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## SOPHRONY SAKHAROV'S LITURGICAL PRAYERS:

### RE-EXPRESSING THE LITURGICAL EXPERIENCE

Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov (1896-1993) was born in Moscow in 1896, and emigrated to Paris after the Revolution. After studying at the Theological Institute of St Serge he moved to Mount Athos. After the Second World War he had to leave Mount Athos and returned to Paris where he served as a priest and gradually gathered around himself a group of monastically inclined people. The monastic community moved to Essex, in Great Britain, where Archimandrite Sophrony founded the Monastery of St John the Baptist. He died at the monastery in 1993.<sup>1</sup>

Sophrony Sakharov wrote his own prayers for different situations. The most significant collection of his prayers is meant to be read at the Divine Liturgy before the Cherubic Hymn. Sakharov also wrote other liturgical prayers: the prayer to be read by the priest before beginning the Holy Liturgy, the prayer to be read after the Great Entrance, the prayer to be read before the consecration of the Holy Gifts, and two prayers behind the ambon. It was typical of him that he had the courage also to change the wording of some fixed traditional prayers. With the new prayers he wrote, Sakharov wanted to liven up and revitalize prayer so that it would be easier for the people to concentrate on praying. In his view, fixed prayers that are repeated unchanged again and again may weaken the attentiveness of the people.

Sophrony Sakharov himself, in a letter addressed to his sister, who lived in Moscow,<sup>2</sup> cites a book published by the Holy Synod of the Russian Church in 1905, in which the bishops presented as their opinion that it was appropriate to read aloud prayers that had until then been read silently, so that the people would be able to participate more actively in the celebration of the liturgy. Sakharov states that reading aloud is of course not appropriate in large parish churches considering the established order of service that has been in use for centuries. However, he considers it a good idea to encourage the people to participate more actively in the liturgy. Sakharov writes further in his letter that he himself has developed an alternative approach to the problem – the additional prayers to be read before the Cherubic Hymn. The purpose of these prayers is, according to him, to help the people, together with the priest, to

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1 Ильянина, Л. А. *Старец Софроний. Ученик преподобного Силуана Афонского*. Санкт-Петербург: Искусство России 2011, 81–82.

2 Сахаров, Софроний, *Письма в Россию*. 3е изд. Троице-Сергиева Лавра: Свято-Иоанно-Предтеченский монастырь 2010, 72–73.

concentrate and turn their attention inwards, at this most important moment during the liturgy.<sup>3</sup> Sakharov used elements from traditional liturgical prayers, both audible and silent prayers, in his prayers, and his goal was to increase attentiveness, which is sometimes weakened because of the repetition of one and the same formula.<sup>4</sup>

Since Sakharov was of the opinion that fixed prayers may weaken the attentiveness of the people, he tried to increase their attentiveness by changing the wording of the prayers. He uses this technique in his own prayers to be read before the Great Entrance. For example, he sometimes adds words to the conclusion of each petition. Each of his prayers ends with words borrowed from the litany of fervent supplication: *молим Ти ся, услыши и помилуй* (we pray Thee, hearken and have mercy). To these words, he sometimes adds the word *скоро* (soon): *скоро услыши* (hearken soon) or *скоро помилуй* (have mercy soon), or *Отче Благий* (Good Father): *молим Ти ся, Отче Благий, услыши и помилуй* (we pray Thee, Good Father, hearken and have mercy) or *Отче Всевяты́й* (Most Holy Father): *молим Ти ся, Отче Всевяты́й, услыши ны и помилуй* (we pray Thee Most Holy Father hear and have mercy), *тай Христе* (Christ): *молим Ти ся, Христе, услыши и помилуй* (we pray Thee Christ, hearken and have mercy).

Most of the liturgical prayers written by Sophrony Sakharov are meant to be read before the Cherubic Hymn. There are forty-eight of these prayers, divided into eight groups. However, there are also a smaller number of other liturgical prayers to be read at other points of the Divine Liturgy. One of these is the prayer to be read before the consecration of the Holy Gifts. Sakharov usually read it, while the singers were singing the hymn "We hymn Thee, we bless Thee, we give thanks to Thee, O Lord..."<sup>5</sup> In other words, this prayer was not meant to be read aloud so that the people would be able to hear it. This is different from the others, which were meant to be read aloud. The content of the prayer and the fact that it was supposed to be read before the consecration of the Gifts refer to the reading of the troparion of the Third Hour before the Epiclesis, which is common in the Slavic practice. Both the prayer before the consecration of the Gifts written by Sakharov and the troparion of the Third Hour speak about the Holy Spirit and ask that God will not forsake us. It is interesting that he corrected the problem of the reading of the troparion of the Third Hour at this point of the Liturgy, namely the anaphora being directed to the Father, while the troparion of the Third Hour is directed to the Son. Sakharov's prayer for this moment in the liturgy is directed to the Father, just as the anaphora is directed to the Father.

A natural point of comparison for the additional liturgical prayers written by Sophrony Sakharov are the silent prayers read by the priest during the liturgy, especially during the first and the second litanies of the faithful before the Great Entrance. These silent prayers include the same themes as the addi-

3 Сахаров 2010, 73.

4 Αθανασιαδης, Θεωνας, Αρχιμ. *Θεια λατρεία και λειτουργική βίωση κατά τον Γερωντά Σωφρονίο του Εσσεξ*. Πτολεμαίδα, 2011, 128; Сахаров 2010, 75.

5 Сахаров, Софроний. *Молитвенное приношение*. Москва: Паломник, 2004, 138.

tional prayers written by Sakharov. In the silent prayer read by the priest during the first litany of the faithful, the priest thanks God and prays that He will make the priest worthy of offering the sacrifice. In the silent prayer read by the priest during the second litany of the faithful, he prays that God will cleanse him so that he will be able to stand in front of the altar of sacrifice, and that he will be able to participate in the Holy Eucharist without being condemned. Both of these silent prayers are directed to the Holy Trinity.

Each of the five series of prayers to be read before the Great Entrance ends with the sentence: “Яко да под державою твоею всегда храними, Тебе славу возсылаем, Отцу и Сыну и Святому Духу, ныне и присно и во веки веков. Аминь.”<sup>6</sup> This is identical with the doxology said by the priest at the conclusion of the second litany of the faithful just before the Cherubic Hymn. This binds the prayers to the fixed traditional prayers of the Liturgy, and also indicates the point in the Liturgy when Sakharov intended the prayers to be read.

For Sophrony Sakharov, the silent prayers of the Liturgy of St Basil the Great were important.<sup>7</sup> The prayers he wrote himself were influenced by them and also quote them directly (parts in italics are direct quotations from the Liturgy of St Basil):

да будем *достойны приносить Тебе словесную сию и Безкровную Жертву о наших согрешениях и о людских невежествах*, юже прием во святый, и пренебесный, и мысленный Твой Жертвенник в вою благоухания, возниспосли нам благодать Святаго Твоего Духа.<sup>8</sup> (Offertory prayer of the Liturgy of St Basil the Great)

сподобляя нас *достойно приносить безкровную Жертву о гресех наших и о всем мире Твоем*<sup>9</sup> (Prayers before the Great Entrance, fourth set of prayers, second prayer)

Ты бо завесою пречистыя Плоти Твоя обновил еси нам путь новый и живой во Святая Святых во еже *приносити сердцем сокрушенным и духом смирения словесную сию и безкровную службу нашу о гресех наших и о всем мире твоём*.<sup>10</sup> (Prayers before the Great Entrance, sixth set of prayers, fifth prayer)

The thoughts in this prayer written to be read before the Great Entrance are identical to those expressed in the offertory prayer read after the Great Entrance in the Liturgy of St Basil the Great. Both speak about sacrificing worthily and about the sacrifice being reasonable and bloodless, and they both also say that the sacrifice is carried out on behalf of both the priest and the people.

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6 “That being ever guarded by thy might we may give glory to thee, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.”

7 Ильюнина 2011, 112.

8 “that we may be worthy to offer unto the this reasonable and bloodless sacrifice for our sins and for the errors of the people: and receiving the same for a sweet-smelling savour unto thy holy altar far above all heavens, send down upon us the grace of thy holy Spirit.”

9 “to make us worthy to offer the bloodless sacrifice for our sins and for your entire world.”

10 “to offer this reasonable and bloodless sacrifice for our sins and for your entire world with a broken heart and spirit of humility.”