his future writings. This will be a definite transition of his work from a theology of economy, concerned with contemporary questions and polemics, to a theology of ontology, whose only subjects are the Church and Man, in their relation with Divinity.

### **Monastic *Sobornost*: Fr Sergii Bulgakov's use of Khomiakov's social *sobornost***

This clarification of the meanings and the theoretical applications appropriate for each of the various types of *sobornost*, and the definite transition from Khomiakov's social *sobornicity* to the ontological *sobornost* of Fr. Bulgakov also influence Archim. Sophrony's future writings on monastic life. The disappearance of all quotations and references to Khomiakov from Archim. Sophrony's article is the immediate and visible effect of his understanding that the theoretical prototype of the social *sobornost* does not express his universalist vision concerning the Church and the human being. The central claim of the article is proven wrong: historic churches cannot reflect the Divine Ontology, they merely follow Khomiakov's model of social *sobornicity*.

The same *soborny* model applies to monastic life. His writings on local churches and monasteries are perfect examples of how Archim. Sophrony makes use of Khomiakov's *soborny* prototype; what changes is that he no longer applies the model to the Universal Church – for that, as we shall see a bit further, he turns to Fr. Bulgakov's ontological *sobornost*. However, his statements regarding the fullness of the dogmatic conscience and moral life<sup>344</sup> remain valid both for local churches and for

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<sup>344</sup> Particularly relevant for the moral implications of *sobornicity* is Metropolitan Antoine Khrapovitsky, who is quoted by Archim. Sophrony in the 1950 version of 'Unity of the Church' and remains important to him throughout his entire career; see Nicholas Sakharov, *I Love, Therefore I Am*, pp. 125-26.

monasteries. These are historical expressions of ontological realities, to which one can apply moral codes, principles of dogmatic consciousness, organisational and disciplinary rules and so on.

I want to make it clear that, although Archim. Sophrony spends a great deal of time writing about monastic life and linking it to ontological concepts such as consubstantiality, All-Adam and Divine Life, he never attempts to re-articulate the argument behind autocephaly and local churches in relation to monasteries. There is only one other application of the *soborny* framework which he uses specifically in relation to monastic life, drawn from the ‘soborny theory of man’s consciousness’ developed by Prince Eugene Trubetskoi. Apart from this, everything he writes about monastic life and its purpose is the same he has to write about the life and purpose of any other human being, monastic or not. The difference is that, in comparison to how he treats local churches, he rarely refers to monasteries as ‘groups’ of people, which prevents him from repeating the problems he had to deal with in relation to autocephaly. As we shall immediately see, when he does refer to the monastery as a group – ‘our small family’ – he only does so to express Trubetskoi’s *soborny* consciousness, never to talk about the universalism of human consubstantiality. These ontological ideas, even when they are used in relation to monasticism, are in reality expressions of Archim. Sophrony’s general theology of Personhood; the monk, like any other human being, is called to become a Person, by means of hypostatizing (actualization of) the whole human nature. There is no difference between the purpose of monastic life and the life of any lay human being, except perhaps, that monasteries are meant to offer a more appropriate environment for the fulfilment of this common purpose.

It has also been noted<sup>345</sup> that the *soborny* framework used by Archim. Sophrony for his monastic writings is taken from Fr. Bulgakov’s idea<sup>346</sup> that monastic life is built around the Trinitarian model put forward by St Sergius of Radonezh and his decision to dedicate his Cathedral to the Holy Trinity; this particular idea of Fr. Bulgakov proved particularly fertile, being adopted and developed by a number of theologians and monastic writers. However, it must be clarified that, although Fr. Bulgakov is among the first to use *sobornost* as an ontological concept, when he refers to the monastic life, he limits himself to the social meaning of the notion; here, he uses the primary meaning of the *sobornost* – ‘to gather together’ – and its moral, psychological or disciplinary applications.

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<sup>345</sup> See *I Love, Therefore I Am*, pp. 127-29.

<sup>346</sup> Sergii Bulgakov, ‘St Sergius’ Testament to Russian Theology’, Put’ 5 (1926).

### 3. *Sobornost* as a Psychological Concept

#### In Russian history

In the complex history of the *sobornost* concept, Vladimir Soloviov<sup>347</sup> is the main link between the preponderantly social (nationalistic, even) ‘Russian *sobornost*’ and the more theologically-centred ‘universal *sobornost*’ of the twentieth century. Soloviov ‘has affinities both with the Slavophiles and Dostoevsky, but he is too thoroughly religious to identify himself with a movement which is primarily nationalistic in character.’<sup>348</sup> The focus of Soloviov’s philosophy is neither Russia, nor exclusively Orthodoxy, but an intermediary ‘pan-Christian *sobornost*’. His own controversial decision to receive communion in the Catholic Church—while not breaking from the Orthodox Church—was an expression of his search for the long-lost *sobornyy* unity of Christianity.<sup>349</sup> To that date, only Dostoyevsky’s ‘panhumanism’ is more daring and closer to the twentieth-century ‘universal *sobornost*’ than Soloviov’s ‘pan-Cristianity’. It was during the following century that Soloviov’s ‘theandric world’ would prove its deep influence on the Sophiological theology of

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<sup>347</sup> According to Berdiaev, Soloviov considered himself the ‘direct descendent’ of Khomiakov; Francis Poulin, ‘Vladimir Solov’ev’s *Rossia i vselenskaia tserkov*’, ‘Early Slavophilism’s Pneumatic Spirit, and the Pauline Prophet’, *Russian Review*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Oct., 1993), pp. 528-39 (p. 535).

<sup>348</sup> ‘The Russian Progressive Religious Thought’, p. 607.

<sup>349</sup> Soloviov was not interested in changing sides (so to say), he did not want to make a choice between two separate options, but precisely to link them and to mediate a return to the unity of the two. According to him ‘the ideal church must comprise not only the orthodox catholic tenets, but also a single, corporate, unified ecclesiastical organization and rule; in other words, it must be a synthesis of the various fundamental principles of all historical Christian communions. This conviction made Soloviov the chief exponent of the idea of church union.’; ‘The Russian Progressive Religious Thought’, p. 610.

Fathers Florensky and Bulgakov<sup>350</sup>, built on their treatment of *sobornost* as a concept of ontology.<sup>351</sup>

Apart from Florensky and Bulgakov, another ideological thread that grew from Soloviov's work was that of 'his chief modern disciple'<sup>352</sup>, Prince Eugene Trubetskoi. Rather than applying Soloviov's *soborny* vision to the Christian world or to the whole humanity, Trubetskoi worked out the idea of a psychological *sobornost* and developed through his work a so-called '*soborny* theory of man's consciousness'. According to Vasily Zenkovsky:

Prince Serge Trubetskoi's theory of *sobornaya*, or the congregational nature of man's consciousness, is its [the notion of *sobornost*] most remarkable derivation. According to Trubetskoi, our conscience is not personal because it contains many elements which are not *from us* but only *in us*. It is also not impersonal because it is part of the personality. Therefore, the conscience is *supra-personal*, *it binds us with all men*. The logical operations of the mind and the faculty of moral judgments are common to all men. Thus all men, all humanity, are in a spiritual unity. Man's personality is the expression of his originality, and yet each element of personality is itself not individual because each man had much in common with his fellow-man.<sup>353</sup>

### **Relevance to Archim. Sophrony's ecclesiology**

This is an important and original use of the *soborny* principle, which seems to have been picked up by Archim. Sophrony and used specifically in relation to monastic life. For him, the monastery is a

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<sup>350</sup> Lossky, for instance, makes the same connection and places the work of Berdiaev and Frs Florenskii and Bulgakov in direct descent from Soloviov's theology – 'The Russian Progressive Religious Thought', p. 614, note 27.

<sup>351</sup> It is an intriguing paradox how, in the century to follow, the central ideas of the Slavophile authors have evolved so that eventually they could nourish both the ideology of the communist USSR and that of the Russian intelligentsia in exile. 'The Degeneration of "Pan-Slavism"', p. 50.

<sup>352</sup> 'The Russian Progressive Religious Thought', pp. 612-14.

<sup>353</sup> 'The Spirit of Russian Orthodoxy', p. 44.

miniature version of the entirety of humanity, a community bringing together ‘people coming in different countries, speaking different languages’<sup>354</sup>, but whose purpose is to overcome all these differences and reunite the broken pieces of the human nature. The psychology of this micro-humanity allows one to enter the psychology of the All-Adam, and learning to love one’s small community reflects on the ability to love the entire human race; in one of his spiritual talks, he writes:

Life in community teaches you that, through obedience, one begins to enter the psychology of others. And so, by learning how to live with one sister N, or sister NN, you will have learned to live with millions of persons who are alike them, because among the billions of people on Earth, there are many like them.<sup>355</sup>

‘This thought ... the foundation of our monastery’ is built on the words of St Paul’s second epistle to the Corinthians and is used by Archim. Sophrony as his strongest argument against all limitations imposed on Christianity: nation, race or gender. The whole humanity – from the first Adam to the last one to be born’ – is present in the micro-humanity of the monastic community. At places, this argument it further developed into a parallel monastic life and the entire cosmic life:

The entire cosmic life, in all its forms of manifestation, is but one common [*soborny*] being [existence – *fiintare*], in various degrees of perfection. And we notice in the cosmic being [*fiintare*] endless degrees of perfection ... as also in monasticism ... there are various degrees of perfection in its various manifestations.<sup>356</sup>

So far, we have seen how the nineteenth century has seen several different handlings of the *soborny* principle, as various as the focal interests of each individual writer. And yet, the same principle has generated and is the underlying connection between such diverse concepts as Kireevskii’s ‘*tsel’nost*’, Khomiakov’s ‘*sobornost*’, Soloviev’s pan-Christianity, ‘*vseyedinstvo*’ or divinely inspired ‘*narod*’, Dostoyevsky’s ‘pan-humanity’ and Trubetskoi’s ‘*soborny* consciousness’—all

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<sup>354</sup> *Dukhovnie Besedi*, Vol. I, p. 54.

<sup>355</sup> *Dukhovnie Besedi*, Vol. I, p. 57.

<sup>356</sup> *Dukhovnie Besedi*, Vol. I, pp. 28-9.

these notions depict ‘a similar, all-unifying form of the Pauline Spirit within the Church.’<sup>357</sup> For some scholars, this multitude of concepts and their generating *soborny* principle, go as early as the first Christian century and are, in fact, political, social and theological derivatives of St Paul’s theology.<sup>358</sup> This brings us close to the final version of the *soborny* theology, the twentieth-century ontological *sobornost* developed especially in the works of Frs Florensky and Bulgakov and those of Nikolai Berdiaev. For our thesis, the writings of Fr Bulgakov are especially important, for their influence and relevance in relation to Archim. Sophrony’s own applications of the concept.

#### **4. Sobornost as an Ontological Concept. Fr. Sergii Bulgakov**

##### **In Russian history**

As one of the central concepts of Russian Orthodoxy, *sobornost* is both a highly useful theological tool and also a very complex and multi-layered one in terms of its meanings. We have already seen that the concept itself has a long history behind it and has known in its evolution a series of various definitions. However, although this evolution of meaning takes the form of a chronological thread of interpretations, the new insights have not excluded previous ones, but found ways of coexisting in the work of contemporary theologians. In the case of most Russian theologians contemporary with Archim. Sophrony, almost all these multiple meanings of the concept of *sobornost* find their

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<sup>357</sup> ‘Vladimir Solov’ev’s *Rossiia i vseleenskaia tserkov*, Early Slavophilism’s Pneumatic Spirit, and the Pauline Prophet’, pp. 533-34.

<sup>358</sup> Francis Poulin notes that Soloviov’s conception ‘proceeds in part from a Russian religious-philosophical tradition with an inherent Pauline character, a tradition which can be found in the works of two of Soloviov’s predecessors, A. S. Khomiakov and I. V. Kireevskii. Sergii Bulgakov once noted that “the soul of Orthodoxy is ‘sobornost’ according to the perfect definition of Khomiakov.” One might, however, declare that the soul of Khomiakov’s *sobornost* is the spirit found in the Pauline Epistles; after all, both seek to depict the Church as an “organic whole”—a real and organic union subsumed into a whole, much like the parts of an organic, living body.’; ‘Vladimir Solov’ev’s *Rossiia i vseleenskaia tserkov*’, Early Slavophilism’s Pneumatic Spirit, and the Pauline Prophet’, pp. 533-34.

way into the writings of the same author; the fact that some of these meanings are simply contradictory often leads to theological ambiguity and even confusion.

The innate tension between the extreme potentialities of the original *soborny* ideal – ‘Holy Russia’ – has survived and can be identified in the Russian political and cultural discourse from the fifteenth century onwards. It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that the problem was to find a solution, as the 1917 Revolution brought about the migration of many of the Russian intelligentsia to more distant and safer places. In the end, Paris proved to be the hub of the best White Russian cultural and theological thinkers. Some of these theologians built on the legacy of the earlier Russian writers, philosophers and theologians, and widened the subject matter to which the *sobornost* principle was applied to its fullest potential.

Once out of Russia, a whole new series of questions faced these theologians. The context in which they lived was also profoundly different, and the unmediated experience of the Western society marked the typology of questions they addressed in their writings. At the same time, though, the solutions they offered came from a deeply *soborny* manner of thinking, rooted in the writings of nineteenth-century Slavophile writers and, especially so, in direct descent from Vladimir Soloviov’s work<sup>359</sup>. This was, in fact, a first attempt to apply the specifically Russian *soborny* methodology in order to address the wider issues of Western society.<sup>360</sup> This is the main reason for which some of the most important twentieth-century Russian theologians (Fr Pavel Florensky and Fr Sergii Bulgakov) developed a sophiological, universal type of theology. The object of their theology was no longer limited to either the essence of Russia (or Slavdom), nor the originality of Russian

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<sup>359</sup> Soloviov developed the *sobornost* into what was to become one of Bulgakov’s own central themes – *bogochelovechestvo* (Godmanhood). Overall, reactions to Soloviov’s philosophical work proved of tremendous importance to Russian and world culture, as they generated radical and highly seminal pro- and anti- attitudes to it.

<sup>360</sup> This also refers to some other theoretical consequences of *sobornost*, as for instance the Slavophiles’ understanding of knowledge. Thus, following the same line of Pauline theology, they also consider the possibility of knowledge of the *soborny* unity of the subject of knowledge and have a deeply pneumatic gnoseology. This same perspective will also be inherited and further developed by the entire twentieth-century theology; see ‘Vladimir Solov’ev’s *Rossia i vselenskaia tserkov*’, ‘Early Slavophilism’s Pneumatic Spirit, and the Pauline Prophet’, pp. 534-36.

Orthodoxy. Instead, they focused on the whole of Christianity and, further still, on the whole human race, while maintaining their inherited *soborny* methodology.

This interpretation was in fact a development of the theology of previous late-nineteenth-century writers<sup>361</sup>, the likes of Khomiakov, Dostoyevsky and Soloviov. The focus of the new theologians who embraced their *soborny* theology – Fr Florensky and Fr Bulgakov, especially – was no longer Russia, but Christianity. Implicitly, their understanding of *sobornost* no longer expresses the wholeness of a geographic entity (as did Holy Russia) nor that of an ethnic (Holy Slavdom), social (*obshchina*) or psychological one (*soborny* consciousness of humanity). Starting with their writings, the *soborny* principle became an ontological concept and once again returned to its proper area of applicability, that of theology.

Commenting on the split in Russian theology in the first half of last century, which created the so-called ‘Russian school’ and the ‘Neopatristic school’, Rowan Williams identifies the reason for the break in these theologians’ different attitudes to Khomiakov, Slavophilism and Soloviev. On the one hand, he writes, there were ‘those who sought to rework Soloviev’s themes in more acceptable form’, among which Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov was the central figure; on the other hand, a ‘traditionalist’ return to patristic sources was already present, mainly through the works of Vladimir Lossky and the ‘deeply Hellenic Florovsky’<sup>362</sup>. However, these different attitudes towards Slavophilism are a rather simplistic way to account for the different theological factions that formed at the beginning of the nineteenth century. For once, none of the Slavophiles would have embarked on an all-embracing, beyond-nationalism project such as Fr Bulgakov’s Sophiology (paradoxically, Neopatristic writers are closer to the old Slavophiles in their general attitude to the world). Fr Bulgakov is more of a ‘Westerner’ in his understanding of Orthodoxy, while making extensive use of Slavophile terminology and philosophy. On the other hand, neither Bulgakov, nor the Neopatristic thinkers ‘fit’ anymore into pre-Revolutionary philosophical movements, as their

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<sup>361</sup> Yet, overall, nineteenth-century Russian nationalists have done a huge deal of damage to the Russian entity in the long run. By defining Russia in a *soborny* manner, they had expanded the meaning of Russia to that of Christianity. However, in doing so, they have lost the lesser reality of a Russian being in the endless entity of a Christian one.

<sup>362</sup> Williams, *Eastern Orthodox Theology*, p. 499.

theology has been written, for its largest part, in the context of and in reaction to their new immigrant status.<sup>363</sup>

In contrast with Williams' debatable account for the break in Russian theology, Paul Valliere rightly observes that the true reason is to be found in the different understandings these theologians had of the relationship between Orthodoxy and the world, and the role and responsibility of the Orthodox Church in the salvation of the whole world. These different positions have more to do with the Church in her newly-found identity as an immigrant institution in the West, than with the recent past of this Orthodox Church in her former home-country. In *Modern Russian Theology*, Valliere rallies with Gachev in his choice to

Read Bulgakov's sophiology<sup>364</sup> in terms of the existential concerns that motivated it ... Contrasting Bulgakov with the aristocratic Berdiaev, Gachev sees Bulgakov as concerned above all with sanctifying the earth and walking humbly with his God in everyday life<sup>365</sup>.

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<sup>363</sup> For more on the philosophical and theological background of early-twentieth-century Russian theology, see also O'Leary, Paul Patrick, *The Triune Church: a Study in the Ecclesiology of A.S. Xomjakov* (Dominican Publications, Dublin, 1982). The distinction is also noted by Paul Valliere, based on a 1903 essay Bulgakov wrote on *Soloviev's Offer To the Contemporary Mind*, in Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov – Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 2000), pp. 239 – 240.

<sup>364</sup> For an excellent argument that Bulgakov's theological system cannot be conceived without Sophiology, and that Sophiology is 'not an accidental feature of his theology, but the heart of the matter' (p. 190) see Paul Valliere, *Sophiology as Dialogue of Orthodoxy with Modern Civilization*, in Kornblatt and Gustafson (eds.), *Russian Religious Thought* (The University of Wisconsin Press: Wisconsin, 1996).

<sup>365</sup> Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, p. 262.

‘The passion for social and political issues is one of the characteristics that distinguish The Russian school from Neopatristic thinkers beginning with Florovsky’<sup>366</sup>; this passion, this determination ‘to the end of my days [I wish] to remain faithful to the principles of freedom and the protection of human dignity, intransigent toward every sort of “totalitarianism”’<sup>367</sup>, are the roots of Bulgakov’s search for an all-embracing Orthodoxy and a theology facing the world rather than one exclusively focused on God. In connection with this, Rowan Williams notes that in Fr Bulgakov’s theology:

The nineteenth-century theme of ‘catholic’ consciousness, *sobornost*, reappears: the Church, Bulgakov was fond of saying, is the fact of human ‘consubstantiality’, not merely a society; it is ‘Sophia in the process of becoming.’<sup>368</sup>

Fr Sergii’s argument for humanity’s capacity for deification is founded on the universally valid *ontological* act of creation according to God’s image, a capacity further enhanced in the Church by the universal implications of the Incarnation and the Pentecost. By doing so, Bulgakov actually extends the limits of the Church to the level of the whole of humanity or, in other words, he develops a boundless ecclesiology, which stands on the brink of universalism:

‘... ontologically, these [the Church’s] boundaries do not exist at all. To admit them would be to limit and diminish the power of the Incarnation and of the Redemption. The existing boundaries have not an absolute but a pragmatic character.’<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, p. 244; for a detailed account of Bulgakov’s ‘progression’ from a world-oriented economist to a world-oriented philosopher and, eventually theologian, see Paul Valliere’s wonderful chapter on *The Philosophy of Economy*, in *Modern Russian Theology*.

<sup>367</sup> Bulgakov, *Autobiographical notes*, p. 27, as quoted in Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, p. 243.

<sup>368</sup> Williams, *Eastern Orthodox Theology*, p. 503.

<sup>369</sup> Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 313-314.

## Relevance to Archim. Sophrony's ecclesiology

It is relatively easy to argue that Archim. Sophrony shares Fr Sergii's ontological understanding of the *sobornost*. We have already seen that his understanding of *sobornicity* is directly connected with that of consubstantiality: all hypostases of an essence are implicitly part of the plenitude of the corresponding *sobor*. Just as the Holy Trinity is not Itself without One of the Three Divine Persons, the Church would similarly be incomplete without any of her human members. In our introductory chapter, we have already seen that Archim. Sophrony uses the term All-Adam to express the *sobornicity* (catholicity) of the Church, which is experienced by each of its members through Christ-like love, most frequently manifested through prayer 'like Christ for the whole world as for oneself ... In this kind of prayer, one experiences the consubstantiality of the human race. Such prayer reveals the ontological meaning of the second commandment, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. All Adam becomes One Man – mankind.'<sup>370</sup>

Thus, Archim. Sophrony's ontological *sobornost* is founded on his existential interpretation of the second commandment – *Love thy neighbour as thyself*. This decisively places his ecclesiology in the line of Fr Sergii's universalism, despite the qualifications we find in his more ascetically-minded writings. Following St Silouan's fundamental theme, Archim. Sophrony openly states that love for one's neighbour is universal. It refers inclusively to one's enemies, even to those in hell.<sup>371</sup> Man is called to love with Christ's Own sacrificial love, which is characterized by two features: it is absolutely kenotic, and it includes all creation, the whole *sobor*.

Having taken upon Himself 'the sin of the world', He descended into the hell of love for our neighbour and went to the last extreme – that is, to the final limits of the second commandment ... Christ's divine love expends itself in the service of the entire human race,

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<sup>370</sup> *We Shall See Him*, pp. 203-204.

<sup>371</sup> Christ embraces 'in one eternal act heaven and earth and the nether regions ... If we follow Him, ... there will be moments when we, too, will be irradiated by Light and in prayer embrace the earth, the nether regions, even earth, and meet Eternity.' (*We Shall See Him*, p. 61) It is interesting to note Archim. Sophrony's understanding of hell as a state of not being oneself, being 'unworthy to enter into the Holy Kingdom of Divine Love, the only place natural to our being.' (*We Shall See Him*, p. 60).

from Adam to the last man to be born of a woman. He gave His soul for His friends and His enemies.<sup>372</sup>

In a similar manner, man is called to love his neighbour to the ‘extreme’ limits of his own essence, by including in his love all consubstantial hypostases, regardless of any other criteria. Thus, Archim. Sophrony’s meaning of *sobornicity* is placed on to an ontological level, as it includes ‘every fellow human being, the whole vast multitude of mankind that has ever lived.’<sup>373</sup> The universalist tone can be observed in relation to Christ’s power to save, which is manifested personally, on the level of each human hypostasis, but also in a *soborny* manner, in virtue of human consubstantiality. As Archim. Sophrony writes:

In Him lies salvation for every separate individual. In Him lies salvation for those who are united in His Name, and so for whole peoples, for the whole world. There is not, and cannot be, any situation wherein He is powerless to save.<sup>374</sup>

It should be pointed out that this is not a discussion concerning energy, but essence. Sophiology will be looked at in the following chapter; for now, our focus is not the Divine Love Itself, but precisely the *soborny* moment of the Church as ‘every fellow human being, the whole vast multitude of mankind that has ever lived.’ It is a discussion concerning *sobornicity*, that is *a multitude of hypostases*, not one regarding the meaning of hypostasis, nor one about the moment of energy. It is useful, in this instance, to make a co-relation with Archim. Sophrony’s ascetically-oriented theology of prayer. Prayer is an essentially *creative* tool<sup>375</sup>, as it moves from person to person, and expands one’s being by gradually ‘introducing’ in one’s prayer the whole *sobor*, the universal Church. Thus,

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<sup>372</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 36. Also: ‘Divine love embraces hell, too’ – *We Shall See Him*, p. 79.

<sup>373</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 36.

<sup>374</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p 72.

<sup>375</sup> See, also: Pierre Burgat, ‘La priere, une creation toujours nouvelle’, *Buisson Ardent* 7 (2001), pp. 145-164.

Archim. Sophrony writes that ‘to start with, the Christian’s ascetic struggle is concentrated within himself; but ultimately it becomes prayer for the whole world, for all Adam.’<sup>376</sup>

We find here again the same tension between Archim Sophrony’s maximalist ontological theology and his ascetical perspective which we have already seen in his theology of personhood. The same tension exists in St Silouan, although less explicitly so, because his thinking was not systematic and did not follow all the theological implications of his notes. Comparatively, Fr Sergii Bulgakov fully acknowledges and embraces the universalist implications of this maximalist ecclesiology, to the point that he argues openly for universal salvation.<sup>377</sup> Although Archim. Sophrony has repeatedly written against universal salvation, his theology, nevertheless, presupposes it, and this generates the theological tension which characterises his work.

We have already seen that Archim. Sophrony builds his ecclesiology by starting from the perfect Being, the Holy Trinity, as the prototype of the Church. In the Holy Trinity, he distinguishes two intra-essential principles of existence – the hypostatical and the *soborny* – which he then applies at the level of the human being. Thus, we end up with two ecclesiological principles: the hypostatical, which presupposes that *each hypostasis* is dynamically equal with the whole Church; and the *soborny* principle, which presupposes that all hypostases must reach this ontological perfection. Archim. Sophrony writes:

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<sup>376</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 72; Consider, also, the following excerpt from Archim. Sophrony’s interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer: ‘To begin with, we pray for ourselves. But when the Holy Spirit increases our understanding and broadens our knowledge, our prayer takes on cosmic dimensions, and in invoking our Father by the word “our” we think of all mankind and implore grace for all men as earnestly as for ourselves.’ – *We Shall See Him*, p. 113.

<sup>377</sup> For Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s view on universal salvation, see his large section on ‘Eschatology’ in *Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 379-526. For an excellent study of Bulgakov’s universalism, see Gavriilyuk, Paul ‘Universal Salvation in the Eschatology of Sergius Bulgakov’, *Journal of Theological Studies* 57 (April, 2006), pp. 110-32, where he writes that ‘For Bulgakov, (...) creaturely freedom, no matter how radical and far-reaching its revolt against God, could not possibly become a barrier to the power and goodness of God. Because of its emphasis upon God as the source and power of being and its methodological shift from juridical to ontological categories, Bulgakov’s eschatology may be termed ontological universalism.’, p. 128.

Reasonable man has to become perfect after the image of the Triune Divinity. This is the meaning, the purpose and the task of Christ's Church. 'That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us...' [John 17:21]. It is clear that every member of the Church must come to fullness of likeness to Christ, even to identity. Otherwise, there will be no unity of the Church in the image of the oneness of the Holy Trinity.<sup>378</sup>

The two principles are inter-dependent and can only be distinguished while the Being of the Church is not yet fully actualised. In the perfect ontology of the Eschaton, the *sobornny* and the hypostatical aspects of the Church become identical, reflecting their identity in the Divine Tri-unity, in Which *Each* (according to the hypostatical principle) and *All* (in virtue of the *sobornny* principle) of the Divine Persons are dynamically identical with the Divine *Sobor*. On the human level, this means that, eschatologically, *each* (the hypostatical principle) and *all* (the *sobornny* principle) human Persons will be dynamically identical with the Human *Sobor*, the Church. Of course, this dynamic identity is related to the third moment of the Church, the sophiological mode of its existence, to which the next Chapter of this thesis is dedicated.

## Conclusions

Having access to two different versions of 'Unity of the Church' proves extremely useful for understanding the evolution of Archim. Sophrony's ecclesiological thinking. More precisely, the changes in the text emphasize the relevance *sobornost* has for Archim. Sophrony's work. He applies *sobornicity* as a structuring principle of a multitude of different realities, from the structure of a monastery to human psychology; this diverse use of the *sobornost* is not accidental, as he refers to the 'different levels' of its relevance: 'Many believers found spiritual joy discovering the reflection of the 'principle of the Trinity' in created existence, on different levels.'<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 108.

<sup>379</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 29.

However, ‘Especially blessed is to build the Church “in the image of the Holy Trinity”, based on the Revelation concerning “man” – humanity.’<sup>380</sup> Archim. Sophrony’s *ecclesiological sobornost* is of an ontological nature, and surpasses the limitations of all other *soborny* forms he uses. In doing so, Archim. Sophrony creates an original connection between his reception of Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s ontological developments of the *sobornost*, and St Silouan the Athonite’s theology of love for one’s enemy.<sup>381</sup>

The implication is that the Church can only attain her perfection once *all* her members become dynamically identical with it. We have also seen that there is an unresolved tension in Archim. Sophrony’s thinking regarding the universalist implications of this ontological relation between *sobornost* and human nature. On the one hand, Archim. Sophrony’s ascetical thinking, which places the focus on man’s efforts in the deification process, cannot accept the idea of universal salvation; in contrast, his ontological interpretation of *sobornost* cannot lead to a different conclusion. As he repeatedly writes, the Church is the deified All-Adam, the deified Multi-unity of all human hypostases. The eternal ontological imperfection of some of these hypostases, or their exclusion from the Being of the Church leads to the imperfection of the Church herself; eschatological unity depends on the full deification of all human hypostases.

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<sup>380</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 29.

<sup>381</sup> Interestingly, given the personal affinity between Archim. Sophrony and the Apostle Paul, this link between the ontological *sobornost* which is the Church in its eschatological perfection, and the practical *sobornost* of love is first noted by Fr Sergii Bulgakov in St Paul’s ecclesiological writings: ‘As was his custom, having affirmed this truth as an ontological one, the apostle also indicates its practical applicability to spiritual and moral life ... Depending upon where the accent falls, the main thrust in Paul’s ecclesiology is either dogmatic or practical. His ecclesiology attests to that mysterious unity of humanity that is the mystery of the Church and also summons us to accept this mystery as a guide, so that all abide in the union of love. In modern language, one could say that this ecclesiology is the doctrine of the *sobornost* of the Church, understood, both ontologically and pragmatically, as the principle of gathering (Russ. *sobiranie*) and gatheredness (Russ. *sobrannost’*) in love.’ – *Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 261-62.

A universalist nuance can also be noted in St Silouan's writings<sup>382</sup>, especially in his well-known conversation with 'a certain hermit' regarding the eternal fate of atheists; in reply to the hermit's belief that "God will punish all atheists. They will burn in everlasting fire," ... the Staretz answered him with a sorrowful countenance: "Love could not bear that", he said. "We must pray for all".<sup>383</sup>

This prayer for all, which Archim. Sophrony refers to as 'hypostatical prayer' or 'Gethsemane prayer' is one the practical aspects of *sobornicity*. Prayer for the Whole Adam contributes to the *sobornicity* of the Church: 'In profound prayer for the whole world as for himself – making him like Christ Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane – he really does live all humanity as *one life*, one nature in a plurality of persons. This form of acquaintance with multi-hypostatic unity leads to theological assimilation of the dogma of the One-ness of the Holy Trinity. Christian monotheism is not the same thing as the henotheism of Islam.'<sup>384</sup> We see in this definition of the All-Adam the three statements of this thesis: the Church is one life (corresponding to the moment of energy), one nature (which is correlated with *sobornicity*) and a plurality of persons (hypostaticity). Moreover, we see that *sobornicity* is correlated with ontological concepts such as nature, consubstantiality and perichoresis; While on earth, necessarily

we fall from the oneness of man that we have experienced, and in sorrow see again that people are not altogether transparent for each other. The borderlines between human *personae* do not disappear to the same extent as in the Divine Trinity, where each Hypostasis is totally unveiled to the Others; where kenotic love is manifest as the basic trait of Divine Life because of which the *Unity* of the Trinity is complete and absolute – as expressed in the theological concept of 'reciprocal penetration' (*Gr. perichoresis*). Mankind is called upon to become One Man after the likeness of the Oneness of the Trinity.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> See, also: Jean-Claude Larchet, 'Salut personnel et salut du monde: Selon les Peres et selon Silouane l'Athonite', *Buisson Ardent* 3 (1997), pp. 71-99.

<sup>383</sup> *St Silouan the Athonite*, p. 48.

<sup>384</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 216.

<sup>385</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 216.

To conclude, we started from an analysis of the differences between the two published versions of ‘On the Unity of the Church’, and we have seen that Archim Sophrony’s work is built around a variety of meanings attached to the central concept of *sobornost*. Consequently, his theology is layered on several levels, ranging from the more superficial ethnic and nationalistic interpretations of *sobornicity*, to the deeper concepts of local church and psychological *sobornost*, in order to conclude with the twentieth-century ontological *sobornost*, which Archim. Sophrony inherited from Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s theology. The ontological Sobor implies an eschatological and universal vision of ecclesiology, which is different from what Gavriilyuk terms ‘hopeful universalism’.<sup>386</sup> If St Silouan’s writings concerning the Eschaton may easily be qualified as ‘hopeful universalism’<sup>387</sup>, the same cannot be said about Archim Sophrony, whose own universalism, as we have seen, finds its source in his ontological vision of the Church and her *sobornicity*. Despite his repeated rejections of universal salvation, the implications of his own ecclesiology are in perfect accord with Fr Sergii’s conclusions. It is now time to directly address the relationship between these two theologians, by looking at Archim. Sophrony’s third claim regarding the Being of the Church, namely its sophianicity.

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<sup>386</sup> ‘Bulgakov’s ontological universalism may also be distinguished from the so-called hopeful universalism’, which found its influential twentieth-century advocates in Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Rahner. These Catholic theologians proposed that although no one could be certain that all would be saved, a Christian could and, in fact, had an obligation to hope that none would be lost. Epistemically Balthasar’s and Rahner’s proposals are more modest than Bulgakov’s. The Russian theologian saw the universal purgation that resulted in the universal restoration of all things to God neither as a paradox (antinomial eschatology), nor as a hope (hopeful universalism), but as an ontological necessity (ontological universalism).’ ‘Universal Salvation in the Eschatology of Sergius Bulgakov’, p 128.

<sup>387</sup> See, for instance, Kallistos Ware, ‘‘Nous devons prier pour tous’’, *Buisson Ardent* 3 (1997), pp. 31-47.

**Chapter Four**  
**The Church as Sophianic Being**

## Chapter Four

### The Church as Sophianic Being

#### I. Introduction: Aims; Methodology; Terminological Observations

##### Aims

In our introductory chapter, we have seen that Archim. Sophrony's theology is a complex system of ontological relationships, some of which manifest at the level of the same essence (intra-essential relations), while others cross the boundary of one particular essence and express the rapport between two ontologically different beings (what we have termed inter-essential relations). We investigated Archim. Sophrony's intra-essential relations in the second and third chapters of this thesis, dedicated to the hypostatical and *soborny* modes of ecclesial beings, respectively. In comparison, this fourth chapter will focus on Archim. Sophrony's theology of the inter-essential relationship between the Holy Trinity and the Church. The aim of the chapter is to prove that Archim. Sophrony uses the third moment of existence to argue for the *ontological identity* between the Divine Being and the Human Being.

Through God's work, man is sanctified and introduced in the Divine eternity, that is in the Life of God Himself. And this to its plenitude, even to the identity of those saved with God.<sup>388</sup>

Unlike hypostaticity and *sobornicity*, which express *principles* of ecclesiological existence, Divine Life is an ontological *fact* which God and the Church have in common.

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<sup>388</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 30. For this chapter, I have used the 1988 version of the article, published in Russian as *Rozhdenie b Tsarstvo nepakolebimoe (Birth Into the Kingdom Which Cannot Be Moved)* (Tolleshunt Knights Monastery: Essex, 1999). All present translations from Russian from this volume are mine.

As we advance in our analysis of this rapport of identity between God and the Church, a series of secondary elements will arise, which will be used to support our second claim. The most important of these is the fundamental connection Archim. Sophrony sees between epistemology and ontology; his theology concerning the Divine Life is argued on the basis of what he calls ‘existential gnoseology’: to know something presupposes a living experience of the object of knowledge.<sup>389</sup> Thus, Archim. Sophrony’s argument for ontological identity turns into an argument for the perfect knowledge of God, or, in his words, seeing God ‘as He is’. Consequently, a perfect knowledge of God ‘as He is’ implies a living experience of God ‘as He is’, which is another way to say that humanity will share the same ontological state as the God it existentially knows; anything less that ontological identity between God and the All-Adam, argues Archim. Sophrony, would lead to a lack of true knowledge and, thus, the complete annulment of the Revelation.

Another secondary implication of the following discussion will be the extent to which Archim. Sophrony’s theology of the Divine Life is influenced by his reception of Fr Sergii Bulgakov’s sophiological theology. It is particularly here, in the sophianic rapport he envisages between the Church and the Divine Being, that Fr Sergii’s influence on Archim. Sophrony’s thought is especially visible; it is also here that the subtle, yet essential differences between Archim. Sophrony and Vladimir Lossky become apparent. At times, as we shall see, Archim. Sophrony seems to engage in a polemical dialogue with his *Messenger* collaborator, which continues their 1950s dispute over the meaning of ‘darkness’ in Christian epistemology.

## **Methodology**

We shall start with a section dedicated to the Archim Sophrony’s terminology and his use of the concept of Divine Life, which will further illumine his reception of the terminology and thinking of St Gregory Palamas and Fr Sergii Bulgakov. This will be followed by a brief analysis of his third and most creative interpretation of the doctrine of creation in the Divine image; we shall see that, while hypostaticity and *sobornicity* were aspects of the Divine image, the dynamic aspect of ecclesiological existence represents the Divine ‘likeness’: that is to say that sophianicity is the fulfilment of hypostaticity and *sobornicity*.

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<sup>389</sup> Archim. Sophrony’s meaning of existential is ‘by actual experience’ (*We Shall See Him*, p. 139), ‘not crude intellectual interpretation of the problem’ (*We Shall See Him*, p. 217).

As such, the sophianic aspect of existence expresses an inter-essential relationship between the Holy Trinity and the Church, overcomes the ontological limits of a certain nature and creates a relationship between two ontologically different Beings; as we shall see, this type of relationship can only be discussed in ontological and eschatological terms.

The most substantial part of this chapter will focus on the relationship Archim. Sophrony sees between ontology and epistemology, according to which one can only know what one experiences. The discussion will be built around Archim Sophrony's understanding and use of apophatic theology, which is revealed with particular clarity by his theology concerning eternal life. The conclusion of this chapter is that Archim Sophrony argues for a complete eschatological identity, in ontological terms, between the Holy Trinity and the Church, an opinion which sheds light on his reception of Fr Sergii Bulgakov's sophiological system, and places him in direct opposition to Vladimir Lossky.

### **Terminological observations: between St Gregory Palamas and Fr Sergii Bulgakov**

Before we proceed any further, we need to note the intriguing terminological similarity of most twentieth-century definitions of hypostaticity, which is paradoxical given the differences of meaning attached to these seemingly identical definitions. My understanding is that there are two main factors which generated this lack of terminological diversity, which are both connected with Fr Sergii Bulgakov.

On the one hand, all major Orthodox theologians active at the same time adopted Fr Sergii's distinction on the human level between three modes of existence, and his attempt to co-relate Chalcedonian Christology and St Gregory Palamas' distinction between essence and energy. Despite the various ways different theologians applied these theological elements, the general character of their presence implicitly focused, and thus limited the necessary vocabulary around them. On the other hand, this deceiving lack of variety reflects the influence existentialist terminology had on these Orthodox theologians; one of the most visible and frequent examples is Fr

Sergii's distinction between hypostasis and individual, which found its way into the work of most Orthodox theologians, including those like Lossky<sup>390</sup>, who opposed Fr Sergii's theology.

These identical definitions reflect very different, at times even contradictory realities; the terminological consensus, especially concerning hypostaticity, reveals its limits once hypostaticity is correlated with those theologians' theology of Uncreated Energy. For each of them, the true meaning of hypostaticity is revealed through an analysis of the moment of energy; a different way to say this is that anthropology is fully revealed in ecclesiology.

These observations are perfectly valid when we turn to Archim. Sophrony. We have already seen the differences between his and Lossky's understanding of hypostaticity, despite their terminological similarity. The same observation must be made concerning his theology of energy, to which he refers by a variety of names. The most frequent of these names is Divine Life, at times further defined as 'the content of Divine Life'. Other common terms used by Archim. Sophrony are St Gregory Palamas' Uncreated Energies and the Patristic concept of grace, which he also identifies in the theology of more recent saints, such as Seraphim of Sarov<sup>391</sup>; he also employs a varied series of

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<sup>390</sup> See, for instance, *Mystical Theology*, p. 53.

<sup>391</sup> "Attaining the grace of the Holy Spirit", according to the teaching of Saint Seraphim of Sarov, is the purpose of our life. We teach in our Church to think, to believe, to know that the deification of man is performed through the communication to him of the Divine Energies, which are what we call *grace*.' – *Rozhdenie*, p. 30.

terms most commonly used to describe Divine Attributes<sup>392</sup>, the most frequent of which are

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<sup>392</sup> ‘Every true vision of God is a gift from the High God making us participants in His life, granting us humility and peace, wisdom and knowledge, love and goodness.’ – *We Shall See Him*, p. 45.

Light<sup>393</sup>, Love and Humility<sup>394</sup>.

As was the case with hypostasis, Archim. Sophrony does not offer any definition as such of the Divine Life, but there are at least two ways we can work out what he means by it. First, we can

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<sup>393</sup> Archim. Sophrony's use of 'light' contains an original typology of the various sorts of light which may be encountered during prayer or meditation. For instance, *We Shall See Him As He Is* contains several autobiographical notes concerning *demonic light* ('one night ... I was awakened in a way that I did not understand. I saw my whole room flooded with patches of vibrating light. My soul was troubled. The vision repelled me – I felt something like the aversion mixed with fear that one feels is a snake gets into the house' – p. 32); *light as the energy of the mind* ('while I was engaged in my meditations, which had developed a certain kind of intensity, I saw my thinking-energy like a faint light inside and all round my skull. My heart, meanwhile, continued to live separately from my brain' – pp. 32-33; 'in a more forceful impulse towards the unnameable, all-transcending Being-Nonbeing I saw my mind as light' – p. 57); *Divine Light* ('years later, after the mercy of the High God had visited me, I noticed that the uncreated Light is tranquil, integral, steady, acting on the mind, the heart, and the body, too' – p. 33) and the difference between Divine Light and natural light ('there were occasions when coming out of church I could see the city, then the whole world for me, lit by two kinds of light. Sunlight could not eclipse the presence of another Light ... I have forgotten almost all that happened in that period of my life but the Light I have not forgotten' – p. 37).

Light is one of the most frequently recurring themes in Archim. Sophrony's life and theology. Unsurprisingly, he begins his essay on 'The Uncreated Light' with 'a brief description of light phenomena which were given to me to encounter. As a young man ... more than once I felt – I saw – my thinking energy like a light. The world of mental contemplation is essentially a radiant one. Indeed, our mind is an image of the Primal Mind, which is Light'; he goes on to distinguish between 'different kinds of lights and light – the light the artist knows ... the light of philosophical contemplation that develops into a mystical experience ... the "light of scientific knowledge" ... manifestations of light from hostile spirits ... the unoriginate Light' – p. 155.

<sup>394</sup> It is interesting to note that Archim. Sophrony tends to create new terms by mixing two such attributes, so that we get 'kenotic love', 'prayerful kenosis', 'humble light' and so on; I suggest that this mixed terminology attempts to evoke something of the unity of the Divine Life as the Divine Act of 'I AM'.

refer back to St Gregory Palamas' concept of Uncreated Energies, and define Divine Life as the immanent Divinity, Divinity in its Self-revelation to Creation and co-participation in it; in support of this definition, we have Archim. Sophrony's many references to specifically Palamite terms, such as Uncreated or Divine Energies, and Uncreated or Divine Light, and his direct references to Palamas' work. Interestingly, despite the centrality of the concept of Divine Life for Archim. Sophrony's theology, his quotations and references to St Gregory Palamas are very sparse. As I have already argued in our introductory chapter, I believe that the reason for this is that Archim. Sophrony does not derive his theology from Palamas, but merely uses his distinction between essence and energy to support his own theology. Ultimately, his 'Palamism' reflects Archim. Sophrony's reception of Fr Sergii's sophiological theology.

This Palamite interpretation of the third moment of existence must, nevertheless, be qualified by a complementary way to find the theological 'prototype' for Archim. Sophrony's Divine Life. The key to this second interpretation is suggested by Archim. Sophrony's consistent use of Fr Sergii Bulgakov's expression of *content of the Divine Life* as an alternative to simply Divine Life; he writes, for instance, that 'according to the Revelation, the difference between God and man in eternity is only according to Essence, and not at all according to the *glory* or the *content* of the Divine Life.'<sup>395</sup> As *content of the Divine Life* is one of the most frequent definitions Fr Sergii gives for his much-disputed concept of Sophia<sup>396</sup>, Archim. Sophrony's use of the same definition for his

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<sup>395</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 82.

<sup>396</sup> For instance, Fr Sergii writes: 'The trihypostatic God has the divine world in and for Himself. But the being of this divine world contains yet another mode of its *being in itself*: as *content* that is independent of its belonging to God. The divine world belongs not only to God's being, being hypostatized in it. The divine world also exists in itself, in its nonhypostatic being, precisely as a determinate content of the divine cosmos, as the *world*', in *Bride of the Lamb*, p. 48. For a chronology of the evolution of Fr Sergii Bulgakov's sophiology, see his seminal section on 'The Sophianicity of the Creature' in *Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (Eerdmans: Cambridge, 2012), pp. 214-84; *The Wisdom of God: A Brief Summary of Sophiology* (Williams and Norgate: London, 1937); his chapters on 'The Divine Sophia' and 'The Creaturely Sophia' in *The Lamb of God* (Eerdmans: Cambridge, 2008); and his final developments in *The Bride of the Lamb* (T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 2002), especially the sections on 'The Sophianicity of the World' and 'The World Soul and Its Hypostases'.

Divine Life (which also, at times, appears as a definition for Sophia) puts the two notions in direct connection.

It would seem, I suggest, that Archim. Sophrony saw Fr Sergii's theology of the Sophia as a continuation of St Gregory Palamas' theology of the Uncreated Energies, and therefore safe enough to incorporate in his own theology, in spite of the whole sophiological controversy. On the other hand, he clearly did not make much of Fr Sergii's choice to use Sophia as a different term for St Gregory's Uncreated Energy, and instead opted to use other Attributes for the same theological concept, most regularly those of Love, Light and Humility (or Kenosis).

To conclude this small section, there are two things we must keep in mind as we advance in our treatment of this subject: that Archim. Sophrony's own choice of terminology concerning the third mode of existence is in itself proof of the extent of his reception of Fr Sergii Bulgakov's sophiological theology, and that terminological similarity regarding human hypostaticity among twentieth-century theologians is not always indicative of a similarity of meaning. To overcome this terminological confusion, one must necessarily co-relate a theologian's theology of hypostaticity with that of Uncreated Energies. In relation to this, we now turn to Archim. Sophrony's distinction between image and likeness, as a method to advance from his theology of personhood to his ecclesiology.

## **II. The Church: A Sophianic Being**

### **Image versus Likeness**

When we looked at Archim. Sophrony's interpretation of the doctrine of creation according to the Divine image, we saw that he preserves the frequent Patristic distinction between *image* and *likeness* of man to his Creator: man was created according to the Divine image, in order to live God's Own Life. For example, he writes that:

God's revelation tells us that, after the cosmos and the whole material and animal world had been created, God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' Therefore, the

image in us lives from our very birth. But what does ‘after likeness’ mean? – ‘After likeness’ reveals our aim ... Man was created in order to be with God, in the unity of God’s and humanity’s life.<sup>397</sup>

Subsequently, he proceeds to identify the Divine Prototypes of the *image* in either Christ or the Holy Trinity, leading to his two-fold interpretation of the Divine image: the hypostatical principle and the *soborny* principle, respectively. Both these images are expressions of a process, a principle of Divine existence which is applied anthropologically. They do not represent an ontological *reality* per se, as they do not have a *content* of being. The two principles we looked at in the previous two chapters express a *similitude* between God and Man of their manner of existence; they are the reflection of Divine intra-essential ontological principles on to the human intra-essential level of existence, with no inter-essential implications. We have also seen that Archim. Sophrony founds his interpretation of image as personhood on the hypostatical moment of Divine existence, while the *soborny* image of man is derived from the moment of essence. One aspect which these two modes of being have in common is that they are non-transferable; neither Divine hypostases, nor Divine essence can be communicated to humanity. As such, they affect the created world by means of reflection or principles of being, rather than a transfer of being. The implication is that their application can only lead to an identity of principles, rather than an identity of being.

Things change drastically when we shift from image to likeness. Archim. Sophrony is consistent in the fundamental difference he makes between hypostaticity and *sobornicity*, as expressions of the Divine *image* in man, and the transfer of Divine Life, which is the manifestation of human *likeness* to the Divine Being. In comparison to hypostaticity and *sobornicity*, the transfer of Divine Life is not a principle; it does not express a *similarity* of human intra-essential relations to Divine intra-essential relations. Divine Life is neither a principle, nor a methodological concept; rather, it is the content of God’s Life, it is an ontological fact in itself, not merely the reflection (principle) of one. Consequently, when Archim. Sophrony insists on the reality of the transfer of Divine Life, he no longer refer to an intra-essential relationship, but to an inter-essential rapport between the Divine Being and humanity.

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<sup>397</sup> *Talks* I, pp. 143-44. Also: ‘We are created by God “in His image” for life “after His likeness” – that is, for our ultimate divinization, for the communication to us of Divine Life in all its plenitude’ – *We Shall See Him*, p. 110.

Because of this difference between image (as hypostaticity and *sobornicity*) and likeness (as the Divine Life), the rapport between the Divine Being and the humanity is no longer one of hypostatical commensurability, nor one of commensurability of essences, as we have seen in our previous chapters. Because Divine Life is an ontological fact, not a principle, the inter-essential rapport can only be one of ontological identity. To express this difference, Archim. Sophrony's terminology appropriately shifts from commensurability to identity whenever he discusses the human likeness to God.

## **Sophianicity: an inter-essential, eschatological and ontological relationship**

### **1. Inter-essential relationship**

To advance our discussion, several new observations become necessary. To start with, we must further nuance the above-mentioned distinction between the hypostatical and *soborny* principles, as expressions of intra-essential relationships, and the sophianic aspect of the Church, as an inter-essential rapport. While it is true that Archim. Sophrony's writings concerning the hypostaticity and *sobornicity* of the church refer primarily to the intra-essential rapport between a *sobor* and its hypostases, it must be noted that this theology of personhood and *sobornost* also retains a sense of overstepping the ontological boundary of one's essence. This is due to Christ's inclusion in the human *Sobor*, as one of the members of the All-Adam; Archim. Sophrony includes Christ's Divine-Human Hypostasis both in the hypostatical moment of ecclesial being, and in its *soborny* moment. The implication is that, in virtue of Christ's Divine-humanity, both the process of hypostatization and the *soborny* principle have inter-essential – that is, Divine-human – effects. That is to say that, while they remain primarily intra-essential principles, and express the reflection on the human level of Divine modes of existence, their complete actualisation, their perfect application also has an inter-essential aspect.

In comparison, Archim. Sophrony understands Divine Life as an exclusively inter-essential reality, one which belongs to both God and Man and, consequently, creates a certain rapport between them. Unlike hypostaticity and *sobornicity*, Divine Life is not primarily relevant within one's own nature, its primordial importance does not consist in generating a rapport among the hypostases of one

nature or even between these hypostases and their *sobor*. The vital importance of the Divine Life, Archim. Sophrony argues, lies in the fact that it generates a rapport between God and Man, two ontologically-different beings. Divine Life, as immanent Divinity, communicates itself to Man, and thus exists in a two-fold manner: humanly and Divinely; it is jointly lived by both Man and God.

## **2. Eschatological reality: the Eschatological Church and historical local churches**

The above observation is directly connected with another, namely the deeply eschatological nature of ecclesiology. Although Archim. Sophrony's theology retains a certain sense in which eschatology is included in the present, as it pre-exists in God's first thought for humanity<sup>398</sup>, it must be kept in mind that, while his anthropology (deeply connected with his theology of personhood) expresses the tensions between the temporal and the eschatological, his ecclesiology is a purely eschatological reality. To some extent, this shift from the temporal to the eschatological is reflected even in Archim. Sophrony's idea that, while hypostaticity and *sobornicity* represent the Divine image imprinted on humanity in virtue of its very essence, sophianicity is something to be revealed in the Eschaton, as the fulfilment of the image into its *likeness*. 'We are created by God "in His image" for life "after His likeness"'<sup>399</sup>: the present tense in 'we *are* created in His image' implies a reality which belongs to the present; in comparison, Divine likeness is the expression of an ideal, something which belongs to the future. Of course, given that this ideal belongs to Divine ontology, namely our co-participation in the Divine Life, this 'future' should be understood as a shift in quality, rather than a chronological evolution. From the temporal realities of the image, ecclesiological Adam enters the eschatological reality of Divine ontology.

Overall, Archim. Sophrony's work contains very little on the temporal church, the church as institution, and is almost exclusively centred around the spiritual, eschatological Being of the Church. After the failed attempt to develop a theology of the local church in his first version of 'Unity of the Church', Archim. Sophrony never returned to the subject. The temporal church retains its importance as the preserver of the unity of local Orthodox communities (as is evident from his

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<sup>398</sup> See our discussion in Chapter Two, regarding Archim. Sophrony's understanding of time and his ideas concerning the pre-existence of the Church.

<sup>399</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 110.

attitude regarding the Patriarchal Church in Russia<sup>400</sup>), or as a sort of pedagogue and protector of dogmas, traditions and writings<sup>401</sup>. For a theologian as inclined towards ontological definitions, this lack of interest in the earthly manifestations of the Church is particularly significant. One particular aspect is his advice to his spiritual children to ‘find what is Orthodox’ in the non-Orthodox traditions in England<sup>402</sup>, which could suggest a vision of the Orthodox ecclesial institution similar to

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<sup>400</sup> ‘Let it be that each church, each monastery, each school – everything which belonged to the Russian Church and was stolen from it – everything that was now returned to the Church by the State, should be united with the home of the whole Russia, which is today led by Patriarch Alexei, and let it be united around him.’ – *Dukhovnie Besedi*, p. 33.

<sup>401</sup> ‘The necessity arises for *cadres* of some sort, of disciplines to co-ordinate life in common and educate far from perfect human beings ... The life of the Divine Spirit surpasses all worldly institutions [while] this very Spirit creates a habitation for Himself possessing within the confines of the earth certain contours which express the Spirit and are the vessel for the preserving of His gifts. This wondrous dwelling-place is the Church, which down the centuries – all so turbulent – has borne the precious treasure of Divinely-inspired Truth.’ – *We Shall See Him*, p. 95.

<sup>402</sup> See, for instance, Dumitra Daviti, *Amintiri despre Parintele Sofronie de la Essex (Memories about Father Sophrony of Essex)* (Caras Severin: Manastirea Piatra Scrisa, 2002).

that of Fr Sergii Bulgakov<sup>403</sup>. Interestingly, we find the same idea that one can naturally ‘advance’

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<sup>403</sup> Fr Sergii’s Church is never defined institutionally, hierarchically or even sacramentally; Divine-humanity or the Church is a construct of grace and it shares the mystery and boundlessness of grace: ‘It is more encompassing than any of its manifestations, whether in the sacraments that disperse its separate rays or outside of them’; ‘from this alone it follows that the Church, understood as a sacramental institution or organization, does not coincide with or exhaust this more general notion of the life of grace’. ‘There is no limit to grace, for it is deification, actualized Divine-humanity, life in God, which is infinitely deep.’ – *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 301.

The rapport Fr Sergii sets between the historical Orthodox Church and the *Ecclesia supra ecclesia* is one of perfect conformity of the first to the latter; Orthodoxy is the only perfect historic expression of the Mystical Church. Yet the presence and action of grace, the possibility and validity of Sacraments, even salvation itself, in the last instance, are not in the exclusive possession of the institutional Orthodox Church. According to Fr Sergii, they also remain possible in the rest of the Christian Churches, and even non-Christian, in virtue of their partaking in the Mystical Body of Christ, of that universal Divine-humanity of the Man created in the image of God and universally affected by the salvific Divine Acts of the Incarnation and the Pentecost.

Bulgakov’s vision of the institutional Orthodox Church is that of *the one* Church which preserves the whole and un-altered truth about the Divine Revelation. Still, the major difference between Bulgakov and traditionalist theologians is that his thinking is profoundly positive and pro-world. Traditionally, this evaluation of Orthodoxy is equated with an implicit evaluation of the rest of the Churches as *not* having possession of the Truth. Bulgakov never seems to focus on what these other churches do *not* have, but exclusively on the ‘bits’ of the Truth that they *have* kept. That, plus the fact that his reference point is never the Orthodox Church itself, but that *Ecclesia supra ecclesia* which the Orthodox Church perfectly expresses, allows him to see the rest of the Christian (and not only) churches as less perfect expressions, but expressions nonetheless, of the same Truth.

For instance, when he defines Orthodoxy as ‘the dogmatically and hierarchically intact Church and which therefore possesses the full power of the sacraments’, he implicitly asserts the possibility of other dogmatically and hierarchically ‘non-intact’ churches whose Sacraments, although lacking ‘the full power’ of the Orthodox ones, are nevertheless valid. – *The Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 310-311.

in Orthodoxy from other Christian traditions in the writings of St Silouan the Athonite<sup>404</sup>.

The Church, as a Living Being, is a reality which belongs to the Eschaton, not to this age. The difference between this eschatological Church and her historical ‘incarnations’ is much more radical than the distance which separates the ‘mystery’ of the eschatological hypostases from their earthly counterparts. This is because human individuals, even outside their perfect ontology, remain, nevertheless, living beings. Comparatively, unlike these un-actualised hypostases, historical churches are never a living being – be it an imperfect, un-actualised one.<sup>405</sup> The only earthly ‘incarnation’ of ecclesiology is hypostaticity itself, as the Church actualized in her hypostases.

Because of this, when Archim. Sophrony talks about the state of eschatological divinization, it sometimes becomes difficult to distinguish whether he refers to hypostatical Adam or the Ecclesial Adam. This happens because of the eschatologically dynamic identity between the Church and each of her hypostases, which mirrors the identity between the Holy Trinity and each of the Three Divine Persons. At other times, Archim. Sophrony preserves the distinction and mentions both ‘methods’ of divinization – hypostatization and living the Divine Life: ‘we become universal bearers of the whole cosmic being *and* of the Divine Life.’<sup>406</sup>

All of the above are a demonstration of the inter-connection between the three modes of existence of the Church in her perfect eschatological becoming. Another way to say this is to note the perfect

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<sup>404</sup> See, for instance, St Silouan’s discussion with ‘a certain Archimandrite’ regarding the proper way to do missionary work among non-Orthodox Christians. Rather than rejecting their faith as heretical, the Saint’s advice is to start from that which is correct in their faith, and gradually to grow into the Orthodox faith: ‘if you were to confirm that they were doing well to believe in God and honour the Mother of God and the Saints; that they are right to go to church, and say their prayers at home, read the Divine word, and so on; and then gently point out their mistakes and show them what they ought to amend, then they would listen to you, and the Lord would rejoice over them. And this way by God’s mercy we shall all find salvation...’ – *St Silouan the Athonite*, p. 64.

<sup>405</sup> The reality of this difference is also emphasized in Fr Sergii’s distinction between the historical Orthodox Church and the *Ecclesia supra ecclesia*, as a Living Being, actualized Divine-humanity, Creaturely Sophia in its full actualization.

<sup>406</sup> *Talks I*, p. 30.

correspondence between the ecclesiological moments of essence, energy and hypostasis of the perfectly actualised Church, a reality which belongs exclusively to the Eschaton.

### **3. Ontological reality versus ontological process**

Finally, we must emphasize that Divine Life, unlike hypostaticity and *sobornicity*, refers to an ontological *reality*: a state of being, not a process. If anything, we can understand the transfer of Divine Life as the fulfilment of the hypostatical and *soborny* principles, their ontological purpose. As such, the two beings it puts into connection do not become ontologically alike, as we have seen in the previous chapters, but ontologically identical, a point Archim. Sophrony repeatedly insists upon.

Thus, Archim. Sophrony argues, while hypostaticity and *sobornicity* represent *principles* of existence, which mirror aspects of the existence of the Holy Trinity and apply them anthropologically, sophianicity is a radically different thing: rather than *a reflection* of Divinity, the sophianic aspect of the Church consists in the actual *transfer* of immanent Divinity to the human level of existence. Rather than two ontologically different Beings' becoming alike, governed by similar existential principles, sophianicity implies that there is a common ontological element which unites these different Beings: Divine Life is the common ontological moment of two ontologically different Beings.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion to these three observations, we must retain the following: that sophianicity is an inter-essential relationship, meaning that our discussion is no longer restricted within the limits of one essence, but refers precisely to the interaction between two different natures; that Archim. Sophrony's Church is an eschatological Being, and represents the fulfilment of his theology of hypostasis and *sobor*; and, finally, that Divine Life, unlike the hypostatical and *soborny* principles, does not consist in a similarity of existence, but is itself an ontological reality, thus imposing a rapport of *identity* between the two Beings which have it in common.

## Sophianicity and Epistemology: Divine Life and Knowledge

Any discussion of Archim. Sophrony's use and understanding of the concept of Divine Life must be carried in relation with what he terms 'Christian gnoseology'. He is surprisingly consistent, even systematic in his claim that these two – knowledge of God and experience of the Divine Life – are ontologically united, and therefore, should necessarily be looked at in connection one to the other.

'Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him' (John 14:23). This commandment lies at the foundation of our Christian gnoseology. The indwelling in us of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, inseparable from Them, gives us the only true knowledge of God in the very existential reality. As the dwelling-place of Divinity, we naturally become the bearers of the plenitude of Divine Eternity.<sup>407</sup>

It is interesting to note that the changes he made in the *Unity of the Church*, the essay we looked at in detail in the previous chapter, emphasize precisely this inherent connection between epistemology and ecclesiology. The theoretical seeds for this reading of the essay are already in place in its original form, but the 1988 version is so carefully constructed around the idea of this connection, that the article becomes as much a study of 'existential gnoseology', as it is an ecclesiological treatise. My suggestion is that Archim. Sophrony uses epistemology as an argument to support his theology of the Divine Life, especially his idea concerning the ontological *identity* between God and His creation. Thus, his claim that the experience of the Divine Life necessarily precedes knowledge of God, implies that complete knowledge of God presupposes the perfect experience of the Divine Being:

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<sup>407</sup> *Rozhdenie*, pp. 28-29.

Man must attain, first and foremost, the state of Divine Love, and then, knowledge of God (cf. I John 4:7-8) and self-knowledge – a penetration into the pre-eternal concept of God for man.<sup>408</sup>

To know something, he claims, is to share the very being of the object of knowledge<sup>409</sup>, to be identical not in the sense of two beings which are *alike*, but with the paradoxical meaning of two beings which, nevertheless, are ontologically united into one being.

Before anything else, knowledge is *community of being* – a living union of the one who knows with the one who is known. It is not possible to know that which is absolutely beyond the subject of the one who knows. ‘To know’ means ‘to appropriate’, ‘to integrate in one’s own life’, ‘to make the immanent known to itself’. Of course, any knowledge, by its own principle, presupposes a certain moment of ‘immanence’, but perfect knowledge, in accord with the Scriptural perspective, cannot be understood any other way exact perfect *unity in being*.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 43. To support his idea that experience precedes knowledge, Archim. Sophrony uses an example taken from St Symeon’s life: ‘St Symeon the New writes concerning himself that over and over again a light appeared to him, and he loved the light and was drawn to it, but for a long time did not know Who this light was. At last, one day when the light appeared, he summoned up the temerity to ask, “Who art Thou?” And he received the answer, and knew, that what appeared to him as Light was Jesus Christ. After that he not only dwelt in love but also “knew” this love.’ (*We Shall See Him*, p. 43). He also refers to the New Testament description of the event of the Transfiguration, when St Peter had to experience the Divine Light first, before confessing Christ’s Divinity.

<sup>409</sup> Theology becomes, thus, a matter of direct experience, as life precedes knowledge; see, for instance: Archimandrite Zacharias, ‘La theologie comme etat spirituel chez l’Archimandrite Sophrony’, *Buisson Ardent* 17 (2011), pp. 30-54.

<sup>410</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 67; See, also: ‘Knowledge of God omnipresent is open to all reasoning creatures everywhere ... In some inexplicable fashion true knowledge filters into our inmost being when He is with us. The operative in-dwelling of God in us means that we are introduced into the very act of Divine Being. And this is precisely the way that our spirit is given the lively knowledge of Him ‘which shall not be taken away’ – *We Shall See Him*, pp. 43-4.

It should not be understood from this that Archim. Sophrony postulates human ability to know the very essence of the Divine Being. He consistently asserts the absolute transcendence of the Divine *ousia*, and, in accordance with Patristic theology, never claims that essence could become an object of human knowledge:

The essence of God *is not communicated* to creation. And anything which cannot be communicated cannot be known.<sup>411</sup>

As he himself says, according to his gnoseologic principle<sup>412</sup>, namely that one only knows what one experiences, knowledge of God's essence would imply that humanity becomes consubstantial with the Divine Being, imposing a transition from the Holy Trinity to a Holy Multi-unity, a Divine Being in one essence and a multitude of Divine Persons, which would include the Three Divine Persons and all the hypostases of the Church, in virtue of their co-participation in the Divine *ousia*.

Existential knowledge is the effect of union in being, and not merely an intellectual speculation. And unity according to Essence itself would make those who are saved 'consubstantial with the Father', and the trinity would become Quaternity, Decimity, and so on, without end.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 30.

<sup>412</sup> On the subject of knowledge of God as a living experience in St Siloan's writings, see Moine Melchisedech, 'L'humilite, la connaissance de Dieu et l'amour selon saint Silouane: *Trepied de spiritualite monastique*', *Buisson Ardent* 12 (2006), pp. 60-71.

<sup>413</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 30. See, also, the more detailed account on the unknowability of essence at *Rozhdenie*, pp. 66-67: 'The essence of God is absolutely transcendent to the created world. It is completely unknowable, un-nameable, un-communicable even to rational beings, it cannot be partaken in, it is eternally unreachable by created beings: angels and humans. To denote this "moment", the Church Fathers used the term "beyond-being", in order to avoid any manner of conceptualization of Essence. For creature, this "moment" remains eternally hidden in the "divine darkness". If the Divine Essence itself could have been communicated, then the deified saints would enter the very being of the Holy Trinity, as "consubstantial with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit", and the Trinity would change into Quaternity, Cinquinity and so on, without end.'

However, he argues, the absolute transcendence of the Divine *ousia* and human inability to know it existentially – that is, to participate in it – does not mean that our knowledge of the Divine Being is somehow limited. That would imply a difference or a lack of ontological correspondence between Divine essence and Divine energy. Warning against what he calls an ‘exaggeratedly apophatic thinking’, Archim. Sophrony argues that the moment of essence is not primordial in the Divine Being, and that it neither precedes nor determines the Divine Persons<sup>414</sup>. Thus, to know God according to the moment of energy, which is fully actualized in His Personhood – ‘the highest Principle’ – fully overcomes our inability to know Him in His Essence. In other words, there is nothing to be known according to the moment of essence which is not revealed through the type of knowledge acquirable through the hypostatization of the Divine Life<sup>415</sup>; this is so, Archim. Sophrony argues, because there is no ‘part’ of the Divine essence which exists extra-hypostatically and thus, is ‘hidden’ from its energetic counterpart.

The entire discussion can be reduced to the idea that the transcendent God-in-Himself is absolutely identical with the immanent God of the Revelation. The Divine Persons, on the one hand, and the Divine energy, on the other, are in no way determined by the Divine *ousia*, in the sense that there is nothing of the Divine essence which these two other moments of the Divine Beings do not contain (reveal) themselves, either through hypostatization of the essence, or in virtue of the perfect ontological correlation between essence and energy.

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<sup>414</sup> ‘God’s Revelation as “I Am That I Am” is understood by us not in the sense that a certain essence determines the faces in its depths, but that the Three Faces Themselves are not abstract concepts, but existential bearers of Their Nature-Essence: Existential Beings.’ – *Rozhdenie*, p. 46.

<sup>415</sup> Archim. Sophrony would never accept, for instance, Lossky’s idea that ‘The goal to which apophatic theology leads ... is not a nature or an essence, nor is it a person. It is something which transcends all notion both of nature and of person: it is the Trinity.’ (*Mystical Theology*, p. 44). This is precisely what Archim. Sophrony refers to as apophatic ‘exaggeration’: a preference on focusing on the ‘hidden’ rather than the ‘revealed’ Divinity, on the ‘difference’, rather than the ‘likeness’ between God and Man: ‘If, in our understanding concerning Christ-the Man, we accentuate the ‘radical difference’ between Himself and us, through this we introduce a change in our entire anthropology’, which is then naturally reflected in a change in ecclesiology. – *Rozhdenie*, p. 80.

The Divine Being, absolutely realised, actualised, excludes the presence of an undeveloped possibility-potentiality in Itself, and thus It can be defined as ‘Pure Reality’ ... As ‘Reality’ (Act, Energy, Life), It communicates Itself in all Its plenitude and infinity to the rational being, created ‘in the image and likeness’ ... The saints are included in the eternal Living Act of God to such an extent, that all features-attributes of Divinity are communicated to them to the full plenitude of likeness, as God will be *all in all*. ‘To the full plenitude’ – but only according to the Act, that is the content of the Life of God Himself, and absolutely not according to the Essence ... The words ‘to the full plenitude – but only according to the Act’ sound like some sort of diminishing, narrowing, degrading. But, in reality, it is not at all like that ... By creating man ‘in His image and likeness’, God repeats Himself in us.<sup>416</sup>

Consequently, our participation in the Divine Life is in no way diminished by the fact that the moment of Divine *ousia* remains unknown and unparticipated in. Our knowledge of God is perfect – we know God ‘as He is’, we know Him ‘as He knows us’ – but it is knowledge granted to us by grace, through participation in the Divine Life, not knowledge in virtue of participation in the Divine essence. A rather crude way of expressing this, but perhaps elucidating it, is that the ‘content of knowledge’ is the same – we know God as He knows Himself – but our ‘methodology’ differs from that of God Himself: whereas we get to this knowledge through receiving God’s energy, God Himself has the same knowledge in virtue of His *ousia*. While the ‘methodologies’ differ, the end result is the same: ‘Man lives the Life of God Himself, becomes perfect like God Himself.’<sup>417</sup>

When we confess the deification of human nature through the Incarnation of the Logos, we do not overlook that fact that, speaking of Christ, we confess *hypostatical deification*. Then follows the question: ... Isn’t there a radical difference between Christ and the other human beings?

We must not forget that the deification of the human nature through the act of the Incarnation of the Word does not, in any way, exclude the presence of the *energetic* ‘moment’ in the deification of Christ’s human nature. This second ‘moment’ is especially

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<sup>416</sup> *Rozhdenie*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>417</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 78.

important, because it shows to us that Christ's example is possible to attain, and that, consequently, it is revealed as an unavoidable duty for all people.<sup>418</sup>

In other words, Archim. Sophrony writes, Christ, the *Son of Man*, is Divine in two ways (unlike Christ, the Son of God, which is also Divine in a third manner, in virtue of His essence), or according to two different 'methodologies': hypostatically, as one of the Three Divine Persons, and dynamically, in virtue of His Divine Life, which He lived in a twofold manner: both as God and as Man. Archim. Sophrony even distinguishes two different events which correspond to Christ's twofold deification: the Incarnation and the Ascension. Hypostatically, as one of the Divine Persons, Christ was deified from the moment of His Incarnation in the Mother of God:

Christ's kenosis through the Incarnation faces us with an amazing fact: on the one hand, as St John Damascene writes, the deification of our nature took place in the moment when the Word received our nature; on the other hand, we see in many places in the Holy Scripture that Christ-the Man avoided everything which carried the character of 'self-deification'. We read in the Scripture that the Incarnation of the Word is fulfilled through the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>419</sup>

This means, Archim. Sophrony argues, that energetically, Christ's deification as the *Son of Man* was completed only after His Ascension to the Father. Until then, Christ-the-Man experienced a duality of life throughout this earthly existence, which only disappeared when Christ lived the Divine Life as the son of Man, too, thus becoming dynamically equal with the Father, as *Man*. This second 'method' of deification is accessible to all humanity:

Christ's commandment, *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect* [Matt. 5:48], should not be understood relatively, in a figurate manner, as the expression of a certain eternal 'tendency,' but in the most profound existential sense: as the confession of man's potentiality to fulfil to perfection his calling, following Christ-man,

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<sup>418</sup> *Rozhdenie*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>419</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 80; See, also: After the Ascension, however, this lack of commensuration disappears, and *the Man Jesus Christ* (I Tim. 2:5) becomes like God (Phil. 2:6), 'sitting at the right-hand of the Father,' from now on also according to human nature. – *Rozhdenie*, p. 71.

Who Himself fulfilled this commandment and *sat on the right hand of God* the Father, which, in the language of Scripture, denotes equality.<sup>420</sup>

A large section of Archim. Sophrony's main ecclesiological essay 'On the Unity of the Church' aims precisely to prove his claim that the difference of essence does not prevent perfect unity in being, leading to perfect mutual knowledge. To prove all of the above, Archim. Sophrony turns again to Christ, 'the absolute foundation of all judgement.' His line of thought is surprisingly consistent, despite the lack of a systematic approach: in the perfectly 'actualised' Being of God, essence and energy represent two modes of existence which are at the same time perfectly identical, yet absolutely different. In Christ, after His Ascension, the Divine and the human natures share the same Divine Life, the same state of deification, in virtue of his unique Divine-Human Hypostases. Because Christ is also Human Hypostasis, it follows that all Human Hypostases can achieve the same 'degree' of deification we see in Christ. The only difference is of the existential 'moment' which acts as the source of deification: while Christ, as a Divine Hypostasis, is Divine according to both essence and energy, the rest of humanity is deified exclusively via communication in the Uncreated Energies.<sup>421</sup>

Christ's one Divine-Human Hypostasis lived the same Life in both natures, despite the difference between his two natures. In other words, we see in Christ that it is ontologically possible to become fully deified without partaking in the Divine nature. In saying otherwise, Archim. Sophrony argues, it would be to imply that Christ, as the Son of Man, was not ontologically identical with Christ, the Son of God, in clear contradiction with the Revelation.

Jesus Christ, as Man, sat at the right-hand side of the Father; in other words, He became like Him, without changing the created human nature, which He put on, into uncreated Divinity. In consequence, He eternally exists in two essences: Divine and human. The Lord, as Man also, 'entereth into that within the veil' and without change lives the whole plenitude of the Divine Being: both as the Without-beginning Only-begotten Son according to

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<sup>420</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 81.

<sup>421</sup> See the last pages of the section on 'Antinomies of Trinitarian Theology' and the first part of the segment on 'Deification', in *Rozhdenie*, pp. 66-72.

Divinity, and as Man, perfectly deified, yet without the transformation of human nature into the essence of the First-Being of God.<sup>422</sup>

Since this is true of Christ, *the Son of Man*, it follows that the same state of deification is accessible to all human hypostases, even without participation in the Divine *ousia*: the absolute transparency of the Divine essence in no way diminishes or limits the Divine energy open for human participation. The divinization of the saints is Christ's Own divinization:

If we confess His complete and perfect deification, it follows that we must also hope that the saints, in the age to come, will receive the same fullness of deification.<sup>423</sup>

The human degree of deification is that of Christ Himself. Archim. Sophrony argues for this idea starting from St Gregory Palamas, not Chalcedon, which emphasizes what we just said regarding the two 'methodologies' leading to the same state of deification: hypostatization, which is only

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<sup>422</sup> *Rozhdenie*, pp. 30-1.

<sup>423</sup> 'Christ is the unshakeable foundation and the highest criterion of the Church's teaching concerning man – of anthropology. Everything we confess regarding Christ's humanity is the revelation of God's Idea before the ages for humanity in general ... If we accept that He is the measure of all things, we must also accept that our affirmations concerning Christ's humanity mirror at the same time the entire range of human potential in general. If we confess His complete and perfect deification, it follows that we must also hope that the saints, in the age to come, will receive the same fullness of deification.' – *Rozhdenie*, pp. 71-2.

valid for the Son of Man, as consubstantial with the Father, and dynamic identity, which is accessible for all human hypostases.<sup>424</sup>

This perfect experience of dynamic Divinity is reflected in a similarly perfect knowledge of God. Because God and All-Adam live the same Divine Life, the two beings know each other in a perfect and mutual manner – Man knows His Creator *to the same degree* to which God Himself knows His Creation. Two of Archim. Sophrony's favourite New Testament passages – 'we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is' (I John 3:2) and 'for now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known' (I Cor. 13:12) – are used precisely to support this statement<sup>425</sup>. Thus, for instance, after having quoted St John, he adds that:

The Apostle Paul, also, does not hesitate to say that we shall be given the plenitude of knowledge of God – a 'plenitude' like that of God's knowledge of us, namely: in an unknown-to-us moment of the 'making of gods' and of the economy of salvation, we also

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<sup>424</sup> In other words, Archim. Sophrony argues that humanity is not deified through Christ's Incarnation (which only shows the possibility of its deification, the *commensurability* of the two natures), but through Christ's Own deification *as Man* – which is not realized in virtue of His Divine essence, but in virtue of His appropriation *as Man* of the Divine Energies – which is fulfilled through his Ascension. Human deification is realized precisely in the same *manner* as Christ's Own deification, as it refers to Christ's divinization according to energy, not essence. This differs from Lossky's theology of deification, which is defined predominantly on the level of essences: 'What is deified in Christ is His human nature assumed in its fullness by the divine person. What must be deified in us is our entire nature, belonging to our person which must enter into union with God, and become a person created in two natures: a human nature which is deified, and a nature or, rather, divine energy, that deifies.' (*Mystical Theology*, p. 55) This lack of clarity in Lossky's (also noted by Papanikolaou, who writes that 'what is divine in Christ, i.e., the nature, is distinct from what is divine in the human person' – *Being with God*, p. 124) is avoided by Archim. Sophrony precisely through this distinction between 'what is divine' and 'how' that which is divine is experienced: since Christ is God-Man, He experiences the same 'what' in two manners, one of which is communicable to the All-Adam.

<sup>425</sup> The same passage from I John was the source for Archim. Sophrony's 1985 volume *We Shall See Him As He Is*.

shall enter into that within the veil of the eighth day: ‘now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.’<sup>426</sup>

The most frequent misunderstandings when making anthropological statements, Archim. Sophrony writes, are either to overdo or to lower the Scriptural vision; one can easily mistake this vision for a total ontological transformation of humanity into the Divinity, with all differences between the created and the Creator completely washed away; just as easily, though, it can be toned down into a significantly less precise understanding of this communal Life, corrupting and even denying the ontological identity it brings between the Divine and the created beings. Archim. Sophrony is very careful to distance himself from both these possible errors.<sup>427</sup> While clearly marking the distinction between the moment of essence and that of the Energy, by specifying that this identity is to be understood “‘Up to the complete fullness” – but only in the plan of the Act, that is the content of Life of God Himself, and absolutely not according to the Essence’, he also makes sure the importance of his statement is not to be toned down:

In creating man ‘in His image and likeness’, God repeats Himself in us. And the complete fullness of the Divine Life – without beginning and without end – will be the inalienable possession of the saved ones ... Just like the Divine Being-Existence is a ‘Pure Act’, the deified man, as well, having been created in the beginning only as a potentiality, in the end actualizes himself in his created being-existence, and also becomes a ‘pure act’, by entering *into that within the veil* (Heb. 6:19).<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 31.

<sup>427</sup> If anything, he identifies in the Fathers a tendency towards unity, rather than one towards distinction: ‘Without denying the inability to know God, the Fathers say, nevertheless, that those saved become *partakers of the Divine nature* in the age to come, when *that which is in part shall be done away*, and affirm that it is possible for man to attain full perfection.’ – *Rozhdenie*, p. 72.

<sup>428</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 69.

## **Divine Life: eternal ascent versus dynamic rest**

Let us return to the example put forward by Christ's Divine-Human Hypostasis, which presupposes the ontological identity between Christ-Son of Man and Christ-Son of God, yet without the confusion of the two essences. We have already seen that Archim. Sophrony's argument that, while Christ's Hypostasis is indeed ontologically unique, His state of deification as the Son of Man is not an exclusive feature of Christ; rather, that same state of deification represents the very 'likeness' of man's creation, and thus, is accessible to all human hypostases. The implication is that the entire Church, all its hypostases, will eschatologically share the same state of deification as that Christ Himself, at the right hand-side of the Father: 'If we confess His complete and perfect deification, it follows that we must also hope that the saints, in the age to come, will receive the same fullness of deification.'<sup>429</sup>

A new element relevant to this discussion is represented by Archim. Sophrony's understanding of deification *as eternal life*. Referring to the meaning of deification according to the moment of Energy – Content of Life, he makes a short excursus<sup>430</sup> into the Patristic teaching regarding the eschatological existence of those who are saved. Archim. Sophrony argues against the opinion that deification represents an eternal process of evolution which the human soul must undergo, a growth without end into the Divine Life. Instead, he makes use of selected quotations taken from St Paul's Letters, and the works of St Maximus the Confessor and Symeon the New Theologian, to support his idea of perfect Christ-like divinization in virtue of the Divine Life.

In God, saints become like Christ, present everywhere, almighty, omniscient. In God, man himself proves to be a god, and takes part to all God's doings. Man lives the life of God Himself, becomes perfect like God Himself.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> *Rozhdenie*, pp. 71-2.

<sup>430</sup> See the entire 'Deification' section of 'On the Unity of the Church' in *Rozhdenie*, pp. 70-84;

<sup>431</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 78. And, also: 'according to the Revelation, the difference between God and man in eternity is only according to Essence, and not at all according to the *glory* or the *content* of the Divine Life.' - *Rozhdenie*, p. 82.

Given this perfect state of divinization, it follows that there is nothing in God which remains unrevealed for the saints in the Eschaton, no uncommunicated attribute, no superior state which is yet inaccessible to them and into which the Church is meant to grow.

The Church fathers understand eternity in various ways. Some think of it as a continuous lifting up of created beings towards Divinity. Others, like the Apostle John, the Apostle Paul, and some of the Church fathers, like Saint Maximus the Confessor, see the promised happiness as a lifting up into that within the veil, on the 'Eighth Day', where there will be no movement forward, no becoming, no growth, where God will be all in all.<sup>432</sup>

Christ's Own Divinity is entirely and perfectly in the possession of the Church, a state which Archim. Sophrony describes as *eternal rest*, as opposed to the contrary vision of *eternal growth*. However, *eternal rest* does not express a finitude of the saints' eschatological Life; Archim. Sophrony insists that, although it is not a process of growth, eternal rest remains, nevertheless, a dynamic state, a 'pure act', experienced as a state of *tension*:

Thus, some [Church fathers] imagined eternity with a logic similar to the mathematical one: a finite number, no matter how much it may grow, will never reach the infinite. Yet there is the possibility to understand them in a different manner, as well: the highest tension of Being itself, in its incalculable dynamics, can be lived itself as a 'movement.'<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 101; See, also: 'Our Creator's idea for us is perfectly realized through the co-joining of our spirit with God. This is actualised to such a perfect degree, that there remains no unrealized potential in our life, no possibility which is not revealed. It becomes a 'pure act', in the likeness of God. And, just as God *rested on the seventh day from all his work*, having finished everything ... man also ... is to acquire the *unshakeable character* of the Divine rest. This *unshakeable character* is not something passive, dead, but eternally alive.' – *Rozhdenie*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>433</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 101. Also: 'In the life of the very Divinity of the Holy Trinity the dynamic and the static merge into a unity which passes our understanding' (*We Shall See Him*, p. 62) 'To man will it be given to dwell in Divine fastness. And this is verily "*eternal rest*"' (*We Shall See Him*, p. 63); 'The Christian must somehow approximate to this state before he can assimilate the measure of salvation that corresponds to the depth of his self-emptying. This is the mode of Divine Love: in eternity it comprises constant, maximum tension of being, together with complete forgetting of self.' (*We Shall See Him*, p. 128).

Without such an interpretation of what it means to share the Divine Life, salvation itself becomes impossible. On the one hand, the existence of a common meeting ‘ground’ between creature and its Creator is encapsulated in the very idea of ‘becoming one’; on the other, our ability to acquire Christ’s complete Divine-human life is the very element that makes salvation possible. As we shall see, Archim. Sophrony argues that any ontological distance between God and Humanity in the Eschaton implies that Christ Himself is not fully deified as a human being.

Thus, again in full accord with Fr Sergii Bulgakov, Archim. Sophrony defines eternal life as the perfect experience of the Divine Life, and rejects all attempts to preserve any eschatological ‘distance’ between God and Man: the two Beings are dynamically identical, which means that they mutually and perfectly know and experience each other. To believe otherwise, he argues, is to deny any real knowledge and mutual participation in each other. Archim. Sophrony consistently situates himself on the side of those who argue for the perfect experience of the Divine Life as restfulness, understood as ‘pure act’, and warns against two wrong ways to answer this question: the philosophical path, which refers to his above-mentioned understanding of ‘exaggerated apophaticism’, and the ‘thought of mathematicians’<sup>434</sup>:

After the Apostles, some of the Church Fathers believed like them; others, however, thought of the eternal life of those who are saved as a triumphant endless ascent towards Him-Without-End. This is a manner of thinking typical for mathematicians: we are always alike some number, while God is the infinite. Between these two there will always be a ‘distance’.<sup>435</sup>

Yet, to deny the human ability to acquire perfect knowledge of God is to deny perfect deification, which is contradicted by the state of deification we see in the Resurrected and Ascended Christ. A continuous and eternal ascent towards the Father would imply that the very Ascension of Christ, as the Son of Man, cannot ever be completed:

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<sup>434</sup> The correct theological methodology, Archim. Sophrony writes, is to start from the Revelation and advance through faith, not philosophy, because ‘faith is deeper and more discerning than reason’ – *Rozhdenie*, p. 58.

<sup>435</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 31; see, also: *Rozhdenie*, pp. 50-1.

We do not image Christ-Man living in an eternal ascent to the Father; we confess Him as He Who ‘ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father’ [the Creed] ... We admit that a certain ‘ontological distance’ remains between us even in eternity ... the Essence of the Self-Being Without-Beginning is not communicated to us; we, even bestowed with the entire plenitude of God, remain ‘creatures’. And so, salvation truly consists in man’s inclusion in the plenitude of God’s Life.<sup>436</sup>

In other words, if human deification were a process of eternal ascension towards Divinity, that would imply a certain duality in Christ, not only of His essence, but also of His Life: Christ-the-Son-of-Man would live a different Life from Christ-the-Son-of-God<sup>437</sup>. Such an understanding of deification would also introduce an eternal ‘distance’ between Christ, as the Son of Man, and God the Father, an implication Archim. Sophrony strongly opposes; after having referred to Christ’s growth as a human being during His earthly life, he concludes:

After the Ascension, however, this lack of commensuration disappears, and *the Man Jesus Christ* (I Tim. 2:5) becomes like God (Phil. 2:6), ‘sitting at the right-hand of the Father’, from now on also according to human nature.<sup>438</sup>

Archim. Sophrony is quick to add that this ‘likeness’ or ‘equality’ ‘is of a different order from the absolute likeness of the Son, consubstantial with the Father, according to the Divine essence. Likeness, in connection with created essence, belongs to the plane of Act-Energy, not to that of Essence.’<sup>439</sup> That is to say that Christ is ‘like the Father’ in a twofold manner: according to the moment of essence, and according to the moment of energy, or Divine Life. While the former is exclusively specific to Christ among all human hypostases, as one of the divine Persons, the latter

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<sup>436</sup> *Rozhdenie*, pp. 31-2.

<sup>437</sup> ‘In Christ, according to the dogma, created human nature is deified to full perfection ... Both essences are in Him in a unity identity so perfect, that any duality is excluded: Christ is one, He Himself is God-Man ... In the Risen and Ascended Christ there is no duality left.’ – *Rozhdenie*, p. 70.

<sup>438</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 71.

<sup>439</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 71.

‘methodology’ of deification opens the path to the same degree of likeness to the Father to all human hypostases.

The ‘mathematical’ interpretation of deification is the effect of an incorrect anthropology; the real problem, Archim. Sophrony argues, is not how we see God, but how we see ourselves. To put it differently, the real question of concern is not as much God’s glory, as argued by those who say that ‘if God were possible to be known in a complete manner, that would mean that He was somehow limited’<sup>440</sup>; instead, the problem arises from their minimalist anthropology, which does not allow them to envisage that man could be glorified to the extent of becoming dynamically identical with God. This problem, in turn, is the effect of a corrupted method of doing theology, one which would rather limit God ‘to the image’ of man, than glorify man ‘in the image’ of God; Archim. Sophrony calls this ‘anthropomorphism’:

Although man is created ‘in the image of God’, nevertheless, when he begins to transpose the results of his self-knowledge upon God, he inverts the hierarchy of being and he starts himself to create God ‘in his image and likeness’. The way of the Church is the opposite. We do not make God according to our own image, but, following Christ’s commandments, we enlarge the features of our created being ‘in the image of God and in His likeness.’<sup>441</sup>

Ultimately, Archim. Sophrony identifies the source of the problem in the same exaggerated apophatic theology of some of his contemporaries, which predisposes their minds to think philosophically about God and, thus, to be focused on the philosophical impossibility of envisaging the ontological unity with God which the Revelation and the Church Fathers attest to. Archim. Sophrony openly re-traces the argument back to the disagreement between Lossky and himself regarding the meaning of ‘Divine darkness’, to which we now turn.

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<sup>440</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 31.

<sup>441</sup> *Rozhdenie*, pp. 58-9.

## St Denys the Pseudo-Areopagite and Apophaticism: From Divine Darkness to Luminous Darkness

As we have already suggested above, Archim. Sophrony's epistemology is affected by his reception of Denys the Areopagite and his apophatic theology. There is sufficient ground, in my opinion, to identify the 'exaggeratedly apophatic thinking' Archim. Sophrony argues against with Vladimir Lossky's treatment of the same subject. The two theologians have a different interpretation of the Areopagite, which reflects directly on their epistemology and, further, on their ontology, especially in relation to the ontological rapport between God and Creation. Their different approaches to apophatic theology already affected their personal relationship in the early 1950s, when Archim. Sophrony could not agree with Lossky's interpretation of the Old Testament idea of 'Divine darkness' and the distinction this seems to introduce between the imminent Economic God and the transcendent God-in-Himself<sup>442</sup>. Lossky's later tendency to nuance his radical apophatic thinking seems to have remained unconvincing for Archim. Sophrony, who, even in his talks to the community, which were delivered in the last years of his life, continued to argue against certain 'theologians whose ideas are full of apophaticism', and who:

Talk about our impossibility to see God 'as He is'. But again, I repeat before you the word: 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.' [Matt. 5:8] ... Shall we then see God 'as He is not', theologically speaking, or 'as He is'? For myself, there is no doubt: 'as He is.' Otherwise, something absurd would follow: 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God as He is not.' But then, is the whole world wrong, the whole world of those who believe that God made the cosmos? There are other ways to understand God's Revelation – non-Christian ways.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> On this issue and the personal relationship between Lossky and Archim. Sophrony, see Nicolas Sakharov, *I Love, Therefore I Am*, pp. 31-2.

<sup>443</sup> *Talks I*, p. 175. See, in this context, Lossky's interpretation of deification, as a 'union with the uncreated' which, nevertheless, does not change the fact that 'while intimately united with God he [man] knows Him only as Unknowable, in other words as infinitely set apart by His nature, remaining even in union, inaccessible in that which He is in His essential being.' – *Mystical Theology*, p. 38.

Archim. Sophrony's own opposition to the idea of Divine darkness is strictly connected with the particular methods one could use to contemplate the Divine Being. He repeatedly opposes philosophical speculation, whose ultimate knowledge can only be that of the 'Unknown God' whose altar was seen by St Paul in Athens [Acts 17:16-31]<sup>444</sup>, to direct Revelation, the end of which is Christ's Incarnation, that is a Revelation of the 'Known God', as reads the dedication of one of the Altars in St Sergii's Lavra near Moscow. Archim. Sophrony retains the Old Testament idea of Divine Darkness only in the sense of the unknowability of the Divine *ousia*, but correlates it with Christ's Incarnation, 'the light in which there is no darkness', as the revelation of man's dynamic identity to God.

Some of the holy fathers gave more importance to the possibility and the need for man to acquire perfect knowledge of God, following in this the spirit of the revelation of the New Testament; at the same time, other teachers of the Church underlined the 'moment' of human inability to know God and to reach Him, from where come such concepts as 'mystical theology' and 'seeing God in the Divine *darkness*'. In the New Testament, we do not encounter the concept of darkness applied to God's revelation or to His knowledge. Does Saint John the Theologian not say that *God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all?* [I John 1:5]<sup>445</sup>

In direct disagreement with Vladimir Lossky, Archim. Sophrony is entirely opposed to the idea that the Revelation of the Incarnation or the eschatological union between God and Man may be read in

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<sup>444</sup> 'Some of our forefathers... – and it must be admitted that these were among the most profound – built an altar with the inscription: 'To the Unknown God'. This boundary of the 'unknowability of God' represents the ultimate accomplishment of Greece's classical wisdom. But even to our days, no one among the philosophers or among the priests of science crossed this boundary, it remains within the limits of their natural mind and faithful to the methods of philosophy and science.'

*Rozhdenie*, pp. 39-40. See, also, *Rozhdenie*, pp. 50-1.

<sup>445</sup> *Rozhdenie*, pp. 73-4.

an apophatic key.<sup>446</sup> Darkness and apophaticism, he says, are theologically relevant exclusively in relation to the Divine essence, and are only meant to protect the uncommunicable and unknowable character of Divine *ousia*.

The concept of ‘Divine darkness’ was introduced into Christian terminology in the fourth century. The great Chalcedonian fathers used it to counteract the pretensions of some heretics who thought it possible to know the very Essence of God. These fathers, in their fight with the heretics, were trying to preserve the logical structure of their arguments concerning the impossibility of reaching the Divine Essence, by calling It ‘Divine darkness.’<sup>447</sup>

By refusing to recognize the possibility of an apophatic reading of both the Incarnation and the Eschatological communion between God and Man, Archim. Sophrony is, in fact, refusing to recognize the theological argument behind Lossky’s ‘mystical theology’ and the distinction it entails

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<sup>446</sup> This is in open contradiction with Lossky’s approach, who writes, for instance, that ‘The supreme “theophany”, the perfect manifestation of God in the world by the Incarnation of the Word, retains for us its apophatic character ... So much more the partial theophanies of inferior degree conceal God in that which He is, whilst manifesting Him in that which He is not by nature.’ – *Mystical Theology*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>447</sup> *Rozhdenie*, p. 74.

between the Economical God and God-in-Himself.<sup>448</sup> Not at all surprisingly by now, this attitude perfectly resonates with Fr Sergii Bulgakov's own reading of St Denys, and his rejection of any

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<sup>448</sup> Concerning the relationship between Lossky's use of apophaticism and his distinction between *oikonomia* and *theologia*, Papanikolaou writes that 'Lossky's apophaticism leads him to posit two realms: that of *oikonomia* and *theologia*. According to Lossky, knowledge of God is possible through God's economy, or is the realm of *oikonomia*, which refers to God's action in the created realm. Knowledge of God in Godself, or *theologia*, is not possible according to Lossky, since God's life is eternal and ontologically distinct from created existence and, hence, beyond human knowing. Not even God's economy can reveal anything positive about *theologia* or God in Godself. Though the revelation of God's economy in Christ reveals *that* God is Trinity, nothing more can be said of God's trinitarian existence since "Trinitarian being belongs to the transcendent nature of God", i.e., *theologia*.' – *Being with God*, p. 99. In comparison, Archim. Sophrony rejects the idea of knowledge (and, implicitly, experience) which belongs exclusively to God's essence, and which, consequently, remains un-communicated in the eschatological act of unity between God and the Church. There is nothing which belongs to the Divine essence, while remaining hidden from the Divine Energies. The only hidden aspect of Divinity is nature itself, which Archim. Sophrony understands as an ontological *mode*, different from the created mode, to experience the same Life. However, this difference of modality does not reflect a difference of 'content', either as knowledge or experience.

difference between God *the Creator* and God in Himself.<sup>449</sup>

It is interesting to note that, in all of his work, Archim. Sophrony makes no real use of St Denys the Areopagite or apophatic theology. The only times he even mentions apophaticism are when he opposes the radical, ‘philosophical’ interpretation of Denys he sees in other theologians and the apophatic excesses this brings about, and when he discusses theological *writing and terminology*.<sup>450</sup> When it comes to his theology, however, one can only note its absence; if anything, his

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<sup>449</sup> Ultimately, Archim. Sophrony shares Fr Sergii’s idea that ‘one must include the world’s creation in God’s own life, cōposit the creation with God’s life, correlate God’s world-creating act with the act of his self-determination ... The roots of the world’s creation lie in God’s eternity. It is usually considered that the world’s creation is something non-essential, additional, and as if accidental in God’s being. It is thought that God did not have to become the Creator, that He does not need the world, that He could remain in the solitude and glory of his magnificence ... The direct identification of the Creator and God is indisputably confirmed by Scripture. The scholastic intricacies that aim to distinguish in God God Himself from God in necessity and freedom, God from the Creator, are utterly alien to Scripture ... In other words, God cannot fail to be the Creator, just as the Creator cannot fail to be God’ (*Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 44-5)

By contrast, Lossky writes that creation ‘has no ontological foundation either in itself (for it is created from nothing), nor in the divine essence, for in the act of creation, God was under no necessity of any kind whatever. There is, in fact, nothing in the divine nature which could be the necessary cause of the production of creatures: creation might just as well not exist. God could equally well not have created; creation is a free act of His will, and this free act is the sole foundation of the existence of all beings.’ (*Mystical Theology*, p. 93).

<sup>450</sup> Concerning Archim. Sophrony’s use of apophatic theology, Nicholas Sakharov writes: ‘As for the “darkness” language in Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius the Areopagite, it is not an existential event, but a figure of speech, a theological image, used by the Cappadocians as a weapon against Eunomian claims to see God’s essence ... It is to Parisian misconceptions of the term that he objects (and to) their literalism in interpretation of God primarily as darkness.’ – *I Love, Therefore I Am*, p. 32. Although true in what it says about Archim. Sophrony’s understanding of apophatic theology primary as theological *methodology*, the quote is slightly exaggerated, as Archim. Sophrony does recognize an existential meaning of apophaticism, even if only in relation to Divine essence.

apophaticism can be seen as organically included in his reception of Gregory Palamas' doctrine of the Uncreated Energy, which is precisely how Fr Sergii interpreted the Areopagite's theology.<sup>451</sup>

In conclusion, Archim. Sophrony's theology concerning the rapport between epistemology and ontology is in open contradiction with Vladimir Lossky's writings on the subject; at the same time, it is extremely close, if not identical, with that of Fr Sergii Bulgakov. This is an important conclusion, as it carries a series of subsequent implications, some of which we have already discussed. Thus, for instance, as we have seen in chapter two, the above-noted difference reveals the fact that Archim. Sophrony's and Vladimir Lossky's definitions of the hypostasis are deeply different, despite their terminological similarity. The same rapport between epistemology and ontology is also of significant importance in retracing the impact Fr Sergii Bulgakov's theology had on Archim. Sophrony's thought.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, we have seen that the third mode of ecclesial existence moves the discussion from the level of Divine image to that of Divine likeness, in the sense of *tozhestvo* – identity of being – between God and the Church. In our previous chapters, we have shown how Archim. Sophrony uses hypostaticity and *sobornicity*, as different modes of existence of the Church, to argue for the commensurability of the Divine and Ecclesial Beings. By comparison, the sophianic mode of existence surpasses the whole previous discussion regarding commensurability and claims the identity of the two Beings. This ontological identity belongs to the Eschaton and represents the ultimate fulfilment of the hypostatical and *soborny* principles.

Archim. Sophrony founds this claim on an elaborate discussion concerning the role and impact of apophaticism on Christian epistemology, which also reveals the difference of opinion between himself and Vladimir Lossky. Lossky builds his apophatic thinking around the notion of 'Divine darkness', which he then applies to all levels of his theology, including his interpretation of Christ's

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<sup>451</sup> Fr Sergii's reception of Denys is very close to that of Archim. Sophrony; in the 'Unfading Light', the Areopagite's apophatic writings are applied primarily to the level of terminology, while apophaticism itself is expanded to include even St Gregory Palamas' theology and Fr Sergii's own sophiological vision.

Incarnation. In comparison, Archim. Sophrony opposes the Old Testament idea of ‘Divine darkness’ to the New Testament vision of Christ as ‘Light in which there is no darkness at all’<sup>452</sup>, and claims that ‘Divine darkness’ and apophatic theology are only relevant in relation to the transcendent nature of the Divine essence. Apophaticism does not create a schism between Divinity in Itself and Divinity as communicated to the human being: the same ‘content’ of Divinity is known and experienced by the Church and God Himself. This is what Archim. Sophrony means when he says that God repeats Himself in us and ultimately creates ‘gods’: there is no apophatic difference in terms of the ‘content’ of Divinity between these created ‘gods’ and God Himself<sup>453</sup>; the only difference is in the mode they live this same life. By consequence, the All-Adam knows his Creator as God knows His creature.

Archim. Sophrony’s idea that God ‘repeats’ Himself in humanity should be looked at in its larger context. On the one hand, each deified human hypostasis becomes a god in virtue of its unqualified participation in the Divine Life; in this sense, one can argue that there is a multiplication of these dynamic gods: all Persons, Divine and human, are equally Divine according to their energy. On the other hand, however, on the basis of the difference of the *mode* of participation in the Divine Life, God’s repetition of Himself does not lead to a duplication (multiplication) of Gods. Human beings are the Persons of a *created* Multi-hypostatic god (the Church), which is dynamically identical with the *uncreated* Tri-hypostatical God (the Holy Trinity).

The eschatological nature of the dynamic mode of existence implies that the Church remains hidden until its ultimate realization. The *tozhestvo* of the All-Adam with the Holy Trinity depends on the perfect fulfilment of the hypostatic and *soborny* principles: that is to say, until the perfect hypostatization of the Divine Life by all human hypostases. Archim. Sophrony points out that, unlike the Divine Being, these principles are realized in time on the human level, they presuppose a chronological evolution: hypostatically, they refer to the chronology of one’s own earthly life; *sobornically*, they refer to the chronology of the *Sobor* itself, manifested in the succession of generations from Adam to the end of time. As long as these two principles are not fully realized, the Church herself exists as a hidden reality, a potentiality which is revealed only sporadically and in part through a variety of expressions of the Divine Life: Light, Humility, Love etc.

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<sup>452</sup> *We Shall See Him*, p. 233.

<sup>453</sup> ‘God-Who-is-Truth makes us gods – “gods” ... by the form of being that is communicated to us and the content of such life.’ – *We Shall See Him*, p. 232.

Here the discussion becomes more complex. If, as Archim. Sophrony repeatedly emphasizes, the Life of the Church is Divinity itself, it follows that the Church somehow subsists, or pre-exists its full hypostatization by the human *Sobor*. Divinity is not a reality ‘created’ in time, waiting for the gradual hypostatization of the human *Sobor*; rather, Divinity exists in Itself eternally, and the same existence belongs to the Church. The discussion is similar to that regarding the pre-existence of human hypostases, and it reveals the same unsolved tensions in Archim. Sophrony’s thought.

**Chapter Five**  
**Conclusions**

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### **Conclusions**

Archim Sophrony is best known today as St Silouan the Athonite's disciple and biographer, and the founder of the monastic community of Saint John the Baptist in Tolleshunt Knights, Essex. In consequence, while his persona is increasingly approaching the status of a twentieth century Orthodox saint, his theology is gradually being overshadowed by the predominantly hagiographic approach of those involved with it.

As we have seen in our introductory chapter, the existing secondary bibliography concerning his theology is characterized by a lack of critical and creative involvement with his ideas. The present thesis is an attempt to partially correct this situation, by addressing in a scholarly critical manner Archim. Sophrony's ecclesiology. His vision of the church is perhaps the most controversial aspect of Archim Sophrony's theology, as it addresses the central question of his whole theological vision: the nature of the eschatological relationship between God and the world. As such, the discussion immediately goes beyond the ascetical level of his work, and reveals the full extent of his reception of twentieth-century Modern Orthodox theology, especially that of Fr Sergii Bulgakov.

Previous studies generally suffer from a double methodological prejudice. First, they all try to find Archim Sophrony's work on St Silouan the Athonite's writings and theological thought, completely disregarding Archim Sophrony's own role in the creation of his Elder's public persona and our contemporary views regarding his theology. The fact remains, that Archim Sophrony's involvement in the publication of St Silouan the Athonite's writings goes far beyond their simple transcription, and includes their editing, partial rewriting, structural arrangement and sequence, and placement under common themes and titles. Nobody seems to notice that Archim Sophrony remains the exclusive source of all material we have from the Elder. The same striking observation should be made regarding St Silouan's biography. St Silouan lived in the Russian monastery of St Panteleimon, the most populous monastery in Mount Athos in the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, given his responsibilities in the monastery, he also had personal interaction with thousands of seasonal workers. And yet, no one else in these generations of monastics and workers has contributed a single page to the biography of the Saint, so that Archim Sophrony is also the

exclusive source of the Saint's biography. The meetings between the Saint and other monastics, his sparse correspondence with David Balfour, the third-party testimonies regarding his holiness, they all come from Archim Sophrony's biography of the Saint.

As we have also argued in our first chapter, all of the above have very little to do with St Silouan himself. His case does not differ drastically from the lives of other saints; it is, perhaps, a little more extreme, as he was neither living in the desert, nor was he an anti-social, reclusive monastic. If anything, he was quite the opposite, both in virtue of his personality and because of his monastic duties, so that the lack of any secondary source of information concerning his life and writings is even more difficult to understand. However, for all the reasons mentioned above, it is methodologically unacceptable that one should build their argument regarding Archim Sophrony's theology starting from, or with arguments taken from, St Silouan's writings. That may be acceptable in a hagiographic context, but it has no place in a scholarly, critical involvement with Archim Sophrony's work. For that reason, with the exception of a few passing references, I have chosen not to found my claims concerning Archim Sophrony's theology on his own interpretation of St Silouan's writings.

The second methodological fault which affects all previous studies concerning Archim Sophrony's theology is their universal prejudice against Fr Sergii Bulgakov. Consequently, this prejudice is reflected in the arguments of these studies, which either ignore completely Archim Sophrony's reception of Fr Sergii's thought, or try to minimize it. Rather than shying away from this issue, the present thesis has openly addressed the relationship between the two theologians, both on a personal level, and in relation to their work. We demonstrated, for instance, the relevance of Fr Sergii Bulgakov's theology to Archim Sophrony's *soborny* ecclesiology and his theology of the Divine Life. In Chapter Four, we also saw how an epistemology Fr Sophrony shares with Bulgakov distanced him from the common Orthodox emphasis on the apophatic, such as he found in Vladimir Lossky.

At the same time, though, we underlined the limits to Archim Sophrony's reception of Bulgakov's thought, and we noted his reservation about embracing the universalist conclusions of this vision. This tendency to withdraw from the implications of his own theology is one of the weaknesses in Archim Sophrony's work, which finds its source in his attempt to apply ascetical corrections to his predominantly ontological theology. Throughout his entire body of work, there is a constant tension

between his ascetical thinking and the maximalist approach to theology he inherited from Fr Sergii Bulgakov.

Far from being a weakness, Archim. Sophrony's reception of Fr Sergii Bulgakov's theology represents one of the most interesting aspects of his work. His creative, yet critical involvement with Fr Sergii is of particular relevance today, when Orthodox theology has begun a process of recuperating and reassessing his theology.

Following the introductory analysis of Archim Sophrony's theology in the first chapter, we structured the main body of the thesis around the three main claims regarding his ecclesiology: that it is a created-uncreated being which exists (1) hypostatically; (2) *sobornically*; and (3) sophiologically. We have seen, in the first part of the second chapter, that these three ecclesiological claims correspond to Archim Sophrony's three-fold interpretation of the doctrine of creation according to the Divine image. Archim Sophrony's theology of image is founded on an original application of the Divine moments of existence on the human level; we noted that the distinction between hypostasis, essence and energy in relation to humanity has no Patristic equivalent, and that its source is to be found in Fr Sergii Bulgakov's theology. Following this distinction, Archim Sophrony identifies an element of the Divine 'likeness' in man on each level of human existence; consequently, he defines the Divine image as, respectively, the hypostatical principle, the soborny principle and Divine Life.

These three interpretations of the Divine image are subsequently applied on the human level, in virtue of what previous theologians have termed twentieth-century 'maximalist' anthropology. The axiom of this manner of doing theology is that everything we know of Christ is perfectly applicable to the level of all humanity. We have seen that this claim is not limited to Christ's humanity, but to His Divinity as well, on the argument that Christ's Divinity reveals the Divine Humanity (*Bogochelovechestvo*, Godmanhood) of the ontologically perfect Son of Man; in other words, Christ's experience of Divinity does not represent an exception, but reveals the universal potentiality of the whole All-Adam. In Chapter Four, we have correlated this personalist approach with the sophianic distinction Archim Sophrony sees in the manner Christ experienced His Divinity: divinely, in virtue of His Divine essence, and in a creaturely manner, in virtue of His Divine Energy. However, Archim Sophrony claims, Christ has a double 'access' to this latter manner of experiencing Divinity, as He lives the Divine Life in two ways: as the Son of God, and as the Son of

Man. On the basis of the relationship he sees between ontology and epistemology, Archim Sophrony argues that the ‘content’ of Christ’s Divinity does not differ because of the different manners in which He experiences it. That is to say that the Divinity Christ experiences as the Son of Man, its ‘what’, is precisely the same as that which he experiences as the Son of God, a reality which the Scripture reveals through the account concerning Christ’s Ascension to the right hand of the Father. Consequently, Christ’s Human Divinity is the same Divinity which He experiences as one of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, an ontological ‘maximalism’ which becomes thus, the universal human ideal.

Following these three interpretations of the Divine image, we have seen, in Chapters Two, Three and Four, respectively, that: (1) the Church is a hypostatical being, in the sense of being hypostatized by each of its members; (2) the Church is a *soborny* being, in the sense of being a multi-hypostatical wholeness; (3) the Church is a sophianic being, in the sense of being dynamically identical with, and yet different from the Divine Being. At the centre of all these statements concerning the Church we find the dynamic element of these rapports of ontological identity and difference, which reflects the centrality of the concept of Divine Life (Sophia, Energy) in Archim Sophrony’s ecclesiology.

Thus, Chapter Two was dedicated to an in-depth analysis of Archim Sophrony’s personalist theology. Previous studies have used his focus on hypostaticity predominantly in order to investigate his anthropological thinking. However, Archim Sophrony’s central claim about the meaning of the human Person is that it becomes dynamically equal with the All-Adam, the Church itself. Although this statement does justify the development of a personalist anthropology, it also points to a similar relevance of the concept of hypostasis for Archim Sophrony’s ecclesiology. This inter-relation between hypostasis and the Church was the focus of our second Chapter, in which we have looked at Archim Sophrony’s anthropology with a set of new, ecclesiological questions: rather than asking ourselves what does it mean for the human being to be equal with the Church, we looked at the implications of the inverted question: what does it say about the Church that it is dynamically equal with each of its members? In fact, such an inverted perspective is justified by Archim Sophrony himself, in that his ecclesiological study ‘On the Unity of the Church’ is overwhelmingly built around anthropological concepts. This has not changed with time, so that the same inter-dependence between man and Church is to be found in both versions of the article, published in 1950 and 1958, respectively. Archim Sophrony is not a singular case; to quote just one

other example, perhaps the most relevant to our discussion, we must remember that Fr Sergii Bulgakov defines his ecclesiological treatise ‘The Bride of the Lamb’ - published six years before Archim Sophrony’s article, in 1944 - as a volume ‘devoted to anthropology.’<sup>454</sup>

In conclusion, the discussion carried in the second chapter showed that Archim Sophrony envisaged the church as a hypostatical being, dynamically equal with each of its members. In other words, each human being is a hypostatization of the whole Church, an ecclesiological claim whose anthropological implications were developed by Archim Sophrony in his ascetical work.

In Chapter Three, we moved from the ecclesiological *multi*-unity of the hypostatical Church to the *multi-unity* of the *soborny* Church. After looking at Archim Sophrony’s claim that the Church is hypostatizable by each of its members, we were left with the question concerning the limits of ecclesiology: who are the members of this Church? The answer to this question is provided by an analysis of the ways in which Archim Sophrony understands and applies the notion of *sobornost*. A comparative analysis of the two published versions of Archim Sophrony’s ecclesiological treatise ‘On the Unity of the Church’ revealed a fundamental shift in his understanding of *sobornicity*, from its nineteenth-century social meaning to the twentieth-century ontological developments of Fr Sergii Bulgakov. The second part of the chapter looked at the variety of interpretations and applications *sobornost* finds in Archim. Sophrony’s theology, and concluded that he is consistent in defining *ecclesiological sobornicity* exclusively in the ontological terms of Fr Sergii.

By the end of the third chapter, we saw that the ontological meaning he applies to *ecclesiological sobornicity* implies that all humanity belongs to the Being of the Church, as hypostases of the one human nature. The All-Adam is the *soborny* unity of the whole multiplicity of human hypostases, from Adam to the last born human being. There is an interdependence between a hypostasis’ dynamic identity with its *sobor*, and the *sobor*’s eschatological plenitude, which cannot be fulfilled otherwise except through the *soborny* unity of *all* its hypostases. As a result, we identified a new source of tension in Archim Sophrony’s thought, as his ontological interpretation of *sobornicity* ultimately implies universal salvation.

Chapters Two and Three focused on the double-faceted relationship between a *sobor* and its hypostases; we saw that, according to Archim Sophrony, ecclesiological hypostaticity means that

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<sup>454</sup> See ‘To the Reader’, in *Bride of the Lamb*, p. xvii.

each human being is a hypostatization of the Church, while ecclesiological *sobornicity* implies the ontological unity of all hypostases of the human nature. Both these rapports are expressions of inter-essential relationships, that is, relationships within a single essence. In comparison, in Chapter Four we approached a different type of relationship, that between God and the Church, two beings which belong to different essences. We started our investigation by noting the radical difference between hypostaticity and sobornicity, on the one side, and Divine Life, as the sophianic aspect of the Divine image, on the other. While the former were elements of similarity, Archim. Sophrony's theology of Divine Life necessarily leads to the idea of *tozhestvo*, the ontological identity of God and Man on the level of energy. We saw how Archim. Sophrony's concept of Divine Life is essentially connected with St Gregory Palamas' theology of the Uncreated Energies, and also with Fr Sergii Bulgakov's theology of the Divine and Creaturely Sophias. Fr Sergii Bulgakov's relevance for Fr Sophrony was further attested by the common link both theologians create between ontology and epistemology, a connection that they use as an argument for their claim concerning the dynamic *identity* of God and Man. In relation to this topic, more than anything else, we noted the originality and creative strength of Archim Sophrony's thought. However, the tension between the two sides of his theology - the ontological and the ascetical - is also more visibly manifested here than anywhere else.

The Holy Trinity and the Church become one Being. Archim. Sophrony consistently argues for the ontological *tozhestvo* of the two Beings in the Eschaton, because they share the same Divine Life. The two Beings become one in virtue of the same *content* of Life, yet they maintain their distinction because of the different manner in which they live this Life. The ontological one-ness between the two *sobors* is represented by the *what* of the Divine Life, whereas their ontological distinction is represented by the difference in *how* they live that common *what*. The Church is Divine and uncreated in virtue of the *what* She shares with the Holy Trinity, yet She is also remains created through the manner in which She lives this Uncreated *what*. As we have seen in Chapter Four, Fr Sergii Bulgakov's influence on this point is evident, especially through his theology of Divine and Creaturely Sophias. Both the strengths and the weaknesses in Archim Sophrony's theology of Divine Life come from his attempt to develop a sophiological ecclesiology without the sophiological system to support it and not addressing the ultimate universalist implications of his own theology.

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