

Amsterdam Lectures 2011-12:

Eastern Orthodox Theology: a Personal Introduction

Lecture IV: What went wrong? Sin and death.

In the last lecture, we looked at creation: a creation of beings both visible and invisible, a creation which, because created out of nothing, manifests nothing but God himself—the whole created order is to be seen as a Theophany, a manifestation of God, indeed a manifestation of God's beauty. But then we look at the world in which we live, and we seem to see there something else. There is, certainly, beauty—especially perhaps in nature: the beauty of the natural order, of mountains and forests, of rivers, lakes and oceans, of the living creatures that inhabit the created order, not least human beings themselves. There is beauty, too, in what creatures make of their environment: from nests and other dwelling places, to the buildings with which humans adorn their living space—both homes, and public buildings, and temples and churches—and what they put in them, furniture, decorations and so on. There is a further beauty in what I suppose we can call culture: arrangements of objects, tools and so on—some of which we find in species other than human beings—through to paintings, statues, carvings; music, both for the human voice and for instruments; and poems, stories and other forms of literature, where our ability to communicate goes beyond the utile and delights and intrigues our minds. There are hints of this in the early chapters of Genesis: we read of Jabal who was 'the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle' (Gen. 4:20), of Jubal 'the father of those who play on the lyre and pipe' (Gen. 4:21), Tubal-cain 'the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron' (Gen. 4:22). But the account in Genesis is part of a history that leads to the story of Noah, ushered in by the Lord's seeing 'that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of his heart was only evil continually' (Gen. 6:5). And this corresponds with what we see when we look at the created order. There is, as we have seen, beauty, but there is much that mars that beauty: natural beauty is destroyed or obscured by human aggression, and we humans do not just shape our environment by making ourselves at home in it; we build defensive settlements, make weapons with which to defend ourselves, and wreak destruction on one another. Limited resources lead to inequality: there are those who oppress others and those

who are oppressed. The Hebrew prophets are eloquent in their denunciation of such oppressive inequality: ‘Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the midst of the stall; who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, who drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!’ (Amos 6:4–6). Sexual differentiation and the love of man and woman can be both the source of one of the greatest of human delights, and the cause of the deepest heartbreak.

What went wrong? The Fathers mostly consider this question in their interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve and their sin in the Garden of Eden and expulsion from Paradise into this world. I say ‘mostly’, because consideration of the story of Noah and his ark, and the Tower of Babel (or the ‘Confusion of Tongues’ in the Greek tradition), also provoke reflection on the presence of evil in the world. But the story of Adam’s fall is the archetypal account, mostly, I would suggest, because of the way the Apostle Paul casts Christ as the ‘Second Adam’, come to remedy the effects of Adam’s sin. If Christ is the ‘second Adam’ who comes to redeem us, then it is to the ‘first’ Adam that we are bound to look to find out what went wrong.

There are a number of preliminary observations that I want to make about Orthodox teaching on the Fall. As with the Fathers, it is presented as reflection on the story of Adam and Eve. It is in fact a matter of telling stories: telling stories that help to explain where we are now. Story-telling seems to be fundamental to how we humans come to understand ourselves; it is by telling stories and placing ourselves in them that we understand what it is to be human, and to be the humans that we are. This seems to be true from the earliest story-telling of which we know to the story-telling that takes place in novels nowadays. Indeed, the stories we tell do not seem to advance much. They change in the way they are presented—from early accounts of heroes and gods to the complex layering of reflection that we find in a novel by Henry James, for instance—but the fundamental mythological patterns seem to be of great antiquity; we still turn to ancient Greek myths for these fundamental patterns. I stress this, because there is a tradition of interpretation that gets very anxious about whether we are to take the stories in Genesis ‘literally’ or not. In the Fathers we find a way of interpretation that transcends these issues, or at least places them in another light. It

seems to me perfectly clear that the Scriptures were read in a way that meant that they were neither taken at a simply literal level, nor at a level that dispensed altogether with a literal interpretation. If we have a problem with this, it is likely to be our problem.

A further problem is the way in which, for some reason that I am not at all clear about, we objectify, as it were, the notion of the 'Fall'. This is so much a part of how most Christians think of things that I sometimes find it difficult to convey what I mean. Put in a simple way, the Fathers simply don't talk about 'the Fall', as some objective event. The Greek noun for fall—*ptôsis*—seems rarely to be used to describe what happened to Adam. It is, I think, significant, when you *don't* have a word for a thing. The Fathers seem to me (this is, I admit, a subjective impression) to talk about what Adam did: he sinned, he was disobedient, he turned away from God. The consequences were disastrous: the world of harmony that God had intended in creating the cosmos with the human central to it was destroyed. The principle of harmony was taken away; the elements that should have fitted together fell apart and became opposed to one another. We are hearing about a process, and furthermore hearing about this process from the perspective of another process, or perhaps a deeper process: God's continuing love for the world he created, and his continuing longing to draw the created order to the end for which he created it. In treating the question of sin and death and destruction, it seems to me that the theology of the Fathers never lost sight of a more important consideration: that the world had been created to be a place where human beings, created in the image of God, would be able to draw closer to God and bring into being a union of wills—a cooperation, a harmony—that amounts to something even greater than anything that could just be made. There is, as it were, an arc that passes from creation to deification, union with God. Sin, death, destruction is a problem brought about by human misuse of freewill, a problem that needs to be dealt with and leads to what one might think of as the lesser arc leading from fall to redemption. It is possible to become concerned with the lesser arc from fall to redemption to such an extent that one loses sight of the greater arc passing from creation to deification, but the theology of the Fathers—and Orthodox theology, when it is true to itself—avoids this danger, and never forgets that we are dealing with God's creation, created for union with Him.

Another way of putting this is that it seems to be characteristic of Orthodox theology that it considers the question of Adam's sin and its consequences from the perspective of the Resurrection of Christ. The icon, called 'The Resurrection', is not a picture of Christ rising from the tomb, the one is familiar with from Western art, rather it is a depiction of Christ destroying the gates of Hell and bringing out from Hell, witnessed by King David and King Solomon and some of the prophets, our foreparents, Adam and Eve, as the first of a crowd of other people (whose heads sometimes stretch back into the caverns of Hell), who are being brought out of Hell by Christ's victory over death in the Resurrection. In the Orthodox calendar, on the Sunday before Christmas we commemorate 'all those who were well-pleasing to God from Adam until Joseph the Betrothed of the most-holy Mother of God'. Adam 'well-pleasing to God'? Is not Adam the archetypal sinner? Maybe, but in the Orthodox tradition he is the archetypal penitent, too: we shall come back to that later. Adam is commemorated as he is now: one whose penitence made it possible for him to be redeemed from Hell by Christ at his resurrection.

There is something else, too, that flows from looking back to the Fall from the perspective of the Resurrection: the resurrection is seen as the conquest of Christ over *death*, and so it is death, rather than sin, that is central to the Orthodox understanding of the consequences of Adam's disobedience. In Genesis, it is indeed death that is the promised punishment for eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (cf. Gen. 2:17), and it is the introduction of death into the world that is seen as the result of Adam's sin. What that meant is treated by the Fathers in a host of ways, that we cannot pursue in detail now, but what they explore is what it means for the world to come under the sway of death, rather than under the sway of sin. Some see it as meaning that Adam (and Eve) would not have died, had they not sinned: not that they were created immortal, but that, like Enoch (Gen. 5:24), he would have been 'taken' in some way. Others saw a change in the meaning of death; physical death would have come upon Adam, but it would have meant something different—perhaps on analogy with the way in which after Christ has conquered death in the resurrection, Christians still die, but not without hope. But what has been unleashed on the world by Adam's sin has been death. This is depicted in a striking way in the early chapters of St Athanasios' *On the Incarnation*: Adam's disobedience leads to the introduction of death and corruption into the cosmos—death and corruption, *thanatos* and *phthora*,

stalk through the pages of Athanasios' text like a couple of furies; the world created out of nothing is dissolving back into nothing. The world under the sway of death is a world characterized by corruption, disintegration; it is a world in which it is impossible to achieve anything, all human intentions are like building on sand—they are impermanent, fragile. In fact, it seems to me to be suggested that it is not so much sin that causes death, as death that causes sin—by sapping our determination, for nothing that we do has any permanence, it is all being carried away by the corruption that has been unleashed on the world; what is the point? At one point, Athanasios asks—like Anselm many centuries later—could not Adam have repented of his sin? Anselm's reply, famously, was that repentance would have done nothing, or far too little, to mitigate the offence that he had committed against God by his disobedience. Athanasios' reply is rather different: repentance might have availed for Adam himself, but would have still left the cosmos in a state of destruction—as if Adam had taken away the coping stone of the central arch of a building, and brought to whole building down about his ears; saying 'Sorry' would not be enough!

St Athanasios treats of the Fall both at the beginning of *On the Incarnation* and at the beginning of what is the first part of a two-part work, *Against the Nations*. There he presents a somewhat different account, often treated as if it were a less satisfactory sketch, though I would take it rather as complementary. There he sees human beings—rational beings, as he puts it—created to live in contemplation of God through the Word of God, and thus 'rejoice and converse with God, living an idyllic and truly blessed and immortal life'. But these rational beings turned away from contemplating God and turned—where? for they are created out of nothing—to themselves, and to the world that they fashion from... nothing. And so the soul comes to 'harbour fears and terrors and pleasures and thoughts of mortality' (CG 3). From contemplating God and living in a world of reality, he contemplates non-being and enters a haunted world of unreality—which Athanasios spells out as a world of immoral desires and longings, populated by the gods and goddesses of Greek paganism.

In both scenarios, Adam had abandoned the world as God created it, and tried to fashion an imaginary world of his own devising, an unreal world, unstable and subject to corruption. It is interesting to note, too, that Athanasios seems aware that the first

man is called Adam, because that is the word for ‘man’ in Hebrew (*CG 2*): with the suggestion that Adam is every one of us, rather than, or at least as much as, a historical figure.

But we need to pause and ask what kind of account this is? A mythical account of ‘everyman’, or an historical account of the first man? I have already suggested that this distinction would not, perhaps, have seemed to the Fathers quite as sharp as we are inclined to make it.

Mostly, it is the story of ‘everyman’; it is a story that is true of each one of us: we have all turned away from God, we all inhabit the world of corruption and death. But there is more to it than that, for it is not as if we have each created our own world of death. It is rather that we seem to have been born into such a world. To account for this the Fathers conceive of sin as being more than simply personal sin. What they mean by this is that if I were able to look at the consequences of my sin, it would seem all so much more than I could really be blamed for. It is as if the consequences of sin are amplified, in the course of nature, as it were, in an alarming way; the consequences of my sin mingle with the consequences of others’ sin and the whole combines into a kind of deafening cacophony. The Greek Fathers speak in this connexion of ‘ancestral sin’, *propaterikon amartima*, the sin of our forefathers, inherited sin. We are born into a ruined cosmos, ruined at a moral level, rather than a physical level (though there surely are areas—disease, for instance—where it is difficult to draw a line); we add our bit to the devastation, but most of it was already laid waste before we came along. The story of Adam talks of the very beginning of this process, but just as we are implicated in a sin that is bigger than we are, so, too, Adam has unleashed consequences of sin that are more than he could be regarded as personally responsible for. In the West, with Augustine and his followers, there develops a notion of original sin, *peccatum originale*: a sin that has its origin in Adam and infects, like an inherited disease, all humanity. This idea, in this very specific sense, never developed in the East, mostly, I suppose, because it seemed that the notion of ancestral sin explained well enough the way in which the effects of sin are more than merely personal. It also seems to me the case that the notion of ancestral sin tends to see the story of Adam and Eve as typical, rather than needing it to be

strictly historical, though, as I have said, for the Fathers this distinction was not drawn very sharply. It might, however, affect our interpretation of Genesis 3.

We need to go a little further here, because there is one aspect of the story of Adam and Eve that can cause problems. The story of the Fall presents a human story that implicated the whole cosmos. The Fathers developed this notion by drawing on ideas in some of the classical philosophers—especially Plato and the Stoics—about the relationship of the human and the cosmic. We shall discuss this in greater detail in lecture VI, but we need here to introduce it in outline. Many of the philosophers saw a relationship between the human and cosmic, so that the human was regarded as a microcosm, a little cosmos, in which all the structures of the cosmos were reflected; similarly, the cosmos could be regarded as the human writ large. Christian theologians worked this notion into their idea, drawn from Genesis, of the human created in the image of God. As God's image, the human had been set at the heart of the cosmos with the role of holding the whole cosmos together. When Adam and Eve relinquished their role as bond of the cosmos—*syndesmos tou kosmou*—the cosmos itself lost much of its harmony; the harmony of the stars and planets was preserved, though perhaps it became obscure to man, but the harmony that had existed in Paradise between humans and animals, for instance, was destroyed (only to be glimpsed in ascetics like St Antony and St Jerome, in whose lives some aspects of the original paradisaic harmony could be found—friendly lions, for instance). If you believe, as Genesis sets out, that the cosmos was created in six days (however these 'days' are understood) with the human coming at the end as the crown of creation, then this picture looks imaginatively plausible. If however one believes that the universe is as modern science thinks of it—an almost immeasurably long development from some primitive 'big bang', through the evolution of stars and galaxies, with human life emerging almost as an afterthought—this picture seems quite unimaginable. How could the cosmos depend on creatures that have only existed in the cosmos for an almost infinitesimal time at the end, on a smallish planet, circling a moderate sized star, in a fairly insignificant galaxy? Such considerations are going to occupy us from time to time in succeeding lectures, but here there is something more immediate. Most scientists think that human life has evolved from earlier forms of life, and indeed shares a great deal with other forms of animal life that have evolved alongside the human. Evolution is understood as a long process—

measured not in years, or centuries, but millennia—with human beings emerging, alongside other forms of animal life, towards the end, not so very long ago in terms even of geological time, let alone cosmic time. Do Christians have to believe that Adam and Eve existed, and that they sinned, and that their sin has infected all subsequent human beings? Do we have to believe that there was an original couple, that *homo sapiens* emerged from some kind of *homo erectus* as a single couple, in a particular place, and if so where? There are, as we know, Christians who believe this, and indeed not a few of them are Orthodox Christians. I don't, however, think we, as Orthodox, need to commit ourselves to such a position, and I want briefly to explain why.

First, however, we need to grasp why Darwin and the theory of evolution caused such controversy at all among Christians from the nineteenth century onwards, though it is worth remembering that not all Christians felt challenged in this way; many of them fell on the idea of evolution as a wonderful explanation of the place of the human in the cosmos—notable among these were Russian Orthodox philosophers such as Vladimir Solov'ev. Darwin caused controversy, not just—or even particularly—because his ideas contradicted Genesis, but because they fell foul of the way in which Genesis had been read by those influenced by the Enlightenment, for it was the Enlightenment that conceived of the human as almost exclusively rational and intellectual, and set the human at a distance from the animal. When the Fathers interpret Genesis, they see the human as sharing a very great deal with the animal, and indeed plant-like, creation. The possession of reason, the gift of being in the image of God, makes the human distinctive, indeed raises the human to a position that transcends the animal and the plant-like, both as being nobler, and also as bearing responsibility for the rest of creation, but the human still shares a very great deal with the rest of creation, both animal and plant-like, and even with the inanimate creation. St Gregory of Nyssa, the younger brother of St Basil the Great, discussed the nature of the human in his work, *On the Creation of the Human*, which he wrote to supplement his brother's set of homilies on the Six Days of Creation, the *Hexaemeron*, as presented in Genesis. Basil's homilies are incomplete, for reasons unknown: the creation of man is only mentioned, not discussed. In his work, Gregory deals at some length with the nature of the human. His account draws on the accepted philosophical ideas of his day, not least Aristotle's analysis of the human make-up.

At one point, Gregory tackles the idea that the human being has a soul that shares a great deal with the soul we find in animals, and indeed the soul we find in plants: the Greek word for soul, *psyche*, means 'life', and so the word soul suggests the principle of the life that any living creature has. So the human may be said to have an animal soul and a plant-like soul, as well as a rational or intellectual soul. But a human being does not have three souls, rather the intellectual soul manifests itself at the animal and plant-like level, which the human shares with animals and plants. What is meant to happen with humans is that the intellectual soul expresses itself through, and makes use of, the lower levels, the animal and plant-like. But the Fall, as we have seen, has disturbed the harmony of God's creation, and this is true at what one might call the psychological level: instead of the intellect expressing itself through the animal and plant-like, it finds itself serving the animal drives and plant-like needs (for nourishment, for example), and producing, what we call bestial behaviour, but which is really something distinctively human, though not anything to be proud of. So the human has two aspects—one reaching towards the divine, the other succumbing to the animal—and the human is in fact poised on a watershed between affinity to the divine and affinity to lower creation. Gregory puts it like this:

It seems to me that the human bears two contradictory likenesses—shaped in the divine aspect of his mind after the divine beauty, but also bearing, in the passionate impulses that arise in him, a likeness to the bestial nature.

Frequently his reason is reduced to bestiality, and obscures the better element by the worse through its inclination and disposition towards the animal. For whenever anyone drags down the activity of thought to these, and forces reason to become the servant of the passions, there occurs a sort of distortion of the good character towards the irrational image, his whole nature being refashioned in accordance with this, as reason cultivates the new shoots of the passions, and little by little causes them to grow into a multitude; for once [reason] makes common cause with passion, it produces a thick and diverse crop of evils.

Thus our love of pleasure took its beginning from our likeness to the irrational creation, but was increased by human transgressions, begetting such a variety of sinning flowing from pleasure, as is not to be found among the animals.

Thus the rising of anger is indeed akin to the impulse of the animals, but it is

increased by the alliance with our processes of thought. For thence come resentment, envy, deceit, conspiracy, hypocrisy: all these are the result of the evil husbandry of the intellect. For if the passion is stripped of this alliance with the processes of thought, the anger that is left behind is short-lived and feeble—like a bubble, bursting as soon as it comes into being. Thus the gluttony of pigs introduces covetousness, and the high spirit of the horse becomes the origin of pride; and everything that proceeds from the lack of reason in animal nature becomes vice by the wicked use of the intellect.

So, therefore, on the contrary, if reason instead assumes sway over such motions, each of them is transmuted into a form of virtue. For anger produces courage, cowardice caution, fear obedience, hatred aversion from vice, the power of love the desire for what is truly beautiful. High spirit in our character raises our thought above the passions, and keeps it from bondage to what is base. The great Apostle, too, praises such a form of mental elevation when he bids us constantly to ‘set our minds on things that are above’ (Col 3:2) and so we find that every such motion, when elevated by loftiness of mind, is conformed to the beauty after the divine image.¹

This is very much more subtle than—quite unfairly—attributing the worse characteristics of the human to animals, rather the human shares a great deal with the animal world, but in making it human either raises it to something that furthers our own assimilation to God, our own process of deification, or makes it human by embroidering and developing it in characteristically human ways, fashioning vices that take their cue from innocent animal patterns of behaviour. But my immediate point is simply that such a view of what it is to be human acknowledges that there is a great deal in our humanity that we share with the animal world. Gregory himself had no notion of evolution—it would be completely anachronistic to suppose that he did—but, with his conception of the human, the notion that our evolutionary past manifests a great deal of commonality with the animal world would not have seemed inconceivable or in any way a diminishment of what it is to be human.

My first point, then, is that the idea of continuity between the animal and the human presupposed by the theory of evolution is not an idea that is at all at odds with how

¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis* 18.3–5.

the Fathers understood human nature. Orthodox theology should not have any problem at such a level. What about Adam and Eve as the original human couple? Here I would draw a distinction between the notions of ancestral sin, found in the Greek Fathers and accepted by Orthodox theology, and of original sin, characteristic of much Western theology, under the influence of Augustine. Original sin involves the idea of some baneful inheritance from Adam (and strictly speaking in Augustinian theology that we are each, individually, responsible for Adam's sin and justly punished for it); it may well be possible to recast this doctrine in some form that dispenses with the historicity of Adam, but clearly there is work to be done. With the notion of ancestral sin, the situation seems to me rather different. What is being affirmed is that something of the sinful condition in which we find ourselves is inherited from our forefathers and foremothers, who are in some way represented by Adam and Eve. It is not claimed that we are *responsible* for ancestral sin, simply that we are affected by it. The world into which we are born is affected by the sin of our forebears: the harmony God intended in creating the world has been shattered, the moral atmosphere in which we grow up poisoned, for we are not isolated individuals, but enter into our humanity at a moral level through interaction with the members of our family, and the society in which we live; in a fallen world these nurturing communities are affected by sinful presuppositions, our ideals are often shallow, our trust in our fellow human beings damaged and weakened. I don't think we need to pretend that we know enough about the emergence of humanity in the evolutionary process to be definite about an original couple; simply that as human beings found themselves growing in awareness of something beyond the merely human, manifest in the way in which the first signs of humanity in the archaeological record begin to include some awareness of a divine transcendence—signs pointing beyond the everyday, that the surviving evidence prevents us from defining with much clarity—they found, as we do, that the pull of more evident pleasure, or a sense of the self expressing itself in aggression towards the other, was too great to resist. Here, as elsewhere, there is much that we do not understand, and we need not pretend to any greater clarity than we can discern.

The figures of Adam and Eve are, nonetheless, powerful, but powerful as inclusive figures that tell us about our own experience of evil and our own struggles towards repentance. The moment in the Orthodox Calendar when Adam becomes the focus of

attention is the Sunday on the very threshold of Lent, the day in which we commemorate Adam's expulsion from Paradise. In the first verse, or troparion, at Vespers we say:

The Lord my Creator, taking dust from the earth, formed me into a living creature, breathing into me the breath of life and giving me a soul; He honoured me as ruler on earth over all things visible, making me a companion of the angels. But Satan the deceiver, using the serpent as his instrument, enticed me by food, parted me from the glory of God and gave me over to the earth and the lowest depths of death. But, as Master and compassionate, call me back again.²

Adam laments his sin, and his expulsion from Paradise, but ends calling out to God to call him back. Here is Adam as everyman; as we sing this verse we take it upon our lips and utter it from our heart. Like Adam, we were created; like Adam we have fallen; like Adam we call on God to call us back to Himself. As the services continues, these themes are developed. Adam looks back to Paradise and addresses it:

O precious Paradise, unsurpassed in beauty, tabernacle built by God, unending gladness and delight, glory of the righteous, joy of the prophets, and dwelling of the saints, with the sound of your leaves pray to the Maker of all: may He open to me the gates which I closed by my transgression, and may He count me worthy to partake of the Tree of Life and of the joy which was mine when I dwelt in you beforehand.

The next troparion reflects on this:

Adam was banished from Paradise through disobedience and cast out from delight, beguiled by the words of a woman. Naked he sat outside the garden, lamenting 'Woe is me!' Therefore let us all make haste to accept the season of the Fast, obeying the traditions of the Gospel, that we may in all things be well-pleasing to Christ and receive once more a dwelling-place in Paradise.

² Translations from the Greek Triodion, based on those in *The Lenten Triodion*, translated... by Mother Maria and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware (London, 1978).

We are all sitting naked outside Paradise with Adam, and lamenting; the season of the Great Fast we are about to embark on gives us the chance to share in Adam's penitence, so that we may find ourselves, with him, on the eve of Easter, grasped by the hand of the risen Christ and taken from banishment to Paradise.

Adam laments, but does not despair. Even though naked and shut out of Paradise he turns back to God in sorrow and repentance.

I lament, I groan, I weep as I look upon the cherubim with the sword of fire set to guard the gate of Eden against all transgressors. Woe is me! I cannot enter unless You, O Saviour, grant me unhindered approach.

O Christ, my Saviour, boldly I put my trust in the abundance of your mercies and in the blood that flowed from your divine side; for through your blood you sanctified the nature of mortal man, O loving Lord, and opened to those that worship you the gates of Paradise that of old were closed to Adam.

The gates of Paradise are a recurrent theme, and pick up a verse we have been singing at Mattins on the Sundays before Lent, and continue to sing throughout Lent:

Open to me, O Giver of Life, the gates of repentance: for early in the morning my spirit seeks your holy temple, bearing a temple of the body all defiled. But as you are compassionate, cleanse it by your loving-kindness and mercy.

In the last century, a monk of the Holy Mountain, the Russian peasant who is now known to the world as St Silouan, wrote a meditation on Adam called 'Adam's Lament'.³ He begins by speaking of 'Adam, the father of mankind' and sees the worst consequences of Adam's sin and banishment from Paradise in the fact that he was 'widowed of the love of God'; as a result, 'he suffered grievously and lamented with a great moan'. Adam, for St Silouan, is both an individual—now in Paradise again—and a representative figure: representative of 'the soul which has known God through the Holy Spirit but has afterwards lost grace [and] experiences the torment

³ First published in English by Fr Sofrony, his disciple, in a book called *The Undistorted Image. Staretz Silouan 1866–1938* (London, 1958), 137–44; now in the expanded English version, *Saint Silouan the Athonite* (Tolleshunt Knights, 1991), 448–56.

that Adam suffered... [the] aching and deep regret in the soul that has grieved the beloved Lord’.

So the story of Adam is, for St Silouan, the story of love lost, regretted and eventually regained: human love for God, for God’s love for us is constant, and unceasingly calls human beings back to himself. One of the most poignant moments in the story of the Fall as Genesis relates it occurs when Adam realizes what he has done, discovers that he and Eve are naked, and they make for themselves aprons of fig leaves. ‘And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.’ They had walked with God in the garden in the time of their innocence, but now they hid themselves: their easy, unself-conscious intercourse with God was lost; their love for God had fled, they were afraid, and hid themselves. It is that lost love that, for St Silouan, is the heart of Adam’s sin; and it is the restoration of that love that God seeks from then on. The expulsion from Paradise, the nakedness, the toil needed to support themselves, even the pain of childbirth, as seen as ways in which God seeks to stir man’s conscience and bring him back to love. In ‘Adam’s Lament’, St Silouan explores the plight of Adam—the plight of each one of us—and he ends with us humans calling on Adam to help us, to show us the way back. But Adam is silent, and when he speaks it is only to say: ‘My children, leave me in peace. I cannot wrench myself from the love of God to speak to you... Trouble me not. I see the Mother of God in glory...’ It seems bafflingly heartless. But in St Silouan’s account we humans go on pestering Adam, and he replies: ‘Repent before the Lord, and entreat him. He loves man and will give all things... Greet tribulation. Wear down your bodies. Humble yourselves and love your enemies, that the Holy Spirit may take up His abode in you...’ Adam is unwilling to be mediator for his children; it is the second Adam who is that. He is unwilling even to be intercessor; we have the Mother of God and the saints. He tells us simply to repent, to go on knocking on the gates of repentance. ‘Adam’s lament’ ends:

Adam lost the earthly paradise and sought it weeping. But the Lord through His love on the Cross gave Adam another paradise, fairer than the old—a paradise in heaven where shines the Light of the Holy Trinity.

Next time we shall turn to the One who is the Second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ,
God Incarnate.