Continual Repentance as a Hermeneutical Tool for Interpreting the Writings of Saint Symeon the New Theologian

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Contents

Abbreviations

Symeon's Writings

CD = Catechetical Discourses
ED = Ethical Discourses
PTC= Practical and Theological Chapters
TD = Theological Discourses
H = Hymns of Divine Eros
Ep. = Epistles

Other Abbreviations

Amb. = The Ambigua (Maximos the Confessor)
Ladder = The Ladder of Divine Ascent (John Klimakos)
Life = The Life of St. Symeon the New Theologian (Niketas Stethatos)
OSL = On the Spiritual Law (Mark the Monk)
OR = On Repentance (Mark the Monk)
QD = Questions and Doubts (Maximos the Confessor)
SC = Sources Chrétiennes
Thal. = The Responses to Thalassios (Maximos the Confessor)
TNTS = Topics of Natural and Theological Science (Gregory Palamas)

Introduction

"A Bundle of Paradoxes": The Place of St Symeon in Orthodox Theology – Problems and Challenges

Monk, abbot, ascetic, spiritual father – the life and theology of St Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) stands today as a powerful witness and call for us to experience Christ in a personal, deifying encounter. He not only had seen Christ, but could describe that experience in stark and *unambiguous* language. Controversial in his own time because of his fierce enthusiasm and claim to spiritual authority; he was a spiritual master rather than a systematic theologian, who wrote and taught from his own experience. Adamantly opposed to the abstract, philosophical theologizing current in his time, Symeon "strove to restore theology to its pristine mystical tendency as a wisdom infused by the Holy Spirit into the Christian after he had been thoroughly purified through a rigorous asceticism and a state of constant repentance."[1] Symeon's writings continue to play a crucial role in the renewal of spiritual life and prayer within the Orthodox Church and beyond.

Over the last century, St Symeon has been described in a number of ways: he has been called "Un grand mystique Byzantin";[2] "a mystic of fire and light" as well as "one of the leading charismatic mystics the Church of Christ has produced";[3] "the greatest of the Byzantine mystical

[1] See George Maloney's introduction to St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses*, trans. C.J. deCatanzaro, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 2.
[2] Irénée Hausherr, "Un Grand Mystique Byzantin," Vol. 12, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 45 (Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1928), v–xciii.
[3] George A. Maloney, *The Mystic of Fire and Light: St. Symeon the New Theologian* (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1975), 5.

writers";[4] a "mystical anarchist";[5] "a bundle of paradoxes,"[6] who at the same time is "fully within the continuum of Orthodox patristic thought."[7] Symeon is "one of the most controversial writers of the entire Christian tradition,"[8] but also "one of the most outstanding Fathers of the Eastern Church."[9] More recently Symeon has been called "the most easily misunderstood"[10] of the Greek Fathers, which "sometimes makes the reading of Symeon a particularly dangerous undertaking, even today."[11] What are we to make of these sometimes-diverging assessments? One immediate observation is that they result in a fragmented image of Symeon's person, life, and theology; which creates a certain ambiguity that goes against the *unambiguous* expression and authenticity of his ecclesial witness. By fragmentation leading to ambiguity, I mean the coexistence of diverging statements and open questions that suggest the need for further clarification.

A key question is: Is it possible that the ambiguity lies not with Symeon himself, but is fundamentally a matter of how both his life and theology have been interpreted over the last century? A closer reading of Symeon's theology as well as researching the scholarship on his life and writings, suggests that the contentious issue is indeed that which surrounds the interpretation of his life and theology; for how could so many varying and sometimes peculiar epithets be applied to the same person by a multitude of scholars? As H.J.M Turner has pointed out, much of the scholarly work on Symeon has been focused on his supposed "mysticism" and "it is as a mystic

[4] Basil Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ: St. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022): Life, Spirituality, Doctrine*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 9.
[5] Alexander Golitzin, "The Body of Christ: Saint Symeon the New Theologian on Spiritual Life and the Hierarchical Church," *Scrinium*, no. 3 (2007): 107. Golitzin is here quoting Johannes Koder from his "Introduction" to *Syméon le nouveau théologien: Hymnes* (*SC* 156), 60-61, note 2.
[6] Alexander Golitzin, *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*, vol. 3: *Life, Times, and Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 175.
[7] Ibid., 7.
[8] Hilarion Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 1.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Nikolaos Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities: The Creation of the Christian Self-Beyond Spirituality and Mysticism in the Patristic Era* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2019), 10.
[11] Ibid., 97.

that he has attracted most attention."[12] Yet as Turner has also remarked, there is no compelling reason why interest in Symeon should be limited to that aspect alone.[13] One of the problems which emerges from this approach, is that such a narrow focus is methodologically questionable. It does not help in clarifying what Symeon actually meant and did. To name but one example, we can refer to his appeal to the luminous vision, "that element which occupies so important a part of his narrative."[14] Compounding the problem is that such a narrow mystical reading and interpretation of Symeon adopts a questionable understanding of mysticism, ignores his historical context, and overlooks major theological themes in Symeon's writings, in favour of an interpretation in which Symeon becomes a "type" of Byzantine writer and mystic "who propounds the luminous vision, without accurately defining what this 'type' is."[15] John McGuckin has called this manner of interpretation a "process of manipulation and historical distortion," which means that Symeon is never "considered in detail, on his own terms, for what he has to say within his own context."[16]

The predominant "mystical" reading of Symeon's life and works is just one source of ambiguity. Other diverging interpretations are related to his views on spiritual authority, spiritual fatherhood, holiness, etc. How have such variety of diverging interpretations emerged and coexist in the scholarship? What does it mean for the reception of Symeon? Moreover, is it possible to move beyond this fragmented perspective and engage in a more productive, integrative way of reading and interpreting Symeon's life and theology, through an alternative hermeneutical lens, which takes into account his historical and theological context? It is the purpose of my thesis to

[12] H. J. M. Turner, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Spiritual Fatherhood* (Leiden/New York: E.J. Brill, 1990), 2.
[13] Ibid., 1.
[14] John A. McGuckin, "The Luminous Vision in Eleventh-Century Byzantium: Interpreting the Biblical and Theological Paradigms of St. Symeon the New Theologian," in *Work and Worship at the Theotokos Evergetis: Papers of the Fourth Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, Portaferry, Co. Down, 14-17 September 1995*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Anthony Kirby, Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations, 6.2 (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1997), 94.
[15] Ibid., 95.
[16] Ibid.

address these questions, as well as propose an alternative and more integrative way of reading and interpreting Symeon's life and theology.

State of the Question and Hypothesis

In the last quarter century, despite various diverging views, there seems to be also one silent agreement among some of the most insightful scholars of Symeon, which is that repentance is a pervasively defining characteristic of his theology. Scholars such as John McGuckin, Hannah Hunt, and more recently, Nikolaos Loudovikos and Alexis Torrance, have singled out the theology of repentance as the context within which to read and interpret Symeon's life and theology. As McGuckin has pointed out, Symeon's historical context is monastic and ascetic, and within that context, the theology of repentance is a fundamental aspect. He has also pointed out that all of Symeon's visions of light occur within a context of repentance. Hannah Hunt has observed that repentance is the key to Symeon's theology and it is rooted in his life's experience.[17] In Symeon's theology, repentance is linked to deification, which is deeply interrelated with the vision of light. Repentance is also linked to the teaching of Symeon's spiritual father and his experiences as well as to Symeon's own. Repentance is also directly linked to the issues of holiness, the "golden chain of witnesses" and to spiritual authority – thus indicating a direct link between repentance-vision-authority-witness: "Symeon the younger describes his Spiritual Father's place within a succession. He reads in Eulabes' life of weeping and prayer a mode of living which is 'angelic' and equal to the apostles, and because of this he trusts him as a link in a golden chain which not only perpetuates the model of holiness, but demonstrates its genuineness by the presence of specific authority. This includes prayerful meditation, the ability to give spiritual counsel, and, most contentiously of all,

[17] Hannah Hunt, "Penthos and Repentance in St Symeon the New Theologian," in *Studia Patristica*, ed. M.F. Wiles and Edward Yarnold, vol. 35 (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 114.

absolve sin."[18] Hunt also observes that for Symeon and for all monastics and ascetics, repentance is continual and life-long; and concludes that "For Symeon, repentance and πένθος are not about personal perfection, but about incorporation into the Godhead, and incorporation into the church which is God's faithful servants throughout the ages."[19] This observation "suggests an ecclesial context for the consciousness of repentance,"[20] which is also of prime importance for Symeon as the vision of light is not a subjective experience, dependant on the interior contemplation of a charismatic "mystic", completely at odds with or divorced from the Church's tradition and worship.[21] Indeed, Hunt argues that repentance and *penthos* have sacramental aspects and are directly linked to baptism and the Eucharist and one's own consciousness of grace; another major theme in Symeon's theology.[22] For Symeon then, "God's love for humanity sows within the human a seed of repentance. Pricked awake by contrition, the penitent weeps, and the seed flourishes, and bears glorious flowers. Πένθος is the spiritual currency of Symeon the New Theologian."[23]

More recently, Nikolaos Loudovikos has observed that for Symeon "Repentance is the most extreme cruciform realism of communion and fundamental 'humility' in the face of the divine mystery of Being…which reaches as far as the 'pure vision' of God, as the perfection of love towards Him."[24] In Loudovikos' estimate, "The vision of God" in Symeon's theology, "is a result of self-emptying, of self-humbling, of repentance itself, as a comparable initiation into the self-emptying way of living of Christ Himself…"[25] Loudovikos also notes that

[18] Ibid., 115.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 117.
[21] Ibid., 116. The vision of light is not a subjective experience divorced from a context. One must make oneself open to the light of Christ and to be aware of the light of Christ within oneself. Hunt makes this clear when she states that: "This state of openness is only attained through faith, fear and repentance, Symeon affirms, a repentance in which the penitent is 'enriched by the water of his tears'" (Hunt is quoting from Symeon's *Tenth Ethical Discourse*).
[22] Hannah Hunt, "Penthos and Repentance in St Symeon the New Theologian," 116.
[23] Ibid., 118.
[24] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 100.
[25] Ibid., 101-102.

"Relationship/repentance leads, as vision of God, to judgement/knowledge of the individual, with the aim of even deeper repentance/relationship, i.e. deeper vision of God. Because the sight of God leads to an even deeper desire for a vision of Him, and this is expressed as an even deeper desire for repentance."[26] In Symeon's theology, repentance is "a free, personal volitional and emptying initiation into the eschatological ontology of becoming in communion."[27] The point which Loudovikos stresses is that our current reading of Symeon does not help us to assess the importance of repentance in his theology because this type of reading takes place "within an alien frame of reference" which also leads to false readings of Symeon.[28] More importantly, these false readings also lead to a distorted spirituality which is detached from a healthy anthropology because it fails to take into account the role of the body. This form of spirituality is thus disincarnated, intellectualist, and in the end degenerates into subjectivist spiritism.[29] This is how Symeon has been traditionally read in the scholarship and this is why Loudovikos can boldly say that Symeon is the most easily misinterpreted of the Fathers and why such a misinterpretation can be a dangerous undertaking.

The goal of my thesis, then, is to build upon the above insights and propose a contextual reading which posits repentance as an integrative hermeneutical key, in order to shape a more coherent image of Symeon's person, life, and theology. Taking into account the key research insights by some of the major scholars such as the ones mentioned above, this thesis will be an exploration of the integrative potential of a focus on the theology of repentance as a way of unfolding other relevant aspects of Symeon's theology, life, and experience of God. My thesis will

[26] Ibid., 106.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 102.
[29] Ibid., 97.

be an original contribution which will further our knowledge and understanding of the seminal importance of the theology of repentance in Symeon's writings.

In my thesis, I intend to show that a more coherent and productive reading and interpretation of Symeon in the 21st century can be achieved by positing continual repentance as an integrative hermeneutical key for understanding the experience of God in his theology. Even though previous studies have discussed this aspect of his theology, they have not done so in an explicit and systematic way. My research hypothesis is that continual repentance offers a valuable, integrative hermeneutical key that could provide new insights into important facets of Symeon's context and theology, as well as help to clarify what he understood as the experience of God. The thesis will explore the integrative potential of continual repentance in approaching key aspects of Symeon's theology. The deliberate focus on repentance as an exploratory lens was driven by the opportunity to engage its integrative potential, i.e., its ability to relate to and include other relevant aspects of Symeon's theology such as the keeping of the commandments, spiritual fatherhood and spiritual authority, holiness and witness, asceticism, the spiritual senses, the nature of the human person, knowledge of God, self, and others, and the vision and experience of God.

This thesis will begin with an overview of the state of the research into Symeon's remarkable life and theology. The first chapter will consist of a literature review wherein the contributions of a number of key scholars of Symeon over the past century and a quarter, will be examined. It will emerge from the literature review that there are three main problems attendant upon the interpretation of Symeon's life and theology: 1) a lack of focus on the relevance of his historical and social context, 2) the context of his so-called "mysticism", and 3) the problem of his fragmented image and ambiguous place. It will be seen that these problems exist because the reading and interpretation of Symeon's life and theology has been dominated by a focus on

mysticism, to the virtual exclusion of any other considerations. Therefore, in its place I will posit an alternative hermeneutic, which is a contextual reading with continual repentance an integrative hermeneutical key. I will then explain its rationale and outline its methodological principles. I will conclude the chapter with an outline for the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 1

"A Particularly Dangerous Undertaking": The Reception of St Symeon in 20th and 21st Century Orthodox Theology

1.1: Introduction

At the conclusion of his book *In the Light of Christ*, Basil Krivocheine stated: "Having reached the end of our study, we are still faced with the same difficult questions: who is Symeon? Exactly what does his name 'The New Theologian' mean? How could such a figure arise in the Byzantine world? Where does he come from; what place does he occupy in Orthodox spirituality and in Orthodoxy in general?"[1] This assessment was written over three decades ago, and in the interim, much has been written on Symeon. Today, we can say that we definitely know more about Symeon. Yet, as we will see below from a review of the key contributors to research on Symeon, this knowledge has resulted in multiple (and sometimes contradictory) interpretations, diverging opinions, and a fragmented image of the saint. These problems need to be addressed because, despite the best efforts of recent scholars, Krivocheine's questions stubbornly persist and it would be no exaggeration to state that, on the whole, they remain open. Krivocheine's questions are those which this thesis seeks to address. Who is Symeon, where does he come from, and how could such a person arise in Byzantium? These are questions related to his context – both historical and theological. What is his place in Orthodox spirituality and in Orthodoxy in general? These are questions concerning his ambiguous position as well as that of the content of his spirituality and supposed "mysticism".

How has this fragmentation and these diverging opinions come about? In what follows below, we will first review the literature by scholars who have substantially contributed to the

[1] Basil Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ*, 391.

study of Symeon's life and theology in the 20th and 21st century. This literature review will allow us to trace the contours of the diverging opinions and fragmented image by highlighting some of the main readings and interpretations of Symeon's life and works and the gaps in the scholarship which have emerged over the past century, as well as uncovering where the current scholarship is headed. At the conclusion of the literature review, we should be in a position to frame some of the key issues which persist. The second half of this chapter will engage in suggesting an alternative reading of Symeon and outline a methodology – which, it will be argued – could significantly aid in reconstructing the fragmented image of Symeon that continues to persist.

1.2: St Symeon in 20th and 21st Century Orthodox Theology – A Review of the Scholarship

1.2.1: The Scholarship pre-1975

Karl Holl

Modern scholarship on Symeon began in 1898 with the publication of Karl Holl's *Enthusiasmus und Bussgewalt beim griechischen Mönchtum* (*Enthusiasm and Penitence in Greek Monasticism*).[2] Besides rescuing Symeon from general oblivion in the West, it also provided a critical Greek text of Symeon's *Letter on Confession*, which is the main focus of the book.[3] Holl's chief concern was to articulate his own interpretation of the history of monasticism and penance in the Eastern Church. He wanted to find support for Symeon's contention that unordained monks had the right to hear confession and absolve sins. In doing so, Holl stressed the importance of holiness and charismatic gifts and their importance in the monastic tradition. He also stressed how

[2] Karl Holl, *Enthusiasmus Und Bussgewalt Beim Griechischen Monchtum: Eine Studie Zu Symeon Dem Neuen Theologen* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1898).

[3] Symeon's *Letter on Confession* has now come to be designated as *Ep.* 1 and is only one of four surviving letters of Symeon's. The other three remained untranslated until H.J.M Turner published all four in a critical edition in 2009. See St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Epistles of St Symeon the New Theologian*, trans. H. J. M. Turner, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

much Symeon was part of this tradition. Despite these important contributions, Holl depicted monks in general, and Symeon in particular, largely as "enthusiasts" and "mystics" who were in continual conflict and opposition with the ecclesial hierarchy.[4] Holl's work is of great value "not least for the subsequent interest in Symeon which it excited";[5] yet it rather affirmed and perpetuated the prevailing Western view of "mystics" as by nature being opponents of established church order and doctrine, then transferred that association onto Symeon. What is of particular interest to our study is that Holl's "mystical" approach to the interpretation of Symeon's life and theology, may have influenced an entire generation of scholars in the 20th century.

Irénée Hausherr

The next significant contribution was made in 1928 when Irénée Hausherr edited and published a critical Greek text of Symeon's life, originally written in c. 1052 by his disciple Niketas Stethatos.[6] The introduction to the text was significant in that Hausherr was able, based on meticulous research, to establish a chronology of Symeon's life and place his writings within that chronology. The chronology which he established has become the standard used by the vast majority of scholars after him.[7] Even though Hausherr put Symeon's biography back into circulation and established a workable chronology of his life and writings; as the subtitle of the work "Un grand mystique Byzantin" suggests, Hausherr's interpretation of Symeon was largely

[4] See H. J. M. Turner, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Spiritual Fatherhood*, 3. The same assessment of Holl's contribution is echoed by Jim McInnes; see Jim McInnes, *The Immediacy of God in Symeon the New Theologian* (Auckland, NZ: Sunesis Press, 2017), 6–7.
[5] Turner, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Spiritual Fatherhood*, 3.
[6] Hausherr, "Un Grand Mystique Byzantin." See note 2 in the introduction for the full citation.
[7] The only exception seems to be Alfeyev. See Hilarion Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 28.

confined to him as a mystic, without providing a solid interpretive method to back up his claim; nor did he engage in defining what is meant by that term.[8]

Walther Völker

The last significant study of Symeon in this period was published in 1974 by Walther Völker.[9] This study established beyond doubt the patristic basis for the study of Symeon's asceticism (especially the relation to the writings of John Klimakos) arguing that Symeon's theology was without doubt "orthodox". Volker also linked Symeon's ascetism to mysticism, without, however, providing a definition of the latter term. As Alfeyev has pointed out, the drawback of Völker's study is that he limited himself exclusively to patristic writings, which, in Alfeyev's estimate is only one part of Orthodox tradition. For instance, what about Symeon's relationship to liturgical worship? What about Symeon's method of biblical exegesis? Are these things not part of Orthodox tradition? Alfeyev argues that indeed they are and therefore "in the case of Symeon patristic literature was not the only important feature of his background."[10]

[8] Hausherr's valuable work has now been superseded by the critical Greek text and facing English translation by Richard Greenfield. See Nikētas Stethatos, *The Life of Saint Symeon the New Theologian*, trans. Richard P.H. Greenfield, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 20 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2013).
[9] Walther Volker, *Praxis Und Theoria Bei Symeon Den Neuen Theologen* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1974).
[10] Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 2–3. It should also be noted that by 1975, the vast majority of Symeon's works had appeared in critical Greek-French editions, published by *Sources Chrétiennes*. Symeon's *Chapitres Théologiques, Gnostiques et Pratiques* appeared in SC 51; his *Catéchèses* in SC 96, 104, and 113; his *Traités Théologiques et Éthiques* in SC 122 and 129; and his *Hymnes* in SC 156, 174, and 196. Volume 196 was the only work published post-1975. It was published in 2003. This further underscored the growing emergence and interest in Symeon as a person who merits study. The introductions and critical notes in the *SC* editions are valuable studies in their own right.

1.2.2: The Scholarship: 1975-1990

In this period, scholarship on Symeon increased substantially; with the bulk of the major studies retaining their focus exclusively, if not solely, on Symeon as a "mystic".

George Maloney

The year 1975 saw the publication of George Maloney's *The Mystic of Fire and Light*.[11] It is a significant milestone in the scholarship as it is the first full-length work in English to appear on Symeon. Maloney describes Symeon's "mystical" experiences and elucidates some of the theological concepts Symeon used to describe them. The title, however, suggests that the author's main interest is Symeon as a "mystic". Therefore, the book is very light on Symeon's historical and theological context, and thus there is no attempt to ground Symeon's "mystical" experiences in any sort of context whatsoever.[12] Like the scholars who preceded him, Maloney does not provide any systematic interpretation to define what a "mystic" or what "mysticism" is. Mysticism itself is the "context" within which Symeon is read and interpreted. For Maloney, the mystic is "seer" of the "inner world of ultimate reality" who perceives union with God "in his consciousness of being." Thus, for Maloney, mysticism is a growth of consciousness or "increased" consciousness.[13] In the following year, Maloney published the first English translation of Symeon's hymns; which finally gave English readers their first taste of Symeon.[14]

[11] See note 3 in the introduction above for the full bibliographical citation.
[12] See also McInnes, *The Immediacy of God*, 9, and Turner, *Spiritual Fatherhood*, 3-4, for further comments and summary.
[13] Maloney, *The Mystic of Fire and Light*, 8–9.
[14] St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymns of Divine Love*, trans. George A. Maloney (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1976).

B. Fraigneau-Julien

The next major work on Symeon to be published in this period was that of B. Fraigneau-Julien.[15] This work, as the title suggests, focuses on Symeon's teaching on the spiritual senses and their relationship to the vision of God. The first part of the book is a valuable exploration of the development of the concept of the spiritual senses in Patristic theology prior to Symeon. The second part explores Symeon's teaching on the spiritual senses and his insistence on the conscious experience of the Holy Spirit. In the final assessment, Fraigneau-Julien describes Symeon as "l'un des grands auteurs mystiques byzantins"; without defining that term or providing an interpretative method to support his claim.

Basil Krivocheine

The final significant publication of this period is Basil Krivocheine's *In the Light of Christ*.[16] It is a comprehensive and thoroughly detailed look at Symeon's teachings. There is, however, very little in the way of a sustained exploration and discussion of Symeon's historical and theological context. Alfeyev, even though he praises the book, laments the fact that Krivocheine presented Symeon "almost totally without reference to tradition."[17] Despite this, the book is crucial in that it provides the reader with a good introduction to almost every facet of Symeon's teachings. Although Krivocheine's focus is not on mysticism, he uses the words "mystic" and "mysticism" often, without defining the terms – assuming perhaps, as most scholars before him, that the reader is familiar with them. It should also be pointed out that Krivocheine seems to be the first to recognize the importance of repentance in Symeon's theology; calling him

[15] B. Fraigneau-Julien, *Les Sens Spirituels et La Vision de Dieu Selon Syméon Le Nouveau Théologien*, Théologie Historique 67 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985).
[16] See note 4 in the introduction above for the full bibliographical citation.
[17] Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 2.

a "a great penitential pedagogue."[18] Unfortunately, Krivocheine does not unpack what he means by this, nor does he discuss the relationship between repentance and other aspects of Symeon's teachings in any detail.[19]

1.2.3: The Scholarship: 1990-the Present

If the period 1975-1990 saw a marked increase in the scholarship on Symeon, the years since have seen a veritable flood in both books and articles; not only in English, but in other languages. There have been other developments as well, providing a broader perspective on Symeon's life and works. As McInnes has noted, "Recent scholarship has addressed the early imbalance of treating Symeon almost exclusively as a mystic."[20] Other avenues and themes have been explored in Symeon's writings, including themes that are more thoroughly and solidly grounded in Symeon's historical and theological context, with repentance emerging as one of the key themes.

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[18] Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ*, 78.

[19] We should also note that chapter XXI was, until recently, the only sustained discussion of Symeon's views and writings on the Theotokos. Symeon's treatment of the Theotokos in his writings is perhaps one of the least explored areas in the scholarship. For the most recent discussion of Symeon and the Theotokos, see pages 138-144 of Alexis Torrance, *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology: Attaining the Fullness of Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). Concerning Symeon's own writings, in addition to Maloney's publication in English of Symeon's *Hymns*, this period also saw the publication in English of Symeon's *The Practical and Theological Chapters & The Three Theological Discourses*, translated and introduced by Paul [John] McGuckin; see St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Practical and Theological Chapters and the Three Theological Discourses*, trans. Paul McGuckin, Cistercian Studies Series, no. 41 (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1982). This period also saw the first complete English translation of Symeon's *Catechetical Discourses* by J.C. deCatanzaro, with an introduction by George Maloney and a preface by Basil Krivocheine; see St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses*.

[20] McInnes, *The Immediacy of God*, 11. McInnes' observation is very astute, yet ironically, his book does not address this imbalance – quite the contrary – it treats Symeon exclusively as a mystic.

H.J.M. Turner

The first substantial publication of this period is H.J.M Turner's *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Spiritual Fatherhood*.[21] Turner's book is unique in the scholarship on Symeon in that it offers a full-length study which focuses on this aspect of his life and theology. Turner argues that the concept of spiritual fatherhood and how Symeon both understood and practised it, is crucial if we are to form an accurate picture of him. Turner's book integrates the tradition and theology of spiritual fatherhood in the East with Symeon's context. Thus, a picture of Symeon emerges wherein we see him as a real person having to deal with real issues as they arose in his duty as a spiritual father to both his own monks and to laymen. We also see Symeon functioning within a long tradition which had been handed down to him, as well as someone who added to that living tradition and passed it on to his own disciples.

The main contribution of Turner's book is that it is the first to examine Symeon apart from the notion of mysticism. Turner tells us explicitly that his study will deliberately leave the question of mysticism "to one side."[22] In its stead is a detailed exploration of the nature and role of spiritual fatherhood in Symeon's life and writings, which he states has received little to no attention by scholars. Turner's book is thus an insightful study of the potential value of using spiritual fatherhood as a perspective through which to read Symeon's life and theology. As a consequence, Turner delves into this issue in significant detail. Among the many issues covered are the importance of spiritual fatherhood in the monastic tradition of the East, how to secure a spiritual father, the qualifications and duties of a spiritual father, the duties of the disciple, as well as the difficulties of spiritual fatherhood. All of these elements are discussed in relation to Symeon's

[21] See note 12 in the introduction above for the full bibliographical citation.
[22] Turner, *Spiritual Fatherhood*, 1.

experience with his spiritual father both as a disciple himself and later as a spiritual father in his own right. Turner also insists that that Symeon's spiritual father played a pivotal role in Symeon's spiritual development and exerted a huge influence on him, which Turner argues is often ignored by scholars who favour a "mystical" reading.[23]

At the end of the book, we are quite familiar with not only the tradition of spiritual fatherhood itself, but also its importance for Symeon's life within in the context of his relationship with his spiritual father. In the end, Turner's book has demonstrated that it is indeed possible to study Symeon, not through mysticism, but through a perspective which is grounded in Symeon's context and tradition.

Alexander Golitzin

The next full-length study on Symeon was Alexander Golitzin's book, *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses, Volume 3: Life, Times, and Theology.*[24] The first part contains a valuable, though brief, discussion of Symeon's historical and theological context; the last two parts explore some of the major theological themes in Symeon's writings, specifically the vision of God and deification. Golitzin admits to some difficulties with the words "mystic" and "mysticism'; however, he provides no definition of those terms, but rather uses them, although sparingly.

One of the most important observations that Golitzin makes, is the way in which Symeon understands tradition and its transmission. Golitzin's use of the phrase "the continuum of experience" is key in this regard. It means that for Symeon, tradition is not simply a matter of

[23] At the time of writing his book (1990), Symeon the Studite's works had yet to be published in a critical edition. A critical edition was published in 2001 by *Sources Chrétiennes*, with an introduction provided by Hilarion Alfeyev, in which he argues, much like Turner, that scholars should pay more attention to the influence of the Studite's teaching upon Symeon. With a critical edition now available, it has become much easier for scholars to do so. See Simeon le Studite, *Discours Ascétique*, ed. Hilarion Alfeyev, trans. Louis Neyrand, Sources Chrétiennes 460 (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, 2001).

[24] See note 6 in the introduction above for the full bibliographical citation.

relying on and referring to what the great Fathers and Saints of the past have said; it is about incorporating that tradition into one's life and witness and passing it along to the next generation in a manner that is both fresh and contributes to the ever-growing body of living tradition; that is, the continuum of experience in the tradition. For many theologians, tradition is often confirmed by going back to the past to confirm the present. There is nothing inherently wrong with this, but as Golitzin notes, there is a subtle danger as "tradition" can become "traditionalism" and he quotes the historian Jaroslav Pelikan to the effect that "tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism the dead faith of the living." For Symeon however, tradition is also the living faith of the living. While not rejecting a return to the past to confirm the present, Golitzin notes that this is not Symeon's way of looking at the matter. Golitzin points out that for Symeon, the holiness of a living saint or spiritual father is the result of repentance, which opens his being to the personal experience of the risen Christ in light, and is thus the confirmation of the tradition. For Symeon, the active and living holiness of his contemporaries is proof that they are part of the continuum of experience in the tradition.

Yet for Symeon, it was also important to identify himself with the tradition of the apostles and Fathers. For Symeon, the continuum of experience in the tradition also stretched back to the Old Testament prophets, through to the New Testament apostles, and on into the witness of the martyrs and Fathers. It is also, as Golitzin points out, the locus of authority for Symeon – as one's authenticity could then be confirmed by tracing it through the continuum of experience in the tradition. As such, authority and witness are bound together. This is what jarred Symeon's contemporaries and put him at odds with the ecclesiastical authorities. It is this view which informs his understanding of confession and for which he accused his contemporaries of denying.

Another valuable contribution in this study is Golitzin's sensitivity to Symeon's time and place and his attempt to see where Symeon fits in regarding his contemporary situation as well as his relation to the tradition prior to him. Golitzin points out that the state of the Church, the Empire, and the intellectual climate during Symeon's time are very important for the study of his life. As we will see below, Loudovikos stresses this as well, but more forcefully. For instance, when discussing the elements that went into Symeon's thought, repentance emerges as a major theme because, as Golitzin notes, this is the foundation of all monastic and ascetic life and theology. Golitzin points out that references to repentance are so prevalent in Symeon's writings that it would be pointless to list them. This suggests that repentance plays a key role in Symeon's theology and is something which is worth exploring in more detail.

In the end, Golitzin's study argued for the importance of Symeon's place within the continuum of experience in the tradition – with repentance being a key – as well as suggesting that understanding Symeon's context could help us in this regard.

Hilarion Alfeyev

After Golitzin's book, the next extended study of Symeon was Hilarion Alfeyev's *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*.[25] Perhaps the most "academic" of all the books published on Symeon, it contains a veritable wealth of footnotes and citations from Symeon's writings. This book is a meticulous study of Symeon's relationship to Orthodox Tradition and puts to rest any and every notion that Symeon somehow operated outside or in opposition to that tradition. It also extends the work of Völker in its treatment and exploration of the patristic roots of Symeon's theology. Several aspects of Symeon are recounted in this study

[25] For the full bibliographical citation, see note 8 in the introduction above.

which are found almost nowhere else: such as Symeon's method of biblical exegesis; his relationship to liturgical worship;[26] and conjectures as to his reading habits. Several important elements of Symeon's theology are also explored, such as his writings on the Trinity, the sacraments, and the Church. The last chapter explores Symeon's asceticism and mysticism. Alfeyev is one of the few scholars who attempts to define mysticism and applies that definition consistently throughout the book.[27] Like Golitzin, Alfeyev does not concentrate too much on mysticism, preferring instead to limit the discussion to just one chapter.

The importance of Alfeyev's study is that it has proven beyond doubt that Symeon is part of what Golitzin has called "the continuum of experience" in the Orthodox Tradition. Yet how does that play out against the backdrop of his time? How do certain elements in Symeon's theology, such as repentance, for instance, reflect or come out of his context? Part of the problem for Alfeyev is that "it is difficult to be precise about Symeon's relation to the events of his time, since there is an unresolved scholarly controversy about the precise dates of his birth and death."[28] Yet Alfeyev himself does not attempt to settle this controversy, which means that in his book, Symeon's relation to the events of his time are largely passed over. As such, even though Alfeyev has contributed greatly to the scholarship on Symeon by unequivocally situating him squarely in the Eastern Tradition, his study does not situate that tradition within a solid historical framework

[26] Another glaring lacuna in the scholarship, which Alfeyev himself laments in his article "The Patristic Heritage and Modernity," *The Ecumenical Review* 54, no. 1 (April 2002): 97. Recently, however, Derek Krueger has begun to explore this, especially in his chapter entitled "Liturgies of the Monastic Self in Symeon the New Theologian" in Derek Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 197–214. In another quite enlightening paper, Krueger makes some poignant comparisons between the hymns of Romanos the Melodist and Symeon, especially in regards to their use of the first person singular to address their audience; see Derek Krueger, "Romanos the Melodist and the Christian Self in Early Byzantium," in *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, London, 21-26 August, 2006: Volume 1 Plenary Papers*, ed. Elisabeth Jeffreys (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), 255–74. We will explore this question further in chapter four below.

[27] Although as we will see in chapter three, Alfeyev relies on Bernard McGinn's definition (as does McInnis), which is in fact no definition.

[28] Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 10

within which we can assess the impact of Symeon's historical context upon his theology. How can we integrate context and tradition – for tradition is not formed in a vacuum. These questions require further investigation.

Anestis Keselopoulos

Keselopoulos' book, *Man and the Environment: A Study of St Symeon the New Theologian*,[29] is a singularly unique contribution to the scholarship on Symeon. It is unique in that it takes a pressing contemporary problem, that of environmental degradation and our misuse of the world, and applies the dimension of Patristic theology to the problem.

Keselopoulos argues that Symeon's theology rests on solid cosmological and anthropological premises, and that Symeon "maintains emphatically that our natural surroundings – what today we call the environment – and creation in general cannot be excluded and isolated from man's life; indeed, it plays a most essential role even in man's spiritual struggle."[30] This is a dimension of Symeon's theology which is rarely, if ever, elucidated in the scholarship. In his study, Keselopoulos shows how Symeon's theology can provide insights into such pressing issues as the misuse of material goods, social inequality due to privatizing what belongs to the community, and waste due to excessive wealth. Another particular insight into the environmental problem which Keselopoulos highlights in Symeon's theology, is on the nature of repentance. In order for us to have a right relationship with God's creation, we need to discover the inner principles of things; or what Maximos the Confessor called the *logoi* of things. But for Symeon, the "perfect knowledge of the inner principles of existent things….is associated with that state in which man has acquired

[29] Anestis G. Keselopoulos, *Man and the Environment: A Study of St. Symeon the New Theologian*, trans. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001).
[30] Ibid., 9.

experience of the baptism of tears – of repentance as a path and way of life."[31] Yet before this can happen, "Man needs first of all to make himself receptive to the baptism of tears in order to experience true repentance as a change in his way of thinking, so that he may then be given the possibility of orientating himself properly relative to creation and developing a relationship of love with the things of the world."[32] This suggests that repentance as an existential state and way of life is linked to cosmology and anthropology, as well as being a remedy to our broken relationship with God's creation.

While Keselopoulos does not claim that his study offers any solutions, nor does it offer a particular programme in which to address the current environmental problem; it does open a theological dimension, drawn specifically from Symeon's writings.[33] Moreover, like Turner's book, it also shows the potential to extract deep theological insights from Symeon's writings when they are studied through unique perspectives.

John McGuckin

While John McGuckin has not written a full-length study on Symeon, he published a series of articles in the mid-nineties and after,[34] which have made a visible contribution to the scholarship. For example, McGuckin's article "The Luminous Vision in Eleventh-Century

[31] Ibid., 107-108.
[32] Ibid., 108.
[33] Ibid., 9.
[34] See John A. McGuckin, "Symeon the New Theologian (d. 1022) and Byzantine Monasticism," in *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism*, ed. Anthony Bryer and Mary Cunningham (London: Variorum, 1996), 17–35; John A. McGuckin, "St. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022): Byzantine Spiritual Renewal in Search of a Precedent," in *The Church Retrospective*, ed. R.A. Swanson, Studies in Church History 33 (London: Boydell, 1997), 75–90; and John A. McGuckin, "A Neglected Masterpiece of the Christian Mystical Tradition: The Hymns of Divine Eros by the Byzantine Poet Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022)," *Spiritus* 5, no. 2 (2005): 182–202. McGuckin wrote an earlier short article in which he briefly outlined Symeon's theological vision, the important point being stressed that Symeon's life and theology need to be read in their monastic-ascetic context. See John A. McGuckin, "Symeon the New Theologian: His Vision of Theology," *The Patristic and Byzantine Review* 3, no. 3 (1984): 208–14.

Byzantium,"[35] contains a number of seminal observations which seem to have influenced the subsequent scholarship; one of which is that Symeon is rarely studied in his own time and place and for what he has to say within his own context. McGuckin argues that Symeon's historical and social context has been largely unexplored or discounted by scholars. This has resulted in various readings (or rather, misreadings) which interpret Symeon's life and theology apart from that context. For McGuckin, a continual ignorance of Symeon's social and historical context is detrimental to the scholarship, for it puts "the context for a study of an eleventh-century Byzantine author, anywhere (it seems) except the eleventh century."[36] McGuckin's statement pointed out the importance of further research into Symeon's historical and social context in order to arrive at better understanding of how Symeon's life and theology relates to his contemporaries. The irony of McGuckin's statement, however, is that he himself largely misinterpreted that context. As we will see in more detail in chapter two, McGuckin seems to interpret Symeon's life and theology within what is now an outdated and discredited interpretation of East Roman socio-political history, wherein the "aristocracy" was pitted in a power struggle with Basil II. In McGuckin's interpretation, Symeon emerges either as a political victim of court factions or a political opportunist who used his aristocratic family connections to manipulate his way to power both in the court, and when ousted from the court, in the monastic life. Even though McGuckin misinterpreted Symeon's social and historical context, his call for more clarity in this regard is highly relevant. Furthermore, his misinterpretation only underscores the need to work diligently to get it as accurate as possible.

One of McGuckin's key observations is that repentance is an important factor in the overall context of Symeon's theology. Just what this means is not fully worked out, but it alerted the

[35] For the full bibliographical citation, see note 14 in the introduction above.
[36] McGuckin, "The Luminous Vision," 97.

attention of scholars to the importance of repentance as a potential hermeneutical key to Symeon's theology, which has not gone unnoticed by the subsequent scholarship. However, more remains to be done if we are to work out just what the "context of repentance" means for Symeon's theology. It is the goal of this thesis to contribute to this endeavour.

In two recent papers, however, McGuckin has argued more definitively for a reading of Symeon which posits repentance as the defining characteristic of his theology and one that is directly responsible for the vision of light and communion with God. For example, in one of these papers, McGuckin states that in his theology Symeon "emerges as the rhapsodist of radical repentance," and that what makes Symeon stand out from among his peers is "this radical doctrine of repentance" which "is surely one of his most original contributions to the mystical life."[37] Moreover, McGuckin identifies repentance as "the whole bedrock of what Symeon understands by mystical union with Christ."[38] He concludes this paper by stating that Symeon "ought to be venerated for being one of the Church's greatest teachers of the joy of repentance."[39] McGuckin's recent comments about the importance of repentance in Symeon's theology deserve to be explored in more detail, as they seem to align very well with the direction of the present research study.

Hannah Hunt

The beginning of the twenty-first century has seen the scholarship take a definite turn in the direction of a more contextual reading of Symeon, first suggested by McGuckin in 1995. The focus of study has centered on the importance of repentance as the hermeneutical key to Symeon's

[37] John A. McGuckin, "Repentance as Divine Communion in St. Symeon the New Theologian's Hymns of Divine Love," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 11, no. 1 (2020): 9–10.
[38] Ibid., 11.
[39] Ibid., 27. See also John A. McGuckin, "Divine Light and Salvific Illumination in St. Symeon the New Theologian's Hymns of Divine Love," in *Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism: Studies in Honor of Alexander Golitzin*, ed. Andrei A. Orlov (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2020), 156–73.

theology. A major contributor in this endeavor is Hannah Hunt. In a series of books, book chapters, and articles, she has argued for a reading of Symeon which takes into full account his historical and theological contexts – highlighting repentance within monastic-ascetic theology as being a useful interpretive lens.[40] For Hunt, repentance is the key to Symeon's theology and is "rooted in his life's experience" as well as being his "spiritual currency."[41] She has also observed that for Symeon repentance was a continual and life-long state of being and that the consciousness of repentance exists within an ecclesial context.[42] Hunt's latest publication, *A Guide to St. Symeon the New Theologian* is a highly readable introduction to Symeon, primarily geared toward a non-academic audience; which in itself is a testament to the growing popularity of Symeon among the general public.

Jim McInnes

While scholarship has indeed taken a turn toward a more contextually-based reading of Symeon, with repentance being an important hermeneutical key, a recently published book stands out as an exception: Jim McInnes' *The Immediacy of God in Symeon the New Theologian*.[43]

[40] See Hunt, "Penthos and Repentance in St Symeon the New Theologian."; Hannah Hunt, *Joy-Bearing Grief: Tears of Contrition in the Writings of the Early Syrian and Byzantine Fathers*, The Medieval Mediterranean 57 (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2004); Hannah Hunt, "The Reforming Abbot and His Tears: Penthos in Late Byzantium," in *Spirituality in Late Byzantium: Essays Presenting New Research by International Scholars*, ed. Eugenia Russell (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 13–20; Hannah Hunt, "Uses and Abuses of Spiritual Authority in the Writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian," in *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, ed. Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 203–15; Hannah Hunt, "Divine Light and Spiritual Intoxication: Symeon the New Theologian's Image of Penitence as a Mystical Winepress," in *On Light*, ed. K.P. Clarke and Sarah Baccianti, Medium Aevum Monographs (Oxford: The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2014), 87–105; and Hannah Hunt, *A Guide to St. Symeon the New Theologian*, Cascade Companions (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015). Two further studies of Hunt highlight her work on ascetism and repentance in general; see Hannah Hunt, *Clothed in the Body: Asceticism, the Body and the Spiritual in the Late Antique Era* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012) and Hannah Hunt, "The Soul's Sorrow in Syrian Patristic Thought," in *Studia Patristica*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, vol. 33 (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 530–33.
[41] See "Penthos and Repentance," 114 and 118.
[42] Ibid., 115 and 117.
[43] For the full bibliographical information, see note 4 above.

McInnes' study is a rather retrogressive reading of Symeon which takes the scholarship back to Maloney's mysticist reading of Symeon. While providing an excellent review of the scholarship, the book was written by a non-Orthodox for a non-Orthodox audience (which is not necessarily unwelcome and testifies to the growing interest of Symeon outside of Orthodox circles), yet this also means much space is taken up with defining key terms in Orthodox theology, to the detriment of a more thorough analysis. Another issue with this book is that it almost completely eschews Symeon's historical context. In fact, as McInnes admits, "A study of the immediacy of God is, after all, a study of mysticism, not monasticism, or asceticism, or history, or theology, as important as these lenses are for making sense of our tenth-century Byzantine monk."[44] So, while admitting that context is important, McInnes dismisses it as irrelevant. Why? Because this is a study of mysticism; and it is precisely here where Symeon gets interpreted without reference to his context, and mysticism, as its own self-referential category and self-sustaining context, gets inserted in its place. In short, this book discusses Symeon as a mystic with no reference to context.[45]

Nikolaos Loudovikos

One of the most recent contributions to the scholarship is that of Nikolaos Loudovikos. While the overall focus of Loudovikos' book, *Analogical Identities,*[46] is on the creation of the Christian self in the Greek Patristic tradition as a whole, there is a substantial chapter on Symeon wherein Loudovikos makes three key observations which beg for further exploration.[47]

[44] McInnes, *The Immediacy of God*, 172–73.
[45] A similar recent critique of McInnes has come from Fr. Maxym Lysack where he argues that Symeon's context, especially asceticism, is important to understand. See Maxym Lysack, "Charismatic Reformer, Mystic or Father? The Reception of Symeon the New Theologian by Pentecostal/Charismatic Theologians," *Religions* 12, no. 389 (May 2021): 1–14.
[46] For the full bibliographical citation see note 10 in the introduction above.
[47] It should be noted here that the chapter in Loudovikos' book which discusses Symeon, is not about repentance per se. Yet, in the course of his argument, Loudovikos makes important observations concerning the nature of Symeon's understanding of repentance and how it plays a crucial role in the definition of the Christian self and how it links

The first concerns Symeon's context. Loudovikos makes a strong case that "the conflict between the iconoclasts and the iconolatres, which ended in the victory of the latter, seems to present a key to the interpretation for the understanding of the spiritual state of Byzantium in the period of the life of the New Theologian."[48] The victory over the iconoclasts in turn paved the way for a renaissance which in Symeon's time "was marked by the birth pangs of modern Hellenism."[49] Loudovikos remarks that generally this has been little understood by historians. How is this important for the study of Symeon? Is there something in Symeon's historical and social context that is crucial for a proper interpretation of his theology? If and how this context shaped Symeon's thought, demands further study, especially of the spiritual and intellectual state of Byzantium in the post-iconoclastic period leading up to and including Symeon's time, which was also coterminous with the renewal of learning in Byzantium.[50]

Loudovikos' second point is concerned with Symeon's place within Orthodox theology. For Loudovikos, in order to understand Symeon's place in Orthodox theology, as well as appreciate his theological contributions, there is a need to recognize that Symeon built upon the theological contributions of Maximos the Confessor, which would be further augmented by Gregory Palamas. Symeon thus occupies a key position between these two Church Fathers. Maximos' great contribution to Patristic theology was his positing the will as a component of being (ontology). The will as a component of being "lays the foundation for an eschatological ontology of freedom" which allows us to experience "the 'likeness' of God in the Spirit."[51] For Loudovikos,

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Symeon to Maximos the Confessor and Gregory Palamas. Thus, Loudovikos' observations are valuable and provide important insights that are relevant to the present research study.

[48] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 89. This was hinted at in Golitzin's study, yet it is Loudovikos which has insisted that they be taken as an object of serious study. We will explore this in more detail in chapter two.

[49] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 90.

[50] The renewal of learning during this period has been called a number of names by historians: "encyclopaedism"; the "Macedonian renaissance"; the first phase of "Byzantine Humanism"; "Hellenism," etc. We will explore this in more detail in chapter two.

[51] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 94.

one of Symeon's important contributions is that he enhances Maximos' teaching on the will, by introducing repentance into ontology itself.[52] This allows us to experience the fulness of our being in Christ and to experience the likeness of God in the Spirit. Loudovikos has thus pointed to something which is very little understood and understudied in Symeon's theology. As such, the profound repercussions of Symeon's introduction of repentance into ontology and what it means for his theology and for our understanding of human nature and "spirituality" is fertile ground for further study.

The final observation concerns the relationship between repentance and so-called "spirituality" and "mysticism". As the subtitle of his work suggests, Loudovikos considers the terms "spirituality" and "mysticism" problematic, and he insists upon the need for a proper definition of these terms. This is not just a theological issue, but an existential one, which effects how Symeon is read. This lack of definition is what, in Loudovikos' estimate, makes reading Symeon a dangerous undertaking because there is a real temptation to read him from what Loudovikos calls an Origenistic/Augustinian (that is, Platonic) perspective. Such a reading of Symeon sees his "spirituality" and "mysticism" as disembodied, dematerialized, and disincarnated because it is not embedded into to a healthy anthropology; that is, an understanding of the crucial role of the physical body in the spiritual life.[53] The result is that Symeon is studied as a "mystic" or a "seer" of the "inner world of ultimate reality" who perceives union with God "in his consciousness of being."

Loudovikos' chapter touches upon three key areas which are in direct need of further study: Symeon's context, the content of his supposed "spirituality" and "mysticism", and his position in

[52] Ibid., 101.
[53] This will be dealt with in more detail in chapters three and six.

Orthodox theology. This suggests that if we are to make sense of them, the reading of Symeon should be contextually-based and perhaps be approached using an alternative hermeneutical key. Loudovikos' chapter is part of a larger work which contains other interrelated insights that would greatly benefit the analysis proposed in this thesis. A more detailed analysis of Loudovikos' insights will be provided in chapters two, three, and six.

Alexis Torrance

In Alexis Torrance's most recent book,[54] he has argued that for Symeon human perfection is grounded in Christ alone and that the pursuit of this perfection is conditioned by repentance; without which, we will not even know we are human.[55] Torrance also takes issue with Symeon being called a "mystic" and notes that if by "mystic", we mean the traditional caricature of someone pitted against the Church in favour of a supra-institutional and individualistic "spirituality", then Symeon hardly qualifies.[56] Not only that, to brand Symeon as a mystic and his theology as some kind of "hyper-individualistic spirituality and mysticism" is, for Torrance, misguided.[57] Torrance argues that the burning problem for Symeon, one in which he turns to again and again in his writings, is what Torrance calls a "heresy of mediocrity" in the Church and in the Christian life. This mediocrity is characterised as a denial of the possibility for holiness which excuses the Christian from pursuing perfection through Christ's commandments; as well as denies the real possibility of the conscious experience of communion with God in this life.[58] Torrance argues that for Symeon this was the core theological problem of his day and that Symeon insists

[54] Torrance, *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology: Attaining the Fullness of Christ*. See full citation in note 19 above.
[55] Ibid., 151.
[56] Ibid., 150.
[57] Ibid., 144-145.
[58] Ibid., 114.

on repentance and the conscious experience of grace as the solution to this problem.[59] A more detailed study of Symeon's context would help us understand what Torrance means by a "heresy of mediocrity" and why Symeon regarded it as the core theological problem of his day. In another work,[60] Torrance has provided many valuable methodological insights for assessing repentance in monastic-ascetic theology.

1.2.4: Conclusion

From the above examination of the literature by the major scholars on Symeon, several general observations can be made. In addition, three key issues have emerged as well as a potential hermeneutical key, which are fertile ground for further study.

Generally speaking, it can be stated that despite more than a century of scholarship, fundamental disagreements remain in key areas, especially concerning the content of Symeon's supposed "spirituality" and "mysticism" as well as divergences of opinion concerning the interpretation of the context of Symeon's life and theology. The questions Krivocheine proposed at the end of his book remain, by and large, highly relevant. Thus, Symeon's image remains fragmented and his place within Orthodox theology rather muddled. This has come about as a

[59] Ibid., 116. This will be discussed in further detail in chapter two. Concerning Symeon's writings, this last period saw his *Ethical Discourses* published by Golitzin in two volumes in 1995-96; see St. Symeon the New Theologian, *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*, trans. Alexander Golitzin, vol. 1: *The Church and the Last Things*, 3 vols. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995) and St. Symeon the New Theologian, *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*, trans. Alexander Golitzin, vol. 2: *On Virtue & Christian Life*, 3 vols. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996). Turner published the critical edition of all of Symeon's letters in 2009 (for the full bibliographical citation, see note 3 above); and in 2010 an updated translation of Symeon's *Hymns* (based on the Greek text from the *Sources Chrétiennes*) was published by Daniel Griggs; see St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Divine Eros: Hymns of St. Symeon the New Theologian*, trans. Daniel K. Griggs, Popular Patristics Series 40 (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2010), bringing to completion the entire corpus of Symeon's writings in English.

[60] See Alexis Torrance, *Repentance in Late Antiquity: Eastern Asceticism and the Framing of the Christian Life c.400-650 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

result of a certain way of reading and interpreting Symeon which eschews context altogether, coupled with a failure on the part of scholars to integrate his theology, tradition, and context in a meaningful and constructive way.

1.3: Three emerging problem areas requiring further study

Three key issues have thus emerged from the literature review: 1) Symeon's historical and social context; 2) the content and context of his "spirituality" and "mysticism"; and 3) his fragmented image as a saint, which has resulted in a rather ambiguous positioning within Orthodox theology and the Eastern Christian tradition in general. The third issue is of particular importance because it is the divergence of interpretations of Symeon's historical and social context, his "mysticism" and "spirituality", and his position within the continuum of experience in the tradition, that create a fragmented image of Symeon's person and role within the Eastern Christian tradition. Let us look at each in more detail.

1) While there are multiple studies which have provided valuable insights on major aspects of Symeon's theology (Krivocheine, Turner, Alfeyev) and explored Symeon's connections to Orthodox tradition (Völker and Alfeyev) there are several glaring gaps when it comes to integrating them within Symeon's overall context of tenth/eleventh-century Byzantine history. For instance, there has been a failure on the part of scholars to pay sufficient attention to Symeon's historical and theological contexts. As such, Symeon's life and theology are often studied apart from the conditions which produced them. This has led to a further problem of integrating Symeon's context into the interpretation of his life and theology *in relation to the tradition within which they were formed*. Since the mid 1990s, scholars such as Golitzin, McGuckin and Hunt have begun to explore Symeon's context in more detail. One example of an important contextual aspect

that was recently pointed out by Loudovikos, refers to the interconnection between the first wave of Byzantine humanism and the post iconoclastic situation in Byzantium in Symeon's time as a key to understanding his life and writings. Another example is Torrance's emphasis on Symeon's belief in the "heresy of mediocrity" in the Church. Torrance argues that this was the core theological problem that Symeon's writings (with their insistence on repentance) seek to address. These are just two recent examples which have the potential of providing valuable contextual insights which are worth exploring.

2) The literature review suggests that the dominant way of interpreting Symeon's life and theology (until the mid-1990s) has been through the lens of mysticism. This way of reading Symeon focuses on attributing a personal label and expounds on justifying it, but pays little to no attention to the specific historical and theological contextual circumstances that could enlighten Symeon's existential choices. In fact, mysticism is forced to become an ahistorical existential context in which Symeon is read, and thus his life and writings are not examined in or linked to their broader historical context and for what they have to say within it. This is further compounded by the problem that "mysticism" is either vaguely defined or scholars do not bother provide any solid interpretative method to support their claims. Recently, Loudovikos has argued that in regards to Symeon, we must move beyond our notions of "spirituality" and "mysticism" as our understanding of them is often tainted with latent Neo-Platonism. The scholarship (with the exception of McInnes) has been gradually moving away from such a reading. Moreover, while good studies by Turner and Keselopoulos have demonstrated that it is possible to study Symeon apart from mysticism; there is still a very real temptation (which is not always resisted), to read him in such a manner. It has been noted that such a reading of Symeon is dangerous. Why this is

so, needs to be examined more closely, as does the understanding of "spirituality" and "mysticism" and if it has any existential connections to repentance.

3) The understudied issue of Symeon's context as well as the disputed and misunderstood nature of the content of his "spirituality" and "mysticism", has ultimately led to a fragmented image of the saint. Thus, his exact place within Orthodox theology, as well as the value of his theological contributions remain little understood (and even misunderstood). Krivocheine's question of how a figure such as Symeon could have emerged in the Byzantine world can only be answered by a thorough and detailed study of that world. McGuckin made this point almost three decades ago and as we have seen, the works of Golitzin, Turner, and Hunt in particular, have focused on key aspects of Symeon's context (such as spiritual fatherhood and repentance). Loudovikos has argued that Symeon's proper place in Orthodox theology as well as an assessment of his theological contributions can be better understood if we position him as a key figure in the Patristic tradition between Maximos the Confessor and Gregory Palamas. Why so, and why is this important? It is clear that more needs to be done if an answer to this question is to be found.

Finally, the literature review suggests that since the mid-1990s, repentance has emerged as a key theme in the interpretation of Symeon's life and theology. In fact, the importance of repentance has become a silent but fundamental agreement among several key scholars. What was Symeon's understanding of repentance, what role does it play in his life, and moreover, what makes Symeon's insistence on repentance unique in the tradition? Loudovikos notes that Symeon's unique theological contribution was to link repentance to ontology and eschatology. What does this mean for Symeon's theology? If repentance, rather than "mysticism", is a key factor in Symeon's existential context, what does that mean for Symeon's, as well as the current

understanding of "spirituality" and "mysticism"? Can Symeon's life and theology be conceptualized with respect to any understanding of these terms?

1.4: Shaping a Methodological Approach

In this section, I will use the insights from the literature review to propose and outline a methodological approach that could potentially address the problems highlighted above. This approach consists of considering repentance as an integrative hermeneutical key for a contextual reading of Symeon's life and works. The deliberate focus on repentance as an exploratory lens is driven by both the direction which the current scholarship has taken, as well as its integrative potential, i.e., its essential ability to integrate multiple aspects of Symeon's theology such as the vision of God, spiritual fatherhood, holiness, tradition, patristic witness, liturgy, sacraments, etc.

The focus of this methodological approach is threefold: *firstly*, to explore how the relevance of repentance emerges from and is shaped by Symeon's context; *secondly*, to explore how repentance, as an integrative hermeneutical key to Symeon's theology, shapes his theological vision and what it means for the content of his supposed "spirituality" and "mysticism"; *thirdly*, to explore how a focus on repentance could assist in understanding Symeon's theological contributions and his position within the continuum of experience in the tradition. Doing the above will help to piece together Symeon's fragmented image and answer the vexing question of his place within Orthodox theology.

1.4.1: Proposal for a Contextual Reading with Repentance as the Hermeneutical Key – Outline and Rationale

In a critical article on Patristic method and hermeneutics, Hilarion Alfeyev argues quite emphatically that a fundamental and indispensable element of an approach to the Fathers which allows seeing the Patristic heritage more comprehensively, should be the logically consistent use of a contextual method of Patristic hermeneutics.[61] Only comprehensive contextual studies can allow contemporary scholars to appreciate the fundamental insights of the Fathers of the Church. This thesis will thus adopt such an approach to reading Symeon. This reading aims to take into account the specificity of both his historical and theological contexts. According to Alfeyev, "in general, any phenomenon can be adequately judged only from within the context where it has originated and developed."[62] As such, "the theology of each church Father should be studied, as far as possible, in relation to the historical, theological, cultural and linguistic situation in which he lived."[63] Context can be defined as the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be better understood and assessed. Context also is defined as the background, environment, setting, framework, or surroundings of events and occurrences. Therefore, the contextual method of reading the Holy Fathers, as will be employed in this thesis, will pay close attention to Symeon's texts, and consider their historical, social, cultural, and theological background and environment to be of the utmost importance. Such a reading also pays close attention to Symeon's historical time and place – tenth/eleventh century Byzantine monasticism and society – and examines his theology and life within that context. It is also sensitive to the theological and intellectual debates and trends current during Symeon's time

[61] Hilarion Alfeyev, "The Patristic Heritage and Modernity," 97.
[62] Ibid., 99.
[63] Ibid., 99.

and seeks to elucidate and situate his writings within them. Last but not least, such a contextual reading will avoid attribute-based personal categorizations of Symeon by focusing on the circumstantial aspects of his life and theology. As the literature review has shown, such a reading of Symeon has been increasingly growing in the scholarship since the mid-1990s.

A contextual reading of Symeon was suggested in a very basic form in a short paper by John McGuckin, published in 1984.[64] In that paper, McGuckin noted that Symeon's theology will not seem so strange "if one enters into the ascetical theology of the Fathers."[65] This raises the issue of hermeneutics – that is; how the Fathers define patristic theology, and by extension how we do so. We need to ask these questions "if only for methodological reasons."[66] What McGuckin means when he refers to a problem with methodology is that "contemporary patristics divorces the ascetical and dogmatic traditions of the Fathers in a way that seems to run counter to the whole current of patristic thought."[67] These important questions are raised in the paper, but not discussed or resolved. Nonetheless, the primary context of Symeon's theology – the ascetic-monastic – was identified. Furthermore, it is stated that all of Symeon's thought is centred "in the ascetical tradition of divine encounter," which means that for Symeon the "personal experience of God is the only valid criteria of theology."[68]

If this is so and if Symeon's historical, social, and cultural context is ascetic-monastic, what then is his theological context? It is rooted in ascetical discipline, wherein *praxis* renders the soul capable "of receiving the experience of God, the grace of revelation."[69] The key to *praxis* is

[64] McGuckin, "Symeon the New Theologian: His Vision of Theology."
[65] Ibid., 209.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., 209-210.
[69] Ibid., 211. For a good discussion of the importance of ascetism in Symeon's theology, see Maxym Lysack, "Charismatic Reformer, Mystic or Father? The Reception of Symeon the New Theologian by Pentecostal/Charismatic Theologians." See note 45 above for the full bibliographical citation.

penthos; sorrow for sin and repentance.[70] Repentance and sorrow for sin purify the soul and prepare it to receive the vision of Christ in light. McGuckin has thus identified the historical context – monastic-ascetic – as well as the theological context, rooted in asceticism, which recognizes repentance as a fundamental aspect of Symeon's theology. In a later article McGuckin expanded this rationale further and argued for a close reading of Symeon's texts within their own context and for what Symeon has to say within that context.[71] This is essential, because as McGuckin has lamented: the scholarship on Symeon has hitherto placed "the context for a study of an eleventh-century Byzantine author, anywhere (it seems) except the eleventh century"; which is why any interpretation of Symeon "must surely begin in his own text."[72]

Over the last quarter century other scholars have taken up McGuckin's suggestion. This is seen in Turner's work, which has examined Symeon in the light of spiritual fatherhood; Alfeyev, in his study of Symeon's relation to Orthodox Tradition; Hunt, in her studies of the significance of *penthos* and repentance in Symeon and eastern asceticism in general; and in Loudovikos, who eschews a mysticist reading of Symeon in favour of repentance as the basis for the vision of light and the shaping of an authentic Christian self. Yet, in spite of this, there has yet to appear a full-length study which employs, in an explicit way, a consistent use of a contextual method and which specifically focuses upon the role of repentance in Symeon's life and theology. This thesis aims to help fill this gap.

[70] McGuckin, "Symeon the New Theologian: His Vision of Theology," 211-212.
[71] See his paper "The Luminous Vision."
[72] McGuckin, "The Luminous Vision," 97. Some of McGuckin's other papers have focused heavily on the historical-theological context of Symeon's life and theology. See, for instance, his papers "Symeon the New Theologian (d. 1022) and Byzantine Monasticism," "St. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022): Byzantine Spiritual Renewal in Search of a Precedent," and "A Neglected Masterpiece of the Christian Mystical Tradition…." See note 34 above, for full citations of these papers.

1.5: The Methodological Principles of a Contextual Reading

The above discussion has briefly outlined the need for a contextual approach and discussed its rationale; what then, would be the methodology that could take it into account? The key aspects of such a methodology can be found in Alfeyev's article "The Patristic Heritage and Modernity" and in Christos Arabatzis' book *Patristic Hermeneutics*, where he states that "Proportionate care should always be given to the context within which something is written."[73] As the study of Symeon concerns the study of patristic texts and their interpretation, we need to keep in mind that "The writings of a Father are in direct coherence and to be associated with the problem that he is called to solve, and with the error which he attempts to fix in the life of believers."[74] The majority of the writings of the Fathers address theological issues and/or errors, and Symeon's writings are no different. Yet how are we to know the problems that Fathers such as Symeon attempted to solve or the errors he attempted to fix? Arabatzis is quite clear in this regard:

> The correct approach to Patristic texts and the successful interpretation of their contents presupposes knowledge of the wider theological and historical context, within which the writer expressed himself, the purpose for which he wrote, as well as the challenges which he was called to face. In this task, significant assistance is offered by the ecclesiastical historians and by the data that are provided in the historical records of ecclesiastical events.[75]

In short, it is the task of theologians to study the historical context of their given subject and to become intimately familiar with it. In the case of Symeon, this is tenth-eleventh century Byzantium, and there is no shortage of in-depth historical studies on this period, by first-rate

[73] Christos Arabatzis, *Patristic Hermeneutics: 4th-14th Century*, trans. George Dion Dragas, Patristic Monograph Series 1 (Columbia, MO: Newrome Press LLC, 2013), 33. The methodological principles of a contextual reading found in Alfeyev's article and Arabatzis' book are very similar. Although Arabatzis does not use the term "contextual method" and he uses slightly different terminology, both works constitute a definitive "manifesto" arguing for a logically consistent use of a contextual method of reading and interpreting Patristic texts.
[74] Arabatzis, *Patristic Hermeneutics*, 15.
[75] Ibid., 50-51.

historians such as Joan Hussey, Anthony Kaldellis, and Rosemary Morris,[76] to name but a few. An historical awareness fosters a sensitivity to time and place as well as provides valuable background regarding the theological milieu of the given Father under study. Other material, such as first-hand accounts, liturgical and hagiographical texts, and the documents of Church councils can also be of help. Why is this important for patristic hermeneutics? It is important because

> Historical circumstances, questions the Fathers were called to deal with and pastoral considerations that their texts served, are all constitutive of the context within which Patristic texts were composed and within which they can be hermeneutically approached. *The severance of the text from the wider theological and historical context that produced it does injustice both to the text and to its composer.*[77]

The severance of Symeon from his historical and theological context is exactly what McGuckin pointed out and lamented in the scholarship on Symeon. This type of interpretation, which has dominated the scholarship on Symeon – especially in the mysticist reading – is what the employment of a contextual method in this thesis seeks to address and correct. It may also go a long way in helping to determine Symeon's rightful place and legacy in the Orthodox tradition. This has hitherto been difficult because a de-contextualisation and de-historicization of Symeon has largely been the norm in the scholarship. This has played no small part in the fragmentation of his image because his texts are severed or interpreted apart from the conditions that produced them.[78]

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[76] See Joan M. Hussey, *Church and Learning in the Byzantine Empire: 867-1185* (New York: Russell, 1963) and *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); see Anthony Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017); see Rosemary Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843-1118* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Other notable works include Peter Charanis, "The Monk as an Element of Byzantine Society," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 25 (1971): 63–84; Marc D. Lauxtermann and Mark Whittow, eds., *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between* (London & New York: Routledge, 2017) and Alexander P. Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).

[77] Arabatzis, *Patristic Hermeneutics*, 89. Emphasis is mine.

[78] Ibid., 143.

The following methodological principles summarize the main points of both Alfeyev and Arabatzis' work and will be adhered to and serve as a guide throughout this thesis. The contextual method consists of (but is not limited to) the following five basic principles:[79]

1.5.1: Principle 1: Differentiation and Variety

The contextual method takes, as a point of departure, the fact that the Fathers of the Church lived and wrote in different ecclesial, theological, cultural, historical, temporal and linguistic contexts. The Patristic Tradition is not a single "patch," but has many extremes and comprises many historical, linguistic and cultural layers.[80] We often speak of the "Holy Fathers" as a group of persons working together and writing approximately the same things. In reality they lived in different eras, related their writings to distinct cultural, historical, ecclesial and theological contexts, and were not seldom in engaged in controversy with one another. The same truth may be expressed differently by different Fathers, in different times, in different languages, and in different contexts.[81] This does not, however, deny the fact that they shared the common context of the one universal Christian tradition, which they received from their predecessors, and not only vigilantly preserved but also creatively developed by each one to be passed on to the following generations of Fathers.[82]

[79] There are other principles outlined by Alfeyev in his article (see pp. 101-102), but they are not directly relevant for the purpose of this thesis.
[80] Alfeyev, "The Patristic Heritage and Modernity," 97.
[81] Ibid., 95.
[82] Ibid., 102.

1.5.2: Principle 2: Unity and Continuum of Experience

The texts of the Fathers comment on the revelation of God in history, as well as trace the experience of this revelation.[83] Their texts contain conceptual *consensus*, harmony, and no antithesis. The doctrine or a text of a Father must be placed within the more widely accepted doctrine of all the Fathers, which has a compact form and continuity.[84] Thus, the contextual method takes into account the *continuum of experience within the Tradition*. With regard to the identification of this Patristic Tradition, the contextual method holds that Tradition reaches us through sanctity, and thus does not divide the Patristic Tradition chronologically, or qualitatively, or evaluatively, into earlier and later, but considers it unified.[85] The contextual method rejects the opinion that the Holy Fathers are theologians of the past because, in the words of Georges Florovsky, "The church is still fully authoritative as she has been in the ages past, since the Spirit of Truth quickens her now no less effectively than in the ancient times." Therefore, the "patristic age" is not limited to one historic era or another. One must enter into the spirit of the Fathers and acquire a "patristic mind". The Fathers are not merely relics from the past, but are living witnesses and contemporaries. In the view of Kallistos Ware; to say that there can be no more Fathers is to suggest that the Holy Spirit has deserted the Church.[86]

1.5.3: Principle 3: Totality and Coherence

The theology of a Father becomes clear from *all* his works, and not just from one of his texts.[87] As such, the understanding of the content of the writings of a Father is in direct coherence

[83] Arabatzis, *Patristic Hermeneutics*, 1.
[84] Ibid., 61.
[85] Ibid., 132.
[86] Quoted by Alfeyev in "The Patristic Heritage and Modernity," 92–93.
[87] Arabatzis, *Patristic Hermeneutics*, 12.

with the problem that he is called to solve, and with the error which he attempts to fix in the life of believers.[88] Thus, *proportionate care should always be given to the context within which something is written*.[89] The correct approach to Patristic texts and the successful interpretation of their contents, presupposes knowledge of the wider theological and historical context within which the writer expressed himself, the purpose for which he wrote, as well as the challenges which he was called to face. In this task, significant assistance is offered by ecclesiastical historians and by the data that are provided in the historical records of ecclesiastical events.[90] Thus, the theology of each Father should be studied, as far as possible, in relation to the historical, theological, cultural and linguistic situation in which he lived. Moreover, *one should not apply criteria from one context to a Patristic author belonging to a totally different context*.[91]

1.5.4: Principle 4: Circumstance and Purpose

Historical circumstances, questions the Fathers were called to deal with and pastoral considerations that their texts served, also constitute the context in which Patristic texts were composed and within which they can be approached. *The severance of a text from the wider theological and historical context that produced it does injustice to both the text and to its composer*.[92] In other words, the texts of a Father cannot be cut off or read apart from the conditions that produced them. Therefore, the understanding both of the content of the texts and the thought of the author is directly dependant on the knowledge and understanding of the purpose for which the text was composed, of the historical circumstances within which it was written, as well as the

[88] Ibid., 15–16.
[89] Ibid., 33.
[90] Ibid., 50–51.
[91] Alfeyev, "The Patristic Heritage and Modernity," 99.
[92] Arabatzis, *Patristic Hermeneutics*, 89. Italics are mine.

cause which brought it out. The writings of the Fathers often have embedded within them this historical and theological data, as well as the causes and the purposes for their composition.[93] They are interpreted correctly only when they are integrated within the historical and theological conditions that produced them, which are often linked with the broader outlook of the Church.[94] The interpreter should also keep intact the theological principles which its creator acknowledges, because *the approach to the text with premises unknown to the author results in misinterpretation*.[95]

1.5.5: Principle 5: Interrelatedness and Interconnectedness in Time

When studying a Father, the contextual method posits that the better we know his context, the more chance we have of adequately perceiving his theological system. Therefore, one should know the language in which he wrote, the history of his country and church, the sources he consulted and the authors he referred to as authorities. The contextual method prohibits pulling words or thoughts of the Holy Fathers out of the overall context of their theological system, and drawing whatever desired conclusions from such thoughts; on the contrary, the method presupposes the study of a given author's theology as a congruent system in which all elements are interrelated.[96] The contextual method also allows for comparative analysis of the works of several Fathers who are connected in a certain way, under the condition that the contextual criteria be strictly followed. One cannot artificially draw together two or more Fathers who have lived in totally different contexts; rather, *one should look for real connections between authors*; which may be of various kinds. In other words: before comparing two or more Fathers, one must define

[93] Ibid., 152–53.
[94] Ibid., 156.
[95] Ibid., 143–44. Italics are mine.
[96] Alfeyev, "The Patristic Heritage and Modernity," 101.

precisely their contextual interconnectedness: they should either belong to the same period or to the same theological tradition, be in a teacher-disciple relationship, be adversaries of one another, and so on.[97]

If we are to recover and situate Symeon's life and theology within its proper historical and theological context in order to arrive at a fuller appreciation for the depth and beauty of Symeon's theology, as well as understand his place within the broader context of 21st century Orthodox theology – which in turn leads to a broader understanding of Patristic texts in general – then this can emerge only when those texts are studied and considered within their historical and theological environments.

Arabatzis and Alfeyev's contextual method, which stresses paying close attention to the historical and theological context of Patristic texts, has provided workable methodological principles with which to approach and assess repentance in Symeon's writings. This thesis will apply these principles in a close reading of Symeon's writings in order to explore and discover what they reveal about the crucial role of repentance and what it means for the understanding and interpretation of Symeon's life and theology.

1.6: Structure of the Thesis

With these methodological principles in place, the rest of this thesis will be structured as follows: chapter two will focus on the relevance of Symeon's historical and social context. We will first explore why Symeon's historical and social context are important and I will show, using three examples, what happens when that context is misread or misunderstood. Then, through the use of carefully selected historical sources, I will show that Symeon's life and theology was formed

[97] Ibid., 101.

within the context of the post-iconoclastic conditions of tenth-eleventh century Byzantium, wherein also emerged the first phase of Byzantine humanism. These developments presented Symeon and his contemporaries with acute problems regarding the nature of holiness and the value of abstract, intellectualizing theology. I will argue that Symeon posited a life of continual repentance as a response to his contemporary situation. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to argue for the importance and relevance of Symeon's historical context and how continual repentance emerged from his particular time and place.

The problem of Symeon's so-called mysticism will be the focus of chapter three. I will first outline and describe the contours of what I call a "mysticist" misreading of Symeon as well as describe its problematics. I will then describe the origins of this misreading and demonstrate that the "mysticist" reading of Symeon is methodologically problematic for a number of reasons, all of which stem from faulty definitions to misunderstandings of the meaning of what constitutes the "mystical". I will then, using the work of Alexis Torrance, outline the theology of continual or "existential" repentance as an alternative hermeneutic. This chapter ultimately aims to demonstrate how the focus on a theology of repentance could provide a more subtle understanding of his so-called "mysticism" and "spirituality", which transforms the mere labelling of him as a "mystic" and his theology as "mysticism" into a fruitful discussion which can provide an insightful analysis of what constitutes mystical theology and spirituality.

In chapter four I will define and trace the sources of continual repentance in the monastic tradition prior to Symeon's time as well as in other, unexplored avenues, such as in the liturgy and in hymnography. By doing so, I hope to show that Symeon' theology of continual repentance is embedded within the continuum of experience in the tradition, and as such, the theology of continual repentance formed the framework of his life and writings. I will also show how a

theology of repentance could provide us with a useful integrative hermeneutical tool in our study of the various elements of Symeon's theological "system".

Such a study will be the focus of chapter five, wherein I will engage in a close reading of Symeon's writings in order to show how the theology of continual repentance informs a number of key aspects of his theology; such as the keeping of the commandments, spiritual fatherhood and spiritual authority, holiness and witness, asceticism, the spiritual senses, the knowledge of God, self, and others, and finally the vision and experience of God. The aim of this chapter is to show that once it has been established how continual repentance emerged from Symeon's context (which was identified and outlined in chapters two through four), then it has the potential of being a useful integrative tool which enriches our understanding and appreciation for the depth and beauty of his theology. The ultimate aim of this approach is to offer a new perspective on Symeon's theology, while at the same time considering new avenues of research into many elements of his theology which have hitherto been neglected or glossed over due to past misreadings and interpretations.

The final chapter will tackle the third problem outlined in section 1.3 above: that of Symeon's fragmented image and ambiguous place. I will argue that anthropology is the key to piecing together Symeon's fragmented image and solving the riddle of his ambiguous place. I will first briefly examine authentic biblical and Patristic anthropology and its insistence that the image of God in man is found in both soul and body. It will be seen that Symeon's anthropology is perfectly in line with the tradition. The second part of the chapter will consider how anthropology could help position Symeon within the continuum of experience in the tradition between Maximos and Gregory Palamas. I will examine the continuity of Symeon's thought with the theological insights of Maximos and Palamas, as well as Symeon's original contribution to Maximos' theology of the natural will and his insistence upon full participation and illumination in God's uncreated

light, which left a powerful witness and influence on Palamas. I will argue that it is only when we see Symeon's importance in the anthropological axis between Maximos and Palamas, that his place as well as the value of his theological contributions, can begin to be assessed. In the final section of this chapter, I will present the case that our traditional reading of Symeon, anchored as it is, upon a questionable understanding of spirituality and mysticism – which itself is based upon a faulty anthropology – both fragments his image and renders his place ambiguous. In my final assessment, I will argue that it is only when this reading is discarded in favour of a more comprehensive, integrative approach, which takes into account Symeon's entire context, that it will be possible to begin to piece together his fragmented image and solve the riddle of his ambiguous place in the continuum of experience in the Christian tradition.

1.7: Conclusion

Ultimately, the goal of this thesis, in proposing an alternative hermeneutical lens of repentance, is to read, interpret, and understand Symeon within his own context. Its aim is to deepen our understanding and appreciation of Symeon's life, work, and theological contributions, as well as help contribute to solving the riddle of his still fragmented place within modern Orthodox theology and what the relevance of his message is for today. It may also help in understanding what the Christian life and the experience of God meant, not only for Symeon and those of his time and place, but what it means for us today; especially in regards to so-called "spirituality" and "mysticism". This exploration will thus begin by looking at the first of the three key issues suggested by the literature review; namely, Symeon's historical context.

Chapter 2

"How could such a figure arise in the Byzantine world?": Symeon's Historical, Social, and Theological Context

2.1: Introduction

As stated in the methodological discussion outlined in chapter one, if we are to make sense of the writings of a particular Father, we need to closely examine his social, historical, intellectual and theological context. My methodology has pointed out that in order to do so, Arabatzis and Alfeyev stress the need for a contextual reading of Patristic texts. The literature review has shown that over the course of the last century, valuable studies exist which examine Symeon's relation to the Orthodox tradition, as well as studies which have focused on various aspects of his theology. There is, however, a contextual dilemma because significant gaps persist in the understanding of the relation between Symeon's theology and his historical, social, and theological context. It was pointed out that more work needs to be done if we are to integrate Symeon's context into the study of his life and theology, especially regarding the importance of repentance. The literature review has also shown that recent scholarship has been moving toward a more contextually-based reading of Symeon which sees an increasing role of repentance as a hermeneutical key. Scholars such as Hunt, Loudovikos, and Torrance (each in their own way) have singled out repentance as a key factor in Symeon's life and writings, which provides the theological context (as suggested by McGuckin) within which Symeon should be read and interpreted. Golitzin, Torrance, and specifically Loudovikos, have provided a clue as to where we should be looking for the historical, social, and theological context – namely at the post-iconoclastic period which began a century

before Symeon's birth, continued into his lifetime, and within which comprised the first stages of what some historians have called the first phase of Byzantine "humanism". [1]

The purpose of this chapter is to take a closer look at certain aspects of this period in order to discover if and how Symeon's context shaped his theological outlook. I will argue below that indeed a closer examination of Symeon's context reveals that the post-iconoclastic period and the first phase of Byzantine "humanism" raised several key issues, which Symeon reacted strongly against, and which shaped his thought, particularly in regard to his attitude toward repentance.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section will provide a brief outline of what I have called the "contextual dilemma" surrounding Symeon and why a careful study of Symeon's context is important. I will also provide a very brief outline of Symeon's life and times in order to set a backdrop for the discussion of his context. Then, through the use of three examples, I will argue that serious misreadings and confusion arise when Symeon's context is either misread or poorly understood. This underscores the need for careful study in order to get Symeon's context as accurate as possible.

The second section will examine the post-iconoclastic period leading up to and including Symeon's lifetime. I will argue that although the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843 officially ended iconoclasm, a certain skepticism remained as to the nature of the "holy". This is reflected in Symeon's struggle with Church authorities over the holiness of his spiritual father.

The third section will examine the first phase of Byzantine "humanism". It will be seen that along with a sense of triumphalism in the Church, it exasperated the already existing

[1] The first phase of Byzantine humanism arose *within* the context of the post-iconoclastic period. This chapter may give the impression that I am treating them separately. I have done so only out of necessity and for the sake of the argument. They are intimately connected and should be considered as an organic whole.

skepticism in regards to what constituted holiness as well as fostered rationalism and intellectualism in regards to theology, which Symeon reacted strongly against.

The fourth section will examine Symeon's reaction. A skepticism in regards to the holy and an attitude of ecclesiastical triumphalism introduced a "mediocrity" into the Christian life; and, coupled with an overriding intellectualism in regards to theology, induced a profound sadness in Symeon – what Loudovikos calls a "melancholy". The nature of this mediocrity and intellectualism will be examined as well as why it made Symeon melancholic. In response to this, Symeon posits a life of repentance and humility as a cure for mediocrity and intellectualism. It is through repentance, humility, and the keeping of Christ's commandments that we become holy and overcome mediocrity. Moreover, a humble and repentant life is able to cure the pride which ultimately results from intellectualism.

2.2: "Who is Symeon and where does he come from?" – The Contextual Dilemma

2.2.1: Why study Symeon's context?

In many ways, we are a product of the time and place in which we live. Without adopting a determinist position, nor denying personal responsibility for the choices we make, it is safe to say that our lives are conditioned by family upbringing, the culture we live in; including its history, language, and social norms. Our thoughts and opinions, what we consider important (or not), our decisions, etc., are often shaped by the society around us. If we want to understand how someone thinks or acts, especially, say a novelist or theologian; if we wish to understand why an author wrote on certain topics, then we need to know something about that author's context. Symeon is no exception. The above observations may seem commonplace or banal. Yet, Symeon's context and its relation to his theology and his place within tradition, has, until recently, been curiously

understudied. For instance, why does Symeon emphasize holiness so much? Why does he speak of repentance so often? Why does he react so strongly against an overintellectualizing in theology? Any casual reading of Symeon reveals that these topics appear frequently in his writings. Is there something in the social, intellectual, and theological climate that Symeon is reacting strongly against? If so, what is it and why does it matter? What was going on intellectually and theologically during Symeon's time? Embedded in Symeon's writings is a clue to what issues and problems he felt was worth addressing. If we are to understand why holiness and repentance, for example, are so important for Symeon, it is incumbent upon us to pay close attention to his context in order to discover why and how these ideas surfaced in the social, intellectual, and theological climate of his time, and how they effected Symeon's theological thinking.

2.2.2: A Brief Summary of Symeon's Life

Perhaps it would be useful at this point to state some plain facts abouts Symeon's life and provide a brief survey of what was going on in his time.[2] Symeon was born in 949 and died in 1022. His life thus spans the last half of the tenth century and the first quarter of the eleventh. Symeon was born roughly a century after the end of iconoclasm (843) and lived in what is called the Byzantine Empire (or East Roman Empire). Most of his life was lived under the rule of emperor Basil II, when the empire was at the height of its power. He spoke Greek. His family was well-to-do and had connections in the imperial court. Prior to becoming a monk, Symeon spent many years in the imperial court and was familiar with its inner workings and was on intimate terms with many high-ranking court officials. He also had contacts with the Studios monastery in the person of his spiritual father, Symeon the Pious. After entering monasticism, Symeon spent the remainder of his

[2] This is only a very brief summary to set the parameters of the discussion in this section. For more thorough details of Symeon's life, see the studies by Krivocheine, Golitzin, Alfeyev, Turner, etc.

life as abbot and spiritual father in monasteries located in or near the heart of the imperial capital, Constantinople. These are the basic facts.

From about 843 (the Triumph of Orthodoxy) to Symeon's death in 1022, Byzantium was undergoing what has been called the first phase of "humanism". It was during this period that Greek classical texts were being compiled, new translations and adaptations were being composed. A fury of compilation was taking place, yet without any sustained, serious engagement with these texts on the part of intellectuals, as to what these texts meant for East Roman cultural identity. The work of interpretation would be left for men such as Michael Psellos, who flourished after Symeon's death. It is therefore only in the last three quarters of the eleventh century and beyond, that intellectuals occupied themselves with the interpretation and integration of the Greek classical heritage in a critical manner; which in turn led to a distinct ideal of "Hellenism" in a second phase, of which Psellos was the primary (but not the only) catalyst.

In the ecclesiastical sphere, much of the same effort of compilation and formalization was taking place before and during Symeon's time. Coupled with this is what Golitzin calls triumphalism and conservatism in the Byzantine church, which was spurred on by the conversion of the Slavs under Sts Cyril and Methodius, the monastic and liturgical reforms of the Studios monastery under St Theodore, and the conversion of Rus' in 988.[3] This reform and formalization touched upon the liturgy and liturgical texts as they become more codified and rigid in their prescriptions. Ecclesiastical authority became more centralized and less tolerant with what it saw as "charismatic" holy men such as Symeon. Scattered hagiographical texts and saints' lives were gathered, re-written, and interpreted anew under the pen of such men as Symeon Metaphrastes.

[3] Golitzin, *Life, Times, and Theology*, 16–17. It is also worth noting that during Symeon's lifetime, the first coenobitic monasteries were being formed on Mount Athos. All said, the decades preceding Symeon's birth as well as the years of his life are full of important intellectual, cultural, and theological events and developments, and it is a small wonder why they have hardly been studied in relation to his theological development.

This new interpretation of saints' lives was influenced, in part, by the skepticism of the emerging humanism, which considered the communion of saints as closed and assigned knowledge of God and the acquisition of holiness to times gone by.

Although the absorption of the Greek classical heritage in a critical and fruitful manner came after Symeon's death, it was beginning to pose problems for theologians even during his lifetime. The triumphalism of the Church, combined with an inability to absorb the classical heritage fruitfully, expressed itself in a scholastic, intellectual perception of dogmas, which resulted in a cognitive treatment of spiritual matters, and to what Loudovikos calls "an intellectual mysticism of a reductive type."[4] This new turn to "humanism" on the part of intellectuals, which indicated the birth pangs of Hellenism, had a tendency towards a skepticism of, and later in Psellos' writings, an outright rejection of the monastic ideals of asceticism and sanctity.[5]

2.2.3: Examples of Contextual Misreadings and Misunderstandings

The above was only brief list of well-known facts of Symeon's life as well as an over-simplified outline of his historical context. The question is: does this matter? If it does, why? By way of answer, the rest of this section will briefly, and in one case, somewhat simplistically, look at three issues from Symeon's life and writings which provide good examples of contextual misreading and misunderstanding. The first issue has to do with the reasons for Symeon becoming a monk. As indicted in the literature review above, McGuckin has rightly called for a more careful examination of Symeon's context, but ironically, he misread that context, which could lead to a

[4] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 91.
[5] Ibid., 90. We should note here that in Byzantium there were no clear-cut distinctions between intellectuals and theologians. St Photios, for instance was one of Byzantium's greatest scholars (i.e., his *Bibliotheca*) as well as one of its greatest theologians (i.e., *The Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*). For examples of Psellos' distain for monks and monasticism, see Michael Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers: The "Chronographia" of Michael Psellus*, trans. E. R. A. Sewter, Rev. ed., (London: Penguin Books, 2007); especially Book 3, pgs. 64 & 73 and Book 6, p. 270 where Psellos sarcastically calls monks "Naziraeans".

false and rather unsavoury image of Symeon. The second issue concerns Symeon's "opinion" concerning confession and absolution by unordained monks, which has often been poorly understood.[6] The third issue concerns what McGuckin calls a "Transfigurationist" reading of Symeon. In this reading Symeon's context is read backwards through the presuppositions of the hesychast debates of the fourteenth century. These issues combine questions which are both historical and theological, as well as display the kinds of misinterpretation and confusion which arise when one or both of those contexts are misread or misunderstood. These examples aim to demonstrate that Symeon's context does matter and if we misconstrue it (for whatever reason), it leads to him being misunderstood, mislabelled, or worse; accused of holding theological positions which run counter to his intentions, historical circumstances, and to tradition and Church doctrine.

Example 1: Why did Symeon become a monk – political opportunism or something else?

Why did Symeon become a monk? The short answer is that we will never know. We do not have access to Symeon's inner psychology, although I would venture that his fervent love of Christ, which is so apparent in his writings, had much to do with it. Can Symeon's historical context reveal the reasons for his choosing the monastic life? McGuckin seems to think so. McGuckin's argument is complex,[7] and we can only provide a summary of it here. He equates

[6] This issue only being brought up here by way of example and is not a major issue in this study. There will be no attempt at a detailed discussion and/or resolution to what is one of the thorniest theological issues in Symeon's writings. Both Golitzin (in *Life, Times, and Theology*, pgs. 38ff) and Turner (in the introduction to his translations of Symeon's letters) cover this ground extensively. For a discussion of this issue in Symeon's writings, see Joost van Rossum, "Priesthood and Confession in St. Symeon the New Theologian," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1976): 220–28. See also Robert John Beeson, "St Symeon the New Theologian on Binding and Loosing," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2013): 89–98. For a good historical look at the role monks played, including confession, in Byzantine society, see Charanis, "The Monk as an Element of Byzantine Society." For an overview of the role of repentance and confession in the Orthodox Church in general, see John Chryssavgis, *Repentance and Confession in the Orthodox Church* (Brookline, Mass: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1990), and Kallistos Ware, "The Orthodox Experience of Repentance," *Sobornost* 2, no. 1 (1980): 18–28.

[7] McGuckin's thesis is outlined in thorough detail in his 1996 paper "Symeon the New Theologian (d.1022) and Byzantine Monasticism."

Symeon's entry into monasticism (as well as his first visions of light) with several political upheavals which took place during Symeon's life. For instance, Symeon's first vision of light in 969 took place after the assassination of Emperor Nikephoros Phokas and the accession of John Tzimiskes as emperor. The second vision (and Symeon's permanent entry into monasticism) corresponded to Tzimiskes' overthrow in 976 which paved the way for the accession of Basil II. McGuckin suggests that these are not mere coincidences, as both visions of light and the "repentance" which accompanied them stem from political regime changes. This leads McGuckin to suggest that Symeon entered the monastic life because he considered it as some sort of political refuge from the stormy political atmosphere of the court.[8]

Yet McGuckin doesn't leave it at that. He argues that Symeon's whole tenure as monk and abbot was driven by political intrigue wherein Symeon used his aristocratic background and the financial and political patronage which stemmed from it, as a vehicle to further his own promotion as abbot.[9] Moreover, McGuckin contends that the persecution which Symeon underwent from 1003 to his eventual exile in 1009 was personally orchestrated by Emperor Basil II, who used Stephen of Nikomedia as his agent.[10]

What emerges from McGuckin's reading of Symeon's historical context is a rather unsavoury image of Symeon as nothing more than a crass political opportunist who, when frustrated in his secular ambitions for power, flees the political upheaval of the court for the relative safety of the monastic life, only to utilize his aristocratic privileges to pursue his need for power

[8] On the surface these events do seem interrelated, but as we lack access to the inner workings of Symeon's mind regarding these events, they amount to nothing more than interesting coincidences.

[9] See McGuckin's 2005 paper "Symeon the New Theologian's *Hymns of Divine Eros*," (p. 185) where he states "This rapid promotion [as abbot of St. Mamas after only three years] indicated the significant patronage he [Symeon] could still bring to bear as a powerful aristocratic leader, even though he was now a monk." Square brackets are mine.

[10] McGuckin, "Symeon the New Theologian's *Hymns of Divine Eros*," 186: "The Emperor [Basil II] thus began to move against the younger Symeon by means of the ecclesiastical court process, chiefly employing his long-time confidant Stephen of Alexina, the patriarchal Chancellor, who from this time onwards became Symeon's relentless opponent." Square brackets are mine.

and leadership in another sphere. This also affects our reading of the role of repentance in Symeon's theology as McGuckin (at least at this stage) sees repentance, not as a true *metanoia*, but as nothing more than code word for a cynical change of lifestyle from aristocrat to monastic leader.[11]

There are two glaring problems with McGuckin's interpretation of Symeon's historical context. The first is that, simply put, there is absolutely no evidence to support it. There is no evidence in either Symeon's own writings or in those of his biographer Stethatos (of whom McGuckin doesn't trust anyway) to back up McGuckin's claim. There is also nothing in the primary sources which suggest Symeon's ordeal between 1003 and 1009 was politically motivated.[12]

Secondly, and of prime importance, McGuckin's interpretation of Symeon's context rests on what is now considered an obsolete paradigm of reading Byzantine history, which posits that Basil II waged a protracted war against the "aristocracy", wherein he enacted legislation to curb their political power, which was a threat to his throne. This reading assumes that a) there was something which could be called an "aristocracy" in the Byzantine Empire; and b) they posed an organized and real threat to Basil's power.[13] Both assumptions have now been proven to be false.

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[11] McGuckin, "Symeon the New Theologian's *Hymns of Divine Eros*," 184. McGuckin says that Symeon's inner condition was not motivated by a desire for true repentance but was motivated by anxiety (See "Symeon the New Theologian (d.1022) and Byzantine Monasticism," 20). How can McGuckin make such a claim? Does he have access to Symeon's inner state? How can we know exactly what Symeon was feeling in this case?

[12] This is pointed out by the historian Anthony Kaldellis. He describes Symeon as "the most important writer" of Basil II's reign, but adds that "There is no evidence that the emperor took an interest in his career or thought. Instead, Symeon had powerful enemies in the Church, and in 1009 they brought about his downfall and exile from the capital"; (see *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*, 139-40). As an aside, earlier on (pgs. 120-127), Kaldellis notes that between 1004 and 1018 Basil was largely absent from the capital, so it would have been highly unlikely that he would have personally orchestrated Symeon's exile as he wasn't even in Constantinople to orchestrate it!

[13] McGuckin is typical of this when he states that Symeon was in line with the aristocratic party in Byzantine politics which opposed the centralizing forces of the imperial court. For McGuckin, the 'aristocrats' "were fighting against the centralism of Basil II only in so far as it frustrated their own attempts to centralize power in and around their own familial accumulations of land, wealth and armies"; (see "Symeon the New Theologian (d.1022) and Byzantine Monasticism," 34).

Current scholarship has overturned this paradigm.[14] To begin with, there was no "aristocracy" in Byzantium. This idea was first promulgated by the Russian historians A. Vasiliev and G. Ostrogorsky in the mid twentieth century and then picked up by western historians who wished to foist a western "feudal" model upon Byzantine socio-economic history. Though there were wealthy landowners in the East Roman Empire, they hardly counted as an aristocracy and, at any rate, there is no solid data which can measure the extent of their landholdings. As for challenging the emperor, this was, in Kaldellis' judgement, virtually impossible as "No one in Romania had enough land to challenge an emperor, but an army could do so."[15] And this is precisely the issue. Byzantine emperors did not fear any landed aristocracy with pretentions to the throne, but primarily army officers who could command the popular support of the army and populace.[16] There is no shortage of examples in Byzantine history which support this. The two emperors who preceded Basil II, Phokas and Tzimiskes, were both powerful officers who had the support of the army and people. Thus, the biggest threat to any emperor's throne were upstart officers who could take the capital and force the emperor to either abdicate or kill him if he didn't. It was thus incumbent upon emperors to ensure that they maintained the loyalty of their officers, kept them at arm's length or enact measures to check their power. During his reign, Basil II did all three, with varying levels of success.[17]

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[14] For a more thorough examination see pages 13-18 of the Introduction and chapter five of Kaldellis' *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*; see also Mark Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium, 600-1025* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), chap. 10; and Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), chap. 16.

[15] *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*, 116.

[16] In the Introduction to *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood,* 15; Kaldellis states that "The emperors were threatened not by landowners but by army officers. Some were no doubt landowners, but there is no evidence that they were dangerous because of their property – in other words, that they were so rich that they could challenge the imperial state by means of personal resources, something that was possible in the West." This is supported by Treadgold, where he states that Basil II "was particularly suspicious of ambitious generals, like those who had revolted against him…"; see *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, 519.

[17] See also Whittow who states that Basil "avoided where possible having members of the leading military families in key positions"; see *The Making of Byzantium,* 375.

This leads to the other contentious issue; that of Basil's so-called "war" against the aristocracy. The main evidence cited for this comes from the novel issued by Basil in 996 which was intended to limit the ability of wealthy families to appropriate the land of the poor. This is touted as evidence that Basil's intention was to break the power of wealthy landowning families; and thus constitutes an open war against them. Again, there are several problems with this view. Firstly, Basil was not the first or last emperor to enact such legislation – Romanos I enacted such a law in 934, which was maintained by his successors. In fact, Basil's novel of 996 remained in force long after his reign. Secondly, as Kaldellis has argued, there is little evidence of the actual enforcement or effectiveness of this law, and at any rate, it is mere conjecture if the law had any effect of stemming the wealth of any particular family – as they were still wealthy at the end of his reign. Thirdly, as Whittow has pointed out, the law in reality made little economic or fiscal sense as Basil's (or any emperors, for that matter) intention was not to destroy the wealth of provincial landowners; because by doing so, an emperor would undermine the tax base needed to support the state. In short, there was no "aristocracy" in Byzantium, at least not powerful enough to challenge the state, and Basil did not wage any "war" against them.[18]

McGuckin's thesis rests on these two assumptions, which, in the end, have been proven to be only that – assumptions with no basis in actual fact. Now, McGuckin could perhaps be forgiven as he posited his thesis at a time when these false assumptions were the norm in Byzantine historiography. But has he changed his thesis in light of recent scholarship? Concerning repentance, he seems to have done so; but concerning Symeon's historical context, he has

[18] In her book, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, which, to date, is the most comprehensive study of Basil II's reign, Catherine Holmes states quite plainly that it is difficult, if not impossible to "assess the extent to which Basil stifled the empire's economy by imposing heavy taxes especially on the Powerful" (p. 531). A few pages later she remarks that "There is little sign of harsh taxation in the historiographical record…" (p. 533). For more details of her discussion of this, see Catherine Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976-1025)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 531–37.

stubbornly maintained his position, despite all evidence to the contrary. In two recent papers,[19] he seems to have revised his understanding of the role of repentance in Symeon's theology. It seems to be no longer interpreted as a cynical code for a change of life from aristocrat to monk, but is rather a genuine *metanoia,* which is now considered to be an important hermeneutical key to Symeon's theology. On the other hand, McGuckin has not only maintained his previous thesis, but has gone even further. He states that Basil's imperial administration was intent on disgracing Symeon publicly because Basil "seems to have had personal scores to settle against Symeon's family, who had surely bankrolled the latter's rapid promotion to be *Higumen* and *Ktitor* (re-founder) of the St. Mamas monastic complex."[20] McGuckin has several serious questions to answer here. To begin with; what "personal scores"? What evidence does McGuckin have to prove that Basil had a personal vendetta against Symeon's family? Symeon hailed from Paphlagonia, far from the centre of imperial power. Moreover, even though Symeon's family was wealthy, we do not know the extent of either their wealth or their influence, which seems to have been negligible, especially after the death of Symeon's uncle in the palace coup of 969. How do we know that Symeon's family "surely bankrolled" his promotion to abbot of St Mamas? Again, no evidence.[21] Is McGuckin suggesting that Symeon's family or, even worse, Symeon himself had designs on the imperial throne? No evidence. Was Basil intent on Symeon's public disgrace? And for that matter, why? No evidence. If Kaldellis' judgement is correct, which the primary sources seem to suggest, that Basil took no interest in Symeon's life and writings, and moreover was not even in Constantinople for most of the duration of Symeon's struggle with the patriarchal synod, then

[19] See "Repentance as Divine Communion in St Symeon the New Theologian's Hymns of Divine Love" and "Divine Light and Salvific Illumination in St Symeon the New Theologian's Hymns of Divine Love," both published in 2020.
[20] "Divine Light and Salvific Illumination," 158.
[21] In fact, if we are to believe Stethatos, Symeon's family did everything in their power to persuade him *against* becoming a monk. Furthermore, Stethatos tells us that before entering the Studios monastery Symeon *renounced in writing* "all the property that would come to him from his parents." See *Life,* 8 & 9.

McGuckin's thesis is, at best, pure fantasy; and at worst, pure distortion and fabrication. McGuckin's thesis seriously misreads Symeon's historical context and paints an ugly and distorted image of Symeon, which has no basis in reality, and only lends itself to perpetuating the already fragmented image of Symeon in the scholarship.

Yet the question remains: why did Symeon become a monk? The question may never be definitively answered – but I believe that Joan Hussey's assessment, made almost a century ago, still stands as a fitting explanation. It deserves to be quoted in full:

> He [Symeon] chose the monastic life because he thought that it was only thus that the *best* life was to be found, and his choice is a reflection upon neither the secular nor the ecclesiastical life of the Byzantine Empire. It was not because the world was then particularly evil that he left it, it was not because monastic life was then especially spiritual that he chose it.[22]

Example 2: Symeon on confession and absolution by unordained monks

Simply stated, Symeon's "opinion" was that not all priests had the power to bind and loose simply by virtue of their ordination – they must demonstrate holiness of life in the exercise of their priestly office and must be purified and illuminated by the Holy Spirit.[23] If a priest was lacking in these qualities, Symeon argued that it was perfectly legitimate to turn to an unordained monk for confession and absolution, provided that this monk demonstrated the corresponding level of holiness. Such was the case of Symeon himself, whose spiritual father was an unordained monk.

At first glance this "opinion" may seem dangerously close to Donatism, which argued that any sacrament administered by an unworthy priest was ineffective. A superficial reading of Symeon could lead one in that direction; and there has been no shortage of scholars who have

[22] Hussey, *Church and Learning in the Byzantine Empire*, 205. Italics in original. Square brackets are mine.
[23] For a few good examples of Symeon's views on this matter see his *CD* 28.9; *ED* 6; and *Ep*. 1.400-410 (in Turner's edition).

either hinted at or inadvertently accused Symeon of adopting a Donatist position.[24] Yet, there are several factors which, when combined with a more careful reading of Symeon's texts and a deeper understanding of Symeon's context, lead us to quite opposite conclusions.

Theologically speaking, Symeon's focus is on humility when he says that priests must "serve in the priestly ministry of the gospel in a spirit of humility and who live a blameless life" (*CD* 28.9. 263-265). This insistence on humility, purity of life, and illumination by the Holy Spirit are the bedrock of his "opinion" and are mentioned by him every time he brings this matter up for comment. This suggests to us that Symeon's concern is the *moral life* of the priest and not his juridical power of binding and loosing. Secondly, we have to remember that the Eastern tradition has never expressed the opinion on binding and loosing as strongly as has the West. In fact, Symeon is following several Greek Fathers before him who have expressed similar opinions, in no less emphatic language.[25] Thirdly, we must remember that confessing to and receiving absolution from unordained monks was not condemned in Symeon's time and was quite a common monastic practice, as well as the fact that the East has regarded confession and absolution in a quite different, less juridical manner as has the West.[26]

Historically speaking, not every spiritual father was an ordained priest, and the monastic tradition did not make a distinction between confessing one's sins for the purposes of absolution,

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[24] See van Rossum, "Priesthood," 224 and Maloney, *The Mystic of Fire and Light*, 35. See also Hausherr, "Un Grand Mystique Byzantine," lxxi; Jean Darrouzès' introduction to *SC* 122, 28-33; and P. Miquel, "La Conscience de La Grace Selon Symeon Le Nouveau Theologien," *Irenikon* 42 (1969): 340-342.

[25] See for instance Gregory the Theologian, *Oration* 2. 71 & 91 in Grégoire de Nazianze, *Discours 1-3*, trans. Jean Bernardi, Sources Chrétiennes 247 (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, 1978), 185; 209. See also Gregory's *Oration* 27.3 in St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 26–27 and *Oration* 32.13 in St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations*, trans. Martha Vinson (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 200–201. See also Dionysius' rather potent argument in his eighth letter (8.2) in Pseudo-Dionysius, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibhéid, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 274–75.

[26] As Golitzin notes in *Life, Times, and Theology*, 49: "Symeon never extends the logic of his thinking on confession to the other sacraments, and we should recall that confession itself did not enjoy any official status as a sacrament until centuries after his time."

and disclosing one's thoughts (λογίσμοι) to one's spiritual father, which was common monastic practice. Furthermore, Symeon himself was never condemned or censured for his "opinion". Crucially however, we have to keep in mind, as Alfeyev has pointed out, that Symeon was living in post-iconoclastic times and as such, "the authority of the hierarchical clergy among simple believers was very low; many preferred to see monks, even non-ordained, for confession. The moral state of the clergy was therefore an 'issue of the day'."[27] It is this issue of the moral restoration of the clergy, conditioned by the post-iconoclastic situation of his time, which, when Symeon's texts are read carefully, emerges as his prime concern. It is in light of this that Symeon's rather "demanding attitude and critical assessment" of the clergy should be studied.[28]

What can we conclude from this rather brief foray into this thorny issue? Symeon's "opinion" on confession was conditioned by the historical and theological context within which his texts were written. Symeon is neither affirming a Donatist position nor is he denying the right of ordained clergy to their power of binding and loosing. On the contrary, elsewhere, he rather affirms their right to do so and moreover insists that this power was granted to the apostles and their successors – the bishops and clergy – and that Christians have the obligation to not only respect the clergy, but to obey them.[29] Considering that the Eastern Church of his time had not taken a firm theological position on this issue, needs to be considered. If so, we can say that Symeon was not saying anything that was contrary to Church doctrine, but rather affirming a common, accepted practise in the tradition. It is also important to remember that Symeon was never censured nor condemned for his "opinion". In fact, it was never even mentioned as part of

[27] Hilarion Alfeyev, "The Patristic Heritage and Modernity," 94.
[28] Ibid.
[29] See, for instance, his argument in *Ep* 3. 164-182 & 620ff. It is rather curious that Symeon's critics on this issue constantly point to *Ep*. 1 and never consider his arguments in *Ep.* 3. We should also mention here that Symeon himself was an ordained priest, so if he is judging and condemning the ministry of the priesthood, he is by proxy judging and condemning himself and denying that he himself possesses the power to bind and loose. That would be a rather curious example of shamefaced hypocrisy on Symeon's part.

the synodal deposition and sentence of exile meted out to him in 1009. Without pronouncing a definitive closure on this issue, with more careful scrutiny and investigation, this may very well turn out be a case of "much ado about nothing."

Example 3: The Transfigurationist Misreading

This is a way of reading and interpreting Symeon, especially his visions of light, through the lens of the Transfiguration and through the vocabulary and theological terms which emerged in the hesychast debates of the fourteenth century. In such a reading, Symeon is ultimately seen as a proto-hesychast, or a forerunner of hesychasm and "the theology of the Hesychasts in its high traits is a recapitulation of the thought of Symeon."[30] In this reading, the light Symeon sees is described as being "of the same nature as the Light of the Transfiguration,"[31] and "Symeon's chief concern is the practical question of how the Christian may ascend to the vision of Christ transfigured."[32] Symeon's theology is a "treatment of the Transfiguration Light" where the "Taborian Light…may indeed be contemplated, just as it was by the three disciples on Tabor."[33]

While it is true, as John Meyendorff has noted, that Gregory Palamas and the hesychasts are indebted to Symeon,[34] the nature of this debt is not yet fully understood, and thus it is a far cry from saying that the theology of the hesychasts is simply a recapitulation of Symeon's thought.

[30] Constantine N. Tsirpanlis, "The Trinitarian and Mystical Theology of St. Symeon the New Theologian," in *Greek Patristic Theology: Basic Doctrines in Eastern Church Fathers*, vol. 2, Monograph Series in Orthodox Theology and Civilization 6 (New York: EO Press, 1984), 49.
[31] Demetri Stathopoulos, "The Divine Light in the Poetry of St. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1025)," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 19, no. 2 (Autumn 1974): 95.
[32] Christopher Veniamin, *The Orthodox Understanding of Salvation: Theosis in Scripture and Tradition*, 2nd Reprint Edition (Dalton, PA: Mount Thabor Publishing, 2016), 135.
[33] Ibid., 141-142. For Symeon, the luminous vision is not so much an act of "contemplation" as it is a personal, active communion and participation in Christ.
[34] John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. George Lawrence (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 155.

McGuckin calls Symeon's relationship to the hesychasts "highly debatable."[35] Meyendorff has also cautioned us in this regard in saying that although Symeon has been thought of as anticipating Palamas and the hesychasts, this "should be accepted only with reservations, however, since Symeon neither makes any specific mention of 'prayer of the mind' nor insists on any clearly formulated theological distinction between 'essence' and 'energy' in God."[36] This opinion is echoed by Kallistos Ware when he points out that Symeon's theology of light is less interested in dogmatic implications of what the light is; therefore Symeon "does not attempt to set it within the framework of a precisely articulated system of doctrine."[37] For Symeon, the light is a person, and the encounter that takes place within the light is a meeting, face to face, between Symeon and the person of Christ. For Symeon, "the primary centre of his interest is not the light as such, but who he speaks within the light."[38]

John McGuckin is one of the most forceful advocates against this kind of reading. In his close analysis of Symeon's biblical and theological paradigms of the luminous vision, he concludes that this sort of reading is anachronistic as well as "a process of manipulation, and historical distortion."[39] It is also methodologically questionable and thus reductionist because it fails "to pay sufficient critical attention to the details of the text in hand," specifically in regard to

[35] McGuckin, "The Luminous Vision," 96. Andrew Louth characterizes it as "odd." See Andrew Louth, "Light, Vision, and Religious Experience in Byzantium," in *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 95.
[36] John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), 74.
[37] Kallistos Ware, "The Mystery of God and Man in St. Symeon the New Theologian," *Sobornost* 6, no. 4 (Winter 1972): 232.
[38] Ibid., 235. It should be noted briefly here that Symeon's understanding of the light and the language in which he framed it, is not incompatible with that of Palamas. If Symeon's primary centre of interest is not the light as such (that is; its nature) but who he speaks within the light; for Palamas "the light as such" is that which emanated from Christ at the Transfiguration. Symeon does not insist on the nature of that light (whether it is created or uncreated), whereas for Palamas, his insistence on the nature of that light and his recourse to the essence-energy distinction, were determined by the polemical context of his debate with Barlaam.
[39] McGuckin, "The Luminous Vision," 94-95.

"the precise historical and narrative contexts" of those texts.[40] McGuckin has argued that all of Symeon's luminous visions occur within a context of repentance and points out that this "very striking element of his theology" has been neglected because too much emphasis has been placed on reading Symeon through the lens of a transfigurationist paradigm.[41] In short, this paradigm is reductionist because it attempts to interpret Symeon in "hesychast" terms and casts his life and theology as representative types of "hesychasm" without providing a proper methodological and historical justification for doing so.

Part of the problem is that the hesychast articulation of the experience of the divine light in the context of the Transfiguration, has come to dominate "our perception of the Christian Byzantine tradition."[42] For Andrew Louth, the question of light and religious experience in the Byzantine tradition is much wider than that articulated by the hesychasts.[43] The light of Tabor, articulated by the fourteenth century hesychasts, was canonized by the Philokalic tradition (of which Symeon's writings are included) in the eighteenth century – and while this understanding is indeed "Orthodox" (as the councils of the Church have declared), there is a danger in that once these texts become part of the tradition, they are "read with presuppositions that may be foreign to the spirit in which they were originally written."[44] When interpreting Symeon, the transfigurationist interpretive lens is methodologically problematic because such an interpretation of his theology constitutes a reading backwards into the past of ideas that are not necessarily there. In Orthodox theology, from the fourteenth century onwards, the dominant reading of the divine light is in reference to the Transfiguration. We run into a problem, however, when we encounter

[40] Ibid., 95-96.
[41] Ibid., 121. It should be noted here that this reading is common among Orthodox theologians. For good examples of this, see the works by Tsirpanlis, Stathopoulos, and Veniamin cited in notes 30-32 above.
[42] Louth, "Light, Vision, and Religious Experience," 85.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 89.

someone like Symeon, who lived and wrote prior to the fourteenth century. Symeon's understanding of the divine light and his experience of it was not articulated with reference to the Transfiguration, but within an entirely different historical and theological context and vocabulary.[45] The association of the divine light with the Transfiguration doesn't seem to appear in Symeon's theology.

At this point we may be justified in asking the following question: If such a reading and interpretation of Symeon is methodologically problematic; if it is anachronistic and a distortion; how is such a reading possible? The answer is relatively simple: it is possible *if* Symeon is taken out of his context and read in isolation from it.[46]

2.2.4: Conclusion

To sum up; Symeon's life and theology was formed in the post-iconoclastic period of Byzantine history, which saw the emergence of the first wave of Byzantine "humanism". As was just seen in the three examples above, Symeon's context is often misread and misunderstood,

[45] Between Symeon and the hesychasts there is a fundamental difference in context when talking about the experience of divine light. Symeon describes his experience in the context of repentance and his life with his spiritual father. This specific context predefines the dominant themes in Symeon's life and theology. The hesychast controversy and theological discussions of the experience of the divine light emerged in the polemical context of the debates between Constantinople and Rome referring to the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father (and from the Son). In this sense, the hesychast controversy was generically more doctrinal in nature. It started with the discussion of the legitimacy of using logical proofs in theology. The discussion of the applicability of logical proofs translated into a discussion of what is knowable and unknowable in God, and the extent to which what is known is authentically Divine, i.e., uncreated. In addition, after being accused of divine agnosticism, Barlaam questioned the claims by the hesychasts that their experience of the divine light is identical to the light which had been manifested to Jesus' disciples at the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. In brief and a bit simplistically, this is how the Transfiguration came into focus.

[46] It is not just Symeon. The rediscovery of the theology of Gregory Palamas and its focus on the transfiguration light as the dominant interpretive lens, is a feature of 20th century Orthodox theology. Regarding Symeon, it is perhaps timely now to go beyond this interpretive approach and focus on his context. This is not to deny any potential link between Symeon and the hesychasts or Gregory Palamas (for instance, Loudovikos, in his book *Analogical Identities*, provides several meaningful links between Symeon and Gregory Palamas which refer back to the theological contributions of Maximos the Confessor. These links will be discussed in chapter six below). The rationale of this particular example is to suggest that the adoption of a new interpretive key seems to be more promising at the end of the first quarter of the 21st century. The adoption of a new key is a way to learn from recent Orthodox theology while contributing something to it.

which invariably leads to a fragmented image of him which obfuscates his place within Orthodox theology. Thus, it can be seen that a close contextual reading of the Fathers (and of Symeon in particular), as argued by Alfeyev and Arabatzis, is much needed and justified. Furthermore, it underscores the dire need to interpret that context as accurately as possible. That is the goal of the remainder of this chapter.

2.3: Iconoclasm and Post-Iconoclasm: The Limits of the Representational and the Problem of the Holy

As noted in the first section above, the iconoclastic controversy and its aftermath present a key to the interpretation of the spiritual life of Byzantium during the period of Symeon's life. Why is this important and how did it effect Symeon's theology? Two issues of importance (among many others) were raised during the iconoclastic controversy. One concerned what was actually represented in an icon. The second was what constituted holiness and how it was mediated.[47] In regards to the first, the iconoclasts argued that what is represented in an icon is only the person as they were seen in reality. Thus, what is represented in an icon is nothing more than a portrait, and as such, it cannot mediate holiness, nor can it show forth the invisible. In regards to the second issue, the iconoclasts argued that holiness and the sacred was not mediated or manifested through an icon, which is composed of matter, but rather through the clergy and the Church.[48] This had repercussions on the nature of spiritual authority – which was one of the main issues in Symeon's struggle with the church authorities over his spiritual father.

Moreover, these issues seemed to have lingered on long after 843. They continued to present a real danger. As Leonid Ouspensky has noted, the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843 by no

[47] Leslie Brubaker and John F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680-850: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 10.
[48] Ibid., 245.

means ended the controversy, which continued to play an active role because convinced iconoclasts stubbornly held on to their views and "seemed to have been just as numerous during the entire half-century that followed the official restoration of images."[49] Several events in the half-century after 843 seem to confirm this. For instance, emperor Michael III called a council in 861 which issued a fresh condemnation of iconoclasm; in a letter written in 865 to Khan Boris of Bulgaria, the Patriarch Photius went to great lengths to refute all the iconoclast's objections to icons; a council called by the Patriarch Ignatius in 869-70 renewed the third canon of the council of 787 and repeated the main anathemas of that council.[50] Such events have led Francis Dvornik to conclude that there was a real danger of an iconoclastic revival in Byzantium for at least a generation after 843, "and that the liquidation of the aftermath of iconoclasm was not as easy as it is sometimes thought."[51]

2.3.1: The Limits of Representation and the Problem of the Holy

As Loudovikos notes, the icon "defends the completeness of human nature."[52] This means that the completeness of human nature is the state of deification which is the eschatological completeness of being. If this is not the case, it would introduce what Loudovikos calls "the unfamiliarity of being" because our eschatological familiarity of being – which is our deification, union, and communion in Christ and the potential for the completeness of our human nature – is

[49] Léonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel, vol. 2 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), 208. In the first volume of his study, Ouspensky notes that "The scope of the iconoclastic ideology extends beyond the limits of the heresy fought during the eighth and ninth centuries. *There is, in different forms, a permanency to iconoclasm.*" This is definitely the case as different forms of it did indeed reappear in Symeon's time. See Léonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel, vol. 1 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), 119. Italics are mine.
[50] See Francis Dvornik, "The Patriarch Photius and Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 (1953): 67–97. Regarding the council of 869-70, Dvornik states (p. 84) that "The Acts of the Ignatian council make it thus evident that in 870 the heresy was far from suppressed."
[51] Ibid., 97.
[52] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 89.

not possible.[53] And subsequently, neither is holiness. The icon presents its subject as how they truly are, in their eschatological state of completeness; and not what we can visibly see. The icon is not mere representation. The icon presents "spiritual reality", invisible reality. As Bruce Foltz states, "…the goal of the icon is not to render the ocular appearance of holy men and women at all, but rather their inner, spiritual reality."[54]

How could that which is invisible be made visible? How can created matter present this? The answer to these questions lies in the Incarnation. In the Incarnation, Christ, the image of the invisible God (cf. Col. 1:15), has been made flesh; thus God, who no one has seen (cf. Jn. 1:18), has been made visible and known in Christ. When Christ tells Phillip that when he sees him (Christ), he has seen the Father (Jn. 14:9; cf. Jn. 12:45), this is an affirmation that his person, as an icon of the Father, presents, in his human nature, that which is invisible.[55] It affirms that the invisible has been made visible and thus an icon can present this reality through the medium of

[53] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 90 ff. As Ouspensky notes, "Thus, icons are intermediaries between the represented persons and the praying faithful, causing them to commune in grace. In the church during the liturgy, the faithful, through the intermediary of icons and liturgical prayers, enter into communion with the heavenly Church, forming with it a single whole"; see *Theology of the Icon*, 1:140. Further on (p. 161-62), he notes "…the icon is an image not only of the living but also of a deified prototype. It does not represent corruptible flesh, destined for decomposition, but transfigured flesh, illuminated by grace, the flesh of the world to come." Thus, if the icon is denied this, the possibility of an eschatological familiarity of being, which contains the potential for completeness of our human nature, is lost.

[54] Bruce V. Foltz, *The Noetics of Nature: Environmental Philosophy and the Holy Beauty of the Visible* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 135. On the same page he elaborates on this: "As does all sacred art, the icon seeks to present spiritual realities in a material medium (i.e., to present, within the visible, what is inherently invisible). And since what the icon presents is what is invisible and has always been invisible, it does not visibly re-present what has once before been visibly present itself. It is not representational or mimetic in the Platonic sense. It is not that the icon is imperfect in making visible what has already or otherwise been visible, but rather that it makes manifest that which itself is not visible and has never been visible. Ontologically, we could say that what is at work in the icon is not representation but something closer to presentation…"

[55] Other than Col. 1:15, 2 Cor. 3:18 and 4:4 also attest to Christ being the image (icon) of God. As well, there are multiple verses which attest to man either being an icon of God (Gen. 1:26) or an icon of his glory (1 Cor. 11:7); that we bear both an earthly and heavenly image (1 Cor. 15:49); we are to conform to Christ's image (Rom. 8:29); we are renewed in the image of Christ (Col. 3:10). One can say that iconography is not only suggested, but embedded in our creation. As a side observation, we should consider why images were forbidden to the Israelites in the Old Testament – a major argument used by the iconoclasts. With few exceptions, the Israelites were forbidden to make images because prior to the Incarnation, any image could only represent that which was visible (such as plants, animals, or people). On account of his corrupted state, man was apt to worship the image and not his creator (cf. Rom. 1:23; 25). The Incarnation changes everything – even the function of art – as the holy can now be depicted because Christ has assumed visible matter in his human-divine body, and has made manifest the invisible and holy God.

material creation, which can be venerated. The icon is proof that the Incarnation was a real event with profound cosmological consequences and that an attack on an icon of Christ was an attack on the Incarnation and the whole divine economy of salvation.[56]

What exactly is presented or present in an icon? The iconoclasts argued that a true icon must be of the same nature as the person or thing it represents.[57] In other words the iconoclasts "could accept an image only when this image was identical to that which it represented. Without identity, no image was possible."[58] But the iconophiles argued that the icon was linked to its prototype not because it was identical to what it represented, but because it portrays and carries the name of a unique person possessing a common human nature; and this is what makes familiarity of being with the person known and communion with the represented person possible.[59] This is also why the iconographer presents his subject in an un-naturalistic manner – for instance, with elongated necks or strangely shaped ears. It is not because the iconographer is unable to reproduce an exact or identical representation of the person, but rather that such an identical representation is not the point. The point of the icon is not to represent what is seen in nature, but to present something which usually escapes us: "the perception of the spiritual world."[60] The icon presents a person who is already participating fully in that world, and by doing so, affirms our potential to do so as well. If the icon is only an identical representation of that which we can see in nature, like a portrait or a landscape, it has no spiritual value and it can be turned into an idol. As Archimandrite Vasileios observes, "The icon is not a representation of events. It is not an idol

[56] Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 1:121. Further on page 127, he notes that the icon "is an image of a divine person incarnate; it conveys the features of the Son of God who came in the flesh, who became visible and could therefore be represented with human means."
[57] Ibid., 122.
[58] Ibid., 124.
[59] Ibid., 127.
[60] Ibid., 178.

that has been manufactured; it is Grace incarnate, a presence and an offering of life and holiness."[61] The icon itself is a life-giving presence because it "brings before you the transparency of transfigured history and matter: it brings you the wedding of the created and uncreated."[62]

How do we see this spiritual world or transfigured history and matter, of the created and uncreated? The only way we can perceive this world and enter it, the only way we can understand its language is "through repentance and humble veneration, not through observation and mere artistic training."[63] Symeon also understood that the eye's natural vision was insufficient to perceive the spiritual reality which the icon presents. If we rely on natural vision alone, then what we see is just a representation of a person or an event; hence one's vision is guided by mere artistic training. In order to see transfigured history or matter, one's vision must first be transfigured. Although icons do not figure much in Symeon's writings, there is a passage in his thirty-sixth *Catechetical Discourse* where he discusses the acquisition of spiritual sight before one looks at an icon. In this passage we come across the need for a purifying of the mind which transforms our vision and enables us to perceive the invisible in the visible:

> When a blind man gradually recovers his sight and notices the appearance of a man and bit by bit ascertains what he is, it is not the features which undergo transformation or take a new shape. Rather, as the vision of that man's eyes becomes clearer, he sees his features. It is as though they wholly imprint themselves on his vision and penetrate through it, impressing and engraving themselves, as on a tablet, on the mind and the memory of the soul. Even so Thou Thyself becamest visible when Thou, by the clear light of the Holy Ghost, hadst entirely cleansed my mind. As through him I saw more clearly and distinctly. Thou didst seem to me to come forth and shine more brightly, and didst grant me to see the outline of Thy form beyond shape (*CD* 36.10).

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[61] Archimandrite Vasileios of Stavronikita, *Hymn of Entry: Liturgy and Life in the Orthodox Church*, trans. Elizabeth Briere (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 89. Ouspensky is blunter in this regard. Generally speaking, iconoclastic art was representative or "figurative". Such art for Ouspensky was "a rejection of the dogma of the divine Incarnation." See *Theology of the Icon*, 1:124. See also the quote from Foltz in note 54 above.
[62] Archimandrite Vasileios, *Hymn of Entry*, 90.
[63] Ibid., 89.

Symeon here likens the acquisition of spiritual sight to a blind man recovering his sight. The object in view does not change; rather, it is one's vision which has changed.[64] Symeon understands that one will only see Christ *as he really is*, when one's mind has been cleansed by the Holy Spirit.[65] It is only then that the person in the icon will "come forth and shine more brightly". The form beyond shape becomes visible. That is exactly what the icon presents – the form beyond shape is the transfigured matter. But what if, as the iconoclasts argued, created matter cannot present the holy? Iconoclasm has often been explained as resulting from the forces of politics, economics, history, and sociology. Could there be something more subtle which lie at the roots of it?

2.3.2: Iconoclasm as Another Attempt at the Hellenization of Christianity

The famous and oft quoted passage from John of Damascus' first treatise in defense of icons reveals a clue as to what may lie at the root of the iconoclastic debate. The passage runs as follows: "I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake and accepted to dwell in matter and through matter worked my salvation, and I will not cease from reverencing matter, through which my salvation was worked."[66] Note that the word "matter" is used six times in a very short sentence. Is there something John wants us to see? Why the stress on "matter"? What was it about "matter" that the iconoclasts strongly objected to?

The answer to this question emerges more clearly if we consider that the roots of the controversy may not have had anything to do with politics, economics, historical or social factors,

[64] Commenting on this passage, Charles Barber notes that "Here Symeon proposes that human eyes require divine intervention in order to see more fully. It is they, rather than the object of their vision, that require alteration." See Charles Barber, "Icons, Prayer, and Vision in the Eleventh Century," in *Byzantine Christianity*, ed. Derek Krueger, vol. 3, A People's History of Christianity (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 155. Barber's short chapter is a good overview of this subject.

[65] In the following section of the discourse (36.11) Symeon tells us that his spiritual vision came about through humility and repentant tears.

[66] See *Treatise I*, 16 in St. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. Andrew Louth, 1st ed, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 29.

however much they may have been caught up in it. As Ouspensky has argued (following George Florovsky), "the main inspiration for iconoclastic thought was hellenistic, and this heresy was actually a return to pre-Christian Hellenism."[67] This also helps to explain what Loudovikos means when he says that this whole period – iconoclasm, post-iconoclasm, and the first phase of Byzantine humanism, which is vital to the understanding of Symeon's life and theology – continued to preserve certain of the requirements of classical Greek education "at a time when the absorption of both Platonism and Aristotelianism was entering a new phase."[68] For Florovsky, iconoclasm was just another attempt at a return to pre-Christian Hellenism and was itself just a new manifestation of an old struggle. That struggle was against Origenism. [69]

Even though Origenism had been condemned at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553, it was still very much alive, and its method of symbolic-allegorical reasoning and biblical interpretation seemed to have lent itself quite well to iconoclastic thought.[70] As Ouspensky notes, iconoclasm "marked a return to the ancient dichotomy between matter and spirit. In such a system, an image can only be an obstacle to spirituality: not only is it made of matter, but it also represents the body, which is matter."[71] Origen's christology was key in this regard as it highlights the ancient world's difficulty in accepting the truth of Christian revelation – which is that Christ is both divine

[67] Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon,* 1:148.
[68] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities,* 89-90.
[69] George Florovsky, "Origen, Eusebius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy," *Church History* 19 (1950): 96.
[70] Ibid., 87. Here Florovsky notes that "the whole tenor and ethos of Origenism was undoubtably favorable to that course of theological reasoning which was actually adopted by the Iconoclasts. Therefore, the defence of the Holy Icons was, in some sense, an indirect refutation of Origenism, a new act in the story of the 'Origenistic controversies'".
[71] Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon,* 1:149. This return to Origenism, as Loudovikos notes, is always a temptation. Florovsky and Ouspensky's observations seem to me to only highlight one of the main thrusts of Loudovikos' chapter on Symeon, which is that reading Symeon in such an Origenistic manner misleads the reader into thinking that Symeon also posits this dichotomy between spirit and matter, which he does not. This also seems to validate Loudovikos' point that much of what constitutes "spirituality" and "mysticism" today is nothing more than an Origenist-Augustinian dichotomy between spirit and matter, which is why Loudovikos argues that we need to move beyond them.

and human, and therefore the material world plays a key role in our salvation, as the quote from John of Damascus above makes amply clear.[72]

As Florovsky notes, for Origen, Christ's humanity is but only a first, and moreover, the lowest step of our spiritual understanding which needs to be transcended.[73] For Origen, Christ's humanity has been transcended in his glorification and has been exalted to a higher perfection. As such, if we follow Origen, why would we be interested in any historical image or icon of Christ? There would be no purpose as what has been depicted in the icon (Christ's material human body) has been overcome and superseded by his glorified spiritual body; which in Origen's view, cannot be depicted.[74] In addition, even in his lifetime, Christ's face couldn't be depicted properly because what would be depicted would be his earthly, fleshly face which would be seen with our natural vision. Thus, it would only be an "appearance" of Christ but not in any sense his true image, because for Origen, Christ's true image is spiritual and matter cannot depict what supersedes it.[75]

The above argument is somewhat simplistic, but it shows that what lay at the root of iconoclasm was more than just historical, social or economic factors, or the political expediencies of emperor Leo III.[76] Something deeper informed the controversy, and it was something that the Church had been struggling against for centuries – the temptation of Origenism. It also validates Loudovikos' contention that these underlying philosophical and theological problems were by no

[72] Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 1:149.
[73] Florovsky, "Origen, Eusebius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy," 89–90. Origen makes this point in one of his homilies on the Gospel of Luke. When Origen interprets the passage in Luke 20:21-40 and arrives at verse 25 where Christ says "Then render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," he says: "When Christ says, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's,' he means this: "Put off the person of the earthly man, cast off the earthly image, so that you can put on yourselves the person of the heavenly man and give 'to God what is God's.'" For Origen the earthly man, that is the material body, is a hinderance. We can only truly give to God what is his when we have cast of the earthly material body and have put on the heavenly, spiritual body. Thus, a dichotomy has been posited between matter and the spirit. See Homily 39.6 in Origen, *Homilies on Luke/Fragments on Luke*, trans. Joseph T. Lienhard, The Fathers of the Church 94 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 162.
[74] Florovsky, "Origen, Eusebius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy," 91.
[75] Ibid.
[76] This is the basic thesis of Brubaker and Haldon's book.

means resolved in Symeon's day, and even persist into our own – which validates Ouspensky's remark that there seems to be a permanency to iconoclasm. That these issues lingered on into Symeon's time can be seen in his conflict with the patriarchal synod over the holiness and the icon of his spiritual father, Symeon the Pious.

2.3.3: Symeon's Conflict with Church Authorities over the Icon of Symeon the Pious

Our main source for this conflict can be found in Niketas Stethatos' biography of Symeon.[77] It began around 1003 when Stephen of Nikomedia challenged Symeon with a theological question relating to the distinction between the Father and the Son – was it real or apparent? Symeon responded with *Hymn* 21, wherein he argued it was neither and accused Stephen of blasphemy and making "scholastic" distinctions. This aroused Stephen's anger, and as *Hymn* 21 established Symeon's theological credentials as impeccable, the conflict quickly degenerated into a debate over the sanctity of Symeon's spiritual father, Symeon the Pious. After the death of Symeon's spiritual father around 986-87, Symeon instituted a feast day for him in which he wrote the service himself as well as had an icon written of him. This feast was supported and often attended by the patriarch himself. An investigation was held and it was determined that there were serious grounds to doubt the sanctity of Symeon the Pious. Moreover, it was deemed that holiness and spiritual authority were determined by the Church. Symeon defended his spiritual father, but this wasn't enough. The icon of Symeon the Pious was confiscated and first defaced and then eventually destroyed.

What is interesting for our discussion is that not only was the icon physically destroyed, but in how Niketas, when recounting the event, likened it to the destruction of icons during

[77] See *Life*, 72-94.

iconoclasm: "For they destroyed some of the images of the blessed man [Symeon the Pious] …while the monks and laypeople lamented with great emotion as they watched what was being done by Christians in the midst of the church of the faithful (this was also what happened in the old days with the destruction of the holy churches by Kopronymos)."[78] At first glance this could be taken to be hyperbole on Stethatos' part, but in light of what I have been arguing thus far, perhaps it is not.[79] How else could the violent reaction on the part of Stephen of Nikomedia and the patriarchal synod be explained? Could not a simple censure have sufficed? But, if holiness can be questioned and denied; if there are lingering doubts as to the ability of created matter to present such holiness in a person, then the actions of the patriarchal synod were not only logical, but could also be likened to iconoclasm.

Were Stephen of Nikomedia and the members of the patriarchal synod, iconoclasts? Niketas does not say so explicitly, though his language suggests otherwise. They probably weren't iconoclasts in the strictest sense of the term, which would be difficult to prove in any case. Yet their destruction of the icon of Symeon the Pious as well as the tearing down of the icons of Christ, suggest, at least, that while they may not have been iconoclasts, they were inadvertently acting "iconoclastically".[80]

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[78] Stethatos, *Life*, 93.1. Square brackets are mine. Parentheses are in original. In 93.2 Stethatos remarks that they also tore down the icons of Christ in the church. Kopronymos is a reference to emperor Constantine V (741-55) who was singled out for particular vilification by the iconophiles for his harsh enforcement of iconoclasm. Alfeyev also makes this same point: "Nikitas Stithatos constantly draws a parallel between Symeon's struggle for the veneration of his spiritual father and the struggle of the iconodules for the veneration of icons"; see *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 139.

[79] Symeon also saw himself as being persecuted on account of his devotion to his spiritual father. See *Ep.*4. 527-552.

[80] Alfeyev also warns us against making "schematic generalizations and hasty conclusions," and thus we should be wary of placing Stephen and the members of the patriarchal synod on the same level as the iconoclasts, nor should we be tempted to regard Symeon as one of the "great confessors of iconodulia." Yet, regarding Stethatos' account of it, Alfeyev admits that "there is some truth in such a comparison." Moreover, Alfeyev asks the following question: "But was the conflict between Symeon and his opponents not in fact the continuation of this protracted argument?" – that is, of iconoclasm. Alfeyev seems to think so, and I have argued above that the evidence seems to suggest it. The permanency of iconoclasm seems to have lingered on into Symeon's time. See Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 140.

How could such drastic actions be considered, much less acted upon? We have seen thus far that the issue of the "holy", raised by iconoclasm, was not resolved in Symeon's time. As well, we have seen that the philosophical underpinnings of iconoclasm can be found in Origenism. When these issues were coupled with the rise of humanism, this created an explosive mix which exacerbated the already existing doubts about holiness, as well as created new problems of their own. How these developments took place is the subject of the next section.

2.4: The First Byzantine "Humanism" and Rise of Skepticism and Intellectualism

As seen above, the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843, did not end the conflict. It failed to do so because the conflict was not political, social or economic, but went to the heart of what had always been a problem in the Greek east – that of the compatibility of hellenistic philosophy, namely Platonism, with that of Christianity. As such, new conflicts arose which began before and continued into and beyond Symeon's time. As John Meyendorff has observed, these conflicts arose because "The Hellenic character of Byzantine civilization brought into theology the perennial problem of the relationship between the Greek 'mind' and the Christian Gospel."[81] But what is problematic, was not necessarily philosophy or the turn to humanism, but "the difficulty which unexpectedly appeared on the part of the theological understanding of the time to absorb these in a critical and fruitful manner."[82] What was difficult to absorb and why does it matter for the understanding of Symeon? The first Byzantine "humanism" opened up a search for a new view of the individual which made use of both ancient Greek and Biblical problematics.[83] The theological

[81] Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 55.
[82] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 90-91.
[83] Ibid., 90. Loudovikos notes that Symeon's theology, building upon the accomplishments of Maximos the Confessor's teaching on the will, would provide the fundamental coordinates for this search for the willing individual. We will look at this in more detail in chapter six below.

understanding of the time failed to absorb these problematics. What were these problematics and why did the theology of the time fail to absorb them? This may be due in part to the unfinished nature of the first Byzantine humanism and the Church's sense of triumphalism. Let us take a brief look at this before we explore what is meant by ancient Greek and Biblical problematics.

2.4.1: The First Byzantine Humanism, Skepticism, and Ecclesiastical Triumphalism

From the ninth to the twelfth centuries, a fundamental shift occurred in Byzantium toward its classical heritage. The body of classical literature and philosophy which was bequeathed to the Byzantines was gathered and transcribed in the ninth and tenth centuries and was followed by the assimilation and critical reflection of this material in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[84] The historian Anthony Kaldellis notes that this initial phase of encyclopaedism and humanism "did not lead to any experiments in the fashioning of new Hellenic identities."[85] It was only when Michael Psellos attempted to revive philosophy in the eleventh century, that the notion of "Hellenism" became a permanent feature of Byzantine culture.[86] Although the first phase of humanism was

[84] Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 136. Kazhdan and Epstein also note that "Ninth-and tenth-century scholars studied classical texts with curiosity, but also with distance." For a good overview of much of this period, though a bit outdated, see Hussey, *Church and Learning in the Byzantine Empire: 867-1185*. For excellent studies on specific issues and individuals in this period, see the collection of papers which form Part 4 "Philosophy and Theology in Middle Byzantium" in Anthony Kaldellis and Niketas Siniossoglou, eds., *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium* (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[85] Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 181.

[86] Ibid., 183. Kaldellis' book is a masterful study of this. He identifies this development in three stages, beginning with Psellos in the eleventh century, who built upon the encyclopaedism of the ninth and tenth centuries, and which culminated in what he calls a "national Hellenism" in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This interesting development is, unfortunately, outside the scope of this study. Paul Magdalino also testifies to this when he notes that in this period, "Byzantine elite culture passed from an age of classicism and encyclopaedism to an age of humanism and Hellenism, from which it never looked back'; see Paul Magdalino, "From 'Encyclopaedism' to 'Humanism': The Turning Point of Basil II and the Millennium," in *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between*, ed. Marc D. Lauxtermann and Mark Whittow (London & New York: Routledge, 2017), 3. Further in the same chapter (p. 7), he contends that the whole encyclopaedic project, which began with Photios, was a deliberate program undertaken by both Church and State, aimed at consolidating the Triumph of Orthodoxy after 843. He elaborates this thesis more fully in another paper – see Paul Magdalino, "Orthodoxy and History in Tenth-Century Byzantine 'Encyclopedism,'" in *Encyclopedic Trends in Byzantium?: Proceedings of the International Conference Held in Leuven, 6-8 May, 2009*, ed. Peter Van Deun and Caroline Mace (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 143–59. On page 147 Magdalino contends that "the

incomplete during Symeon's lifetime, this did not mean that certain problematics were not already beginning to pose challenges to theologians and intellectuals. There had always been an element within intellectual and ecclesiastical circles which called for a rejection of "Greek" learning;[87] but what emerges during Symeon's lifetime is that this reengagement with the classical past stimulated a new rationalism in intellectual circles.[88] This rationalism augmented the already existing skepticism in regards to the "holy" which was left unresolved after 843. When coupled with a sense of triumphalism in the Church, this rationalism created a potent mixture of skepticism and intellectualism in theological and intellectual circles which did not go unnoticed by Symeon, and had lasting consequences beyond his time.

The Church also experienced a period of renewal and growth during this period. The years after 843 saw the conversion of Slavs under the Cyril and Methodius, as well as the conversion of Rus' in 988. The liturgy was also being formalized and "codified" under the auspices of Theodore the Studite. The lives of the saints were also being gathered and rewritten. These changes tended toward conservatism and the adherence to the orthodoxy worked out by the Holy Fathers and ecumenical councils. By Symeon's day, both Church and State seemed to be at the pinnacle of their eminence. The Church had seemingly defeated the iconoclasts and converted large swaths of territory to orthodoxy. The conquests of Basil II had not only regained former territories lost to the empire in the seventh and eighth centuries, but expanded far beyond them. Church and Empire

encyclopaedism of the tenth century was an extension of the concern for orthodoxy that dominated much of Byzantine intellectual life in the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries. It was an effort to continue the Triumph of orthodoxy over iconoclasm…." On page 154, he reiterates this thesis: "…the encyclopaedism of the tenth century was an imperial appropriation, for the political culture of the empire, of a religious ideology of law and order that had been developed by the monastic reformation of the eighth and ninth centuries in connection with the Triumph of orthodoxy." There are some elements of Magdalino's thesis that are debatable (especially the extent to which Basil II encouraged scholarship) and are still open for historical debate (which is beyond the scope of this study). Yet, there may be some truth in it, as we will see.

[87] Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, 181.

[88] Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 166.

seemed secure. Not so for Symeon. His attack on this complacency and triumphalism struck his contemporaries as jarring.[89] What raised Symeon's ire?

It appears that the Church did not escape from the intellectual trends of the time. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the realm of hagiography. While the lives of the saints had never lost their importance, their regathering and rewriting, first in the *Synaxarion*, and then in the *Menologion* of Symeon Metaphrastes, propagated a different view of holiness which Symeon reacted against. While the compilation and rewriting of the saints' lives followed the general trend of "encyclopaedism" and posed a danger that they could be looked upon as mere intellectual pursuits rather than experienced in the daily lives and devotional practices of the faithful, this was not the principal danger.[90] The problem was that the idea of sainthood and holiness that both the *Synaxarion* and *Menologion* presented was that of a complete book of saints.[91] In other words, the official view of the Church seemed to be that no one in the present time could emulate and equal the saints of old and contemporary hagiography reflected this view.[92] Furthermore, ecclesiastical opinion favoured the idea that holiness was a relic of a bygone age and dissuaded contemporary monks from emulating the great ascetics of the past, because, as Magdalino notes, "the official

[89] Golitzin, *Life, Times, and Theology*, 17.

[90] Barbara Crostini, "Spiritual 'encyclopedias' in Eleventh-Century Byzantium? Miscellaneous Evidence for an Excyclopedic Outlook," in *Encyclopedic Trends in Byzantium?: Proceedings of the International Conference Held in Leuven, 6-8 May, 2009*, ed. Peter Van Deun and Caroline Mace (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 225. See also Paul Magdalino, "Byzantine Encyclopaedism of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries," in *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Jason Konig and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 222. For a good overview of the rewriting of hagiography in this period, see Christian Hogel, "Hagiography under the Macedonians: The Two Recensions of the Metaphrastic Menologion," in *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, ed. Paul Magdalino (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2003), 217–32.

[91] Paul Magdalino, "The Year 1000 in Byzantium," in *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, ed. Paul Magdalino (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2003), 257–58. See also Paul Magdalino, "'What We Have Heard in the Lives of the Saints We Have Seen with Our Own Eyes': The Holy Man as Literary Text in Tenth-Century Constantinople," in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 83–112.

[92] Magdalino, "The Year 1000 in Byzantium," 258. On the same page he further notes that "The belief that the communion of saints is fully complete is implicit in the metaphor which dominates the preface to the Menologion of Basil II."

Church was tending, from the end of the tenth century, to conceive of the communion of saints as a closed society, whose numbers were more or less complete."[93] Symeon attacked this prevailing assumption vehemently and it was the leading factor in the opposition to Symeon's veneration of his spiritual father.

Why was this attitude so dangerous? The iconoclasts had questioned the ability of the icon to manifest holiness and insisted that holiness was a matter for the ecclesiastical authorities to determine. These same ecclesiastical authorities took this skepticism further and questioned the ability of any contemporary ascetic (or laymen, for that matter) to achieve the same level of holiness of the saints of old. The communion of saints, as reflected in the *Synaxarion* and *Menologion*, was now closed. Holiness was simply out of reach. The skepticism regarding holiness, inaugurated by iconoclasm, found its full manifestation in hagiography. It was but a small step. Thus, when Symeon insisted that holiness was available to all, and put forth his spiritual father as an example, he was met with stiff opposition. For how could Symeon not only venerate, but institute a cult of his spiritual father and have an icon written of him, if the official view held that such holiness was beyond the reach of anyone living? Indeed, it seems the whole controversy over the cult of Symeon the Pious hinged on this alone. Symeon defended his spiritual father's holiness in the face of this prevailing attitude.[94]After thorough investigation, however, the patriarchal synod deemed that the holiness of Symeon the Pious could not be determined

[93] Paul Magdalino, "The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century," in *The Byzantine Saint*, ed. Sergei Hackel (Crestwood, New York: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 61.

[94] See *CD* 6.7. This whole discourse is a defense of his spiritual father's holiness. In section seven Symeon pushes back against this view: "So I shall not cease to speak of holy Symeon [the Pious] as I have spoken; I speak under the pressure of necessity, and about ourselves as well, unworthy as we are. There are many who harm those who hear them by saying that nobody can be like that now, or in his deeds attain to what our great fathers achieved, or be found worthy of the spiritual gifts that were granted them. Their unbelief compels me, unwilling as I am, to say the things I never wanted to say, and so to proclaim publicly the reality of God's love for man in order to reprove the slothfulness and carelessness of those who make those claims." Square brackets are mine. Note the tone of urgency here. Who makes these claims? Symeon does not name anyone in particular, although he probably had specific individuals in mind. This could easily be read as an indictment of not only certain individuals, but of a prevailing spirit of the times.

unequivocally, and furthermore, it was not up to Symeon to make that decision, which belonged to the synod alone. Therefore, if one wanted to encounter holiness, they could read the newly minted saints' lives. As for experiencing it oneself or encountering it in others – that was impossible. Holiness had become an intellectual abstraction rather than a living reality. Yet, intellectual abstraction in regards to holiness wasn't the only problem which surfaced at this time. The re-engagement with the classical past also raised problems for theologians.

2.4.2: Rationalism and Intellectualism in Theology

The first stage of Byzantine humanism, which began before Symeon and continued during his lifetime, was marked by the rediscovery and reengagement with Byzantium's classical past. The later eleventh and twelfth centuries would see the assimilation of this heritage more fully into the fabric of Byzantine intellectual life.[95] During Symeon's time, theologians also experienced difficulties interpreting and assimilating this classical past. A result of this difficulty is that a renewed familiarity with the writings of the classical past led to a new rationalism among the urban intellectuals.[96] If we keep in mind that during this period there was no clear distinction between theologians and intellectuals, this rationalism began to affect theological thinking in ways which Symeon found disturbing.

[95] Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 166.

[96] Ibid. See also page 158. This rationalism and the threat that it posed for theology was felt more fully after Symeon's time – but it is important to note, as I am arguing here, that the initial stages of this rationalism were taking shape during Symeon's time and, as we will see below, did not go unnoticed by him and is reflected in his writings. The philosophical innovations introduced by Psellos led to a reaction by the Church. Yet, despite a vigorous campaign of refutation, the Church was not entirely successful in impeding the progress of these ideas. Things would come to a head in the later eleventh century in the trial of John Italos as well as in the twelfth century in the trials of Michael of Thessalonica and Nicephorus Basilaces. For a detailed discussion of these events and their background, see H.W. Haussig, *A History of Byzantine Civilization*, trans. J. M. Hussey (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 320–31. Kazhdan and Epstein also make a similar observation: "The vigor of the Orthodox reaction to the unorthodox ideas of the academics….testifies to the strength of the rationalist threat to traditional ideology." See *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 166. Pages 158-166 also provide a good discussion of this.

Symeon's time was marked by the birth pangs of what would become modern Hellenism, and which also saw the emergence of "intellectualism".[97] This intellectualism led to a skepticism, which argued that knowledge of God belonged to the past and thus a "cognitive treatment of spiritual matters" made its appearance, alongside "a scholastic, intellectual perception of dogma."[98] As the absorption of the classical past was entering a new phase, theologians struggled to find a balance between the truths of Christian revelation and this new Hellenic intellectualism.

This was not a new struggle, but the failure of theologians to find a middle ground, led to new problems. Part of the problem lies in the fact that Greek philosophy and Christian revelation had always existed in a state of tension which theologians and intellectuals never really managed to overcome. As the work of the Cappadocian Fathers such as Basil and Gregory the Theologian has demonstrated, there had always been a free, dynamic, though critical engagement with Greek philosophy; in which careful discrimination existed alongside grievous mistakes.[99] In other words, the dominant Orthodox framework had never managed to fully absorb or fully reject Greek philosophy and its ideas.[100] On the whole, although the Greek language was employed, theologians in the East had, at least up to Symeon's time, remained largely ambivalent toward Greek philosophy.[101] It would also do well to keep in mind that the Orthodox Church has never sanctioned any attempt to Hellenize Christian doctrine or Christianize Hellenism – in fact, any attempt to do so has been seen as bordering on heresy.[102] It is one thing to adopt the categories of Greek

[97] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities,* 90.
[98] Ibid., 90-91.
[99] John Meyendorff, *Living Tradition: Orthodox Witness in the Contemporary World* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 42–43.
[100] Dimitri Gutas and Niketas Siniossoglou, "Philosophy and 'Byzantine Philosophy,'" in *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium,* ed. Anthony Kaldellis and Niketas Siniossoglou (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 288.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 289. On the same page, these authors also note this approach toward Greek philosophy is what later characterized the work of Gregory Palamas, who saw "Orthodoxy as an existential modality alien to the worldview of Hellenism." They note that "Gregory Palamas and Byzantine Orthodox theologians rightly distinguished between the

philosophy as the *milieu* of Christian theology (as they were at that time the only available and understandable ones); but it is quite another thing to absolutize them.[103]

Yet it is just that struggle to absolutize the categorizes of Greek philosophy which began to take shape during Symeon's time. One of the new problems which emerged had to do with "a distinct tendency towards the search for a holistic and willing individuality in modern Hellenism," which involved a new view of humankind that made use of both ancient Greek and Biblical problematics. [104] What were these "problematics" and why are they important for our understanding of Symeon's theology?

2.4.3: Ancient Greek and Biblical Problematics

The search for a holistic and willing individuality was reinvigorated during the first phase of Byzantine humanism of the ninth and tenth centuries. Yet the problems and questions it raised were not new to Greek thought. Nor were they new to Christianity, which had also struggled with them. This had to do with the nature of the human person and the question of the soul and its relation to the body.

In Platonic and subsequently in Origen's writings, the image of God in man was attributed exclusively to the soul, which is a particle of God. The soul's likeness to God was its natural privilege and not a gift of grace. Therefore, the soul needs to find its true nature, which is divine. Material existence was for the Platonists and Origen, a "fall" from divine nature. As such, the soul has to struggle to become de-materialized and purified which renders it its true nature. The material

proprium of the Orthodox *tropos* and that of ancient philosophers, and that this distinction was repeatedly affirmed by synodal decisions and late Byzantine theology." Haussig also notes that the Platonic teaching on the soul, which Psellos was trying to clarify in his writings, "was incompatible with Byzantine theology. They were mutually exclusive." See *A History of Byzantine Civilization*, 324.

[103] Meyendorff, *Living Tradition*, 42.

[104] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 90.

body is shunned as something to be transcended and ultimately to be left behind. This has often led to a type of "spirituality" which is not centred on transfiguration, but on intellectual contemplation, which is the true mode of the soul. For Origen, man is a fallen intellect who is called upon to achieve his original state of absolute intellectual activity and as such, prayer is the supreme activity of the intellect. This type of "spirituality" entered the East through Origen and the West through Augustine (via Origen). It has ever been and still remains a temptation for both sides of the Christian divide. It is precisely through this type of "spirituality" that we often read Symeon and that is why this type of reading is problematic. It is problematic because it posits a fundamental dichotomy or dualism between soul and body which has pernicious anthropological consequences because it denies the crucial importance of man's physical body in the act of worship. It is also questionable because it ignores Biblical problematics.

The "spirituality" of Origen and Augustine is *not* Biblical. In contrast to this, the Scriptures and the writings of the Fathers are very clear that man is constituted of both body and soul which are both created at the moment of conception. The soul does not pre-exist the body, nor can it subsist on its own, nor is its dwelling in the body some kind of "fall" from an original state of grace. Moreover, in Biblical problematics, although the soul occupies a slightly higher place of importance, being what animates the body, the human person is fundamentally a psychosomatic unity of body and soul. The soul is not saved without the body, nor the body without the soul. Both are destined to be resurrected and transfigured in the age to come.

More importantly, in Biblical problematics, both the Scriptures and the Fathers teach that the locus of the human person is the heart. As man is a psychosomatic unity of body and soul; both need to be purified if the intellect is to perceive the divine light. In this understanding, the intellect is illuminated by the divine light of Christ. In Biblical problematics, pure prayer consists of the

intellect descending *into* the heart where both are purified.[105] Christ teaches that only the pure in heart will see God (Mt. 5:8). It is not the intellect alone which needs to be purified. It is through the heart that man's complete being participates in Christ and by doing so man is initiated in and finds his complete being. Any dichotomy between soul and body would introduce the "unfamiliarity of being" that Loudovikos speaks of and on which Origenistic spirituality depends. But how is the heart purified? The great ascetics teach that it is purified through fasting, vigils, prayer, and ultimately for Symeon, through the keeping of Christ's commandments – the keeping of which Christ promised that he would manifest himself to us (cf. Jn. 14:21). For Symeon, the heart is initiated into the keeping of the commandments through repentance. When the intellect (*nous*) descends into the heart and is purified through the keeping of the commandments (which is repentance) it sees the divine light of Christ as he manifests himself in our hearts. For Symeon, the completeness of the human person, his familiarity of being in Christ, takes place in the heart, where Christ is formed within us like a child the womb of its mother. Christ is not formed in the intellect alone, but in the physical body as well. [106] It should come as no surprise then, that Symeon's

[105] The entire corpus of the five volumes of the *Philokalia* is a 'manual' on how to accomplish this.

[106] See *ED* 10; 1:169. This passage is famous and is worth quoting in its entirety: "In order not to stop at the last without any witness and be suspected of speaking from ourselves and laying down as dogma that what is impossible is possible, let us once again introduce the blessed Paul himself, the mouth of Christ, into your midst. He makes our point clearly when he says: 'My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you' [Gal 4:19]. Now then, where or in what place or part of our body does he say that Christ takes form? Do you think he means on the brow, or in the face, or in the breast? Assuredly not! It is rather inside, in our hearts. Perhaps you supposed that He takes form bodily? Away with the notion! Rather, He indeed takes form, but bodilessly and as is proper to God. Besides, just as a woman surely knows when she is with child that the babe leaps in her womb and could never be ignorant of the fact that she has it within her, so the one who has Christ take form within himself and is aware of His stirring, which is to say His illuminations, is in no way ignorant of His leaps, that is His gleamings, and sees His formation within himself. Christ is not, for example, reflected like the light of a lamp in a mirror, is not an apparition without substance like the reflection, but appears in a light which is personal and substantial; in a shape without shape, and a form without form He is seen invisibly and comprehended incomprehensibly." Another Father in the continuum of experience in the tradition which is crucial in this regard is Makarios of Egypt. See Pseudo Macarius, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, trans. George A. Maloney, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1992); especially the preface by Kallistos Ware, pgs. xiii-xviii and Homilies 15 and 43. For a good study of the importance of Makarios in the Eastern Tradition at least until Maximos the Confessor, see Marcus Plested, *The Macarian Legacy: The Place of Macarius-Symeon in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); especially pgs. 32-35 where Plested discusses Makarios' teaching on the heart and intellect. For a good

understanding of the place of the heart and that of man's psychosomatic unity, conditioned by repentance, is diametrically opposed, not to say antagonistic, to Platonic types of "spirituality".

Why does this matter? The first phase of Byzantine humanism brought these problematics once again to the fore, and it was the failure on the part of the theological "establishment" to absorb them in a critical and fruitful manner, that is; to come to a rapprochement between these Greek and Biblical problematics, which was already beginning to pose problems for theologians, as the old temptation of a dematerialized understanding of the human person began to rear its head again. This is important for our discussion, because a failure to reach a rapprochement between Greek and Biblical problematics (i.e., intellect/soul and body) and the temptation toward the former, leads to "an intellectual mysticism" of a reductive type,[107] or what Pavel Florensky has called a "mysticism of the head."[108] Yet, no matter what it is called, it presents dire anthropological consequences, as the body is reduced to something which is necessarily reprehensible and expendable, and in its place the intellect/soul/mind is exalted, and along with it comes a very real danger of pride, rationalism, intellectualism and narcissism – to the point where the soul alone, glorying in intellectual "contemplation", becomes the sole locus of the "mystical" life. Any so-called "mysticism" which moves away from the human center or the heart, is nothing more than an intellectual and metaphysical dualism, which is a perversion and a corruption of man's true nature.[109]

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study on Makarios and Symeon, see Athanasios Hatzopoulos, *Two Outstanding Cases in Byzantine Spirituality: The Macarian Homilies and Symeon the New Theologian* (Thessaloniki: Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, 1991).

[107] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 91.

[108] Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 195. Florensky calls this a false mysticism and argues that the true mysticism of the Church is that of the chest, because the chest is the centre of the body and the centre of the chest is the heart. The heart is where all the attention of Church mysticism has been directed. See especially pages 194-199.

[109] Florensky was unequivocal on this point. He stated that, "Only the mysticism of the human center, which makes man accessible to grace and nourishes his core, corrects the personality and allows it to grow from measure to measure. All other mysticisms necessarily disrupt the already shaky equilibrium of life and ultimately pervert the nature of sinful man"; see *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 195 and also pgs. 213-215.

Symeon was aware of this false, reductive mysticism of the head and reacted swiftly and unequivocally against it. It is to his reaction that we now turn.

2.5: Repentance as the Cure for Rationalism, Skepticism, and Intellectualism

Symeon's reaction to the intellectual and theological issues of his time, which shaped his theology, must be considered in its context. The scholarship has so far failed to integrate Symeon's theological contributions within their historical, social, theological, and intellectual contexts, because it has paid little attention to how post-iconoclastic Byzantium and the rise of humanism shaped Symeon's thought. If we only look at Symeon's life after he became a monk; it is easy to miss. But Symeon was not always a monk. A third of his life was spent outside the monastery.

Niketas Stethatos tells us[110] that Symeon was an intelligent child who received the standard elementary education of his day. Symeon was eager for his lessons and possessed a natural quickness in learning. When he reached the age of advanced learning, Symeon had already mastered shorthand and calligraphy. Yet, as Stethatos notes, Symeon purposefully avoided higher learning, which would have involved deep study of the classics of Greek philosophy and literature. Stethatos tells us that Symeon refused to "hellenize" his speech nor did he assimilate secular learning or master rhetoric as he considered it a defilement and of harmful influence. Symeon took only what was beneficial from it – which would have been its method of argument. Now, some of Stethatos' description is no doubt a product of hagiographical tropes; especially his remark about rhetoric. But we have no cause to doubt that Symeon did not make use of secular learning, as there are absolutely no references to Greek philosophy or literature in his writings. Yet, this does not mean he was not unaware of them. If Symeon avoided them because he thought they had a

[110] See *Life*, 2.

corrupting influence, it was because he was aware of their content. In fact, Symeon was quite aware of what was being debated in the theological and intellectual circles of his day. Alfeyev takes note of this and his view should be cited in full as it provides both a valuable, but somewhat short-sighted assessment of Symeon's context:

> Symeon's life overlaps with that of Michael Psellos, 'the first Byzantine humanist', who, in the eleventh century, became a symbol of the cultural revival in Byzantium. This revival was characterized by a renewed interest in classical tradition, by collection and assimilation of the classical inheritance in both literature and art. One doubts, however, whether this had anything to do with what Symeon the New Theologian was preoccupied with for most of his life. His knowledge of classical literature and his involvement in the process of its assimilation seems to have been extremely limited. He was certainly not an integral part of the so-called 'Macedonian renaissance', as far as his cultural background is concerned.[111]

Let's begin with what Alfeyev seems to have got right. Symeon's life did indeed overlap with that of Psellos and he identifies Symeon's time as belonging to the first wave of "humanism". Alfeyev is also correct when he states that Symeon's involvement in the process of assimilation of the classical heritage was extremely limited and he was not an integral part of the revival of learning.[112]

Yet, we need to reconsider Alfeyev's statement that Symeon's knowledge of classical literature was limited. Symeon avoided it for a reason, and not out of ignorance or hearsay. Also, Alfeyev doubts that the revival of learning which characterized Symeon's time had anything to do with what preoccupied Symeon during his life. I would argue, and indeed this chapter has tried to show, that in fact it was the very problems, both theological and intellectual, which the cultural revival reignited, that did preoccupy Symeon for most of his life. Symeon may not have been well educated in secular learning, but this does not mean, as Alfeyev takes it, that Symeon was not

[111] Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 10-11.
[112] Curiously, the historian Anthony Kaldellis identifies Symeon as being one of the most important writers of Basil II's reign; so maybe Symeon's cultural contributions need to be reassessed. See Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*, 139–40.

acutely aware of what was going on theologically and intellectually during his time. This view works if we focus only on the importance of Symeon's life *after* he became a monk, which is what Alfeyev's study does. Yet, while this is important, it ignores a third of his life and does not take into consideration how Symeon's thought was shaped by the intellectual and theological trends of the time *before* he entered monastic life. Symeon was far more involved theologically and intellectually than he is often given credit for. It should be remembered that Symeon spent many years in the court. From what is known of Byzantine court life, it is safe to assume that Symeon would have known both theologians and intellectuals, who were frequent visitors to court. If Stethatos is correct that Symeon did indeed enjoy learning and possessed a quick-witted mind, then it can be safely assumed that Symeon would have either overheard their discussions or may have taken part in them himself. Keep in mind also that Symeon, even as a layman, had frequent contacts with the Studios monastery and would have been aware of the liturgical and hagiographical changes taking place during this period. In short, Symeon was more than aware of what was going on both theologically and intellectually and these new ideas and their repercussions did preoccupy him. Skepticism regarding holiness as well as rationalism and intellectualism in theology, which were some of the principal characteristics of Byzantine "humanism", provoked a reaction on Symeon's part.[113]

[113] This has been acknowledged by a few scholars. Kazhdan and Epstein, for instance, see Symeon's theology in part as a reaction against "tenth-century institutionalization and order" and as a substitute for "the cold organization of the Byzantine church"; see *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 92. Paul Magdalino points out that Symeon vigorously attacked the prevailing view of his time "that no man of the present age could equal the saints of old," which was echoed in contemporary hagiography – which we should point out – Symeon was a voracious reader; see "The Year 1000 in Byzantium," 258. This is also acknowledged by John Turner when he states that "Symeon openly challenged the widely held idea that one should not expect contemporary monks to become contemporary saints"; see John Turner, "The Formation of Monks at St Mamas and at the Theotokos Evergetis," in *Work and Worship at the Theotokos Evergetis 1050-1200: Papers of the Fourth Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, Portaferry, Co. Down, 14-17 September 1995*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Anthony Kirby, Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations, 6.2 (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1997), 133.

2.5.1: Symeon's Way

A sense of triumphalism in the Church – married to skepticism, rationalism, and intellectualism – led ultimately to a kind of Christianity which was self-satisfied, smug, intellectualist, and content with an outward show of liturgical and doctrinal piety, and which did not make too many demands on its believers; assuring them of the security of salvation. This type of Christianity is mediocre and lacks courage. This "heresy of mediocrity", as it is termed by Alexis Torrance, was one of the burning problems that Symeon addressed constantly in his writings.[114] This mediocrity is an approach to Christianity "characterized by any stance or pretext that would excuse the Christian from the pursuit of perfection through Christ's commandments and/or deny the possibility of real and conscious experience of communion with God here below."[115] Moreover, Torrance calls this type of Christianity, one of the core theological problems of Symeon's day.[116] While there is not enough solid evidence to make so strong a claim, the number of instances in which Symeon addresses this problem, however, indicates that Torrance may not be too far off the mark. And if it turns out that Torrance is correct, it would present a very different context and background against which to read Symeon's theology and assess his theological contributions; than what has traditionally been the case.

Now, in the same vein, according to Loudovikos, this mediocre form of Christianity led to a "profound melancholy in Symeon."[117] I do not think "melancholy" is the appropriate word as it indicates a profound sadness likened to depression (often without any known cause). While this form of Christianity may have indeed made Symeon sad, it rather provoked ire in him which led to a reaction which could be characterized as nothing short of righteous indignation.

[114] See *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology*, 114.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid., 116.
[117] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 91.

In one of his epistles, Symeon tells us that he is persecuted precisely because he is standing against this mediocre, timid, Christianity. He is persecuted because he teaches that "those who share in [the Spirit] are not only free from all lusts and passions…but are also themselves gods abiding in God…and are not just holy themselves and live while in the body as if they had no body, but also look on all the rest of the faithful as holy, and not merely as holy but as people who have *put on Christ* and have become christs…" (*Ep.* 4.536-543). Note that the core problem of this "mediocre" Christianity is the issue of holiness and the ability of all baptized Christians to become holy, even in this life. Furthermore, the only way we can put on Christ is to both exist and share in Christ's light, which Symeon tells us is freely given to be seen by all "who are counted worthy to enter into it through repentance" (*Ep.* 4.545-548). Symeon's opponents, however, become like enraged dogs when they hear someone teach that everyone can be holy like the saints of old: "'Stop!' they say, 'you deluded and prideful man! Who in our time has become such as the holy fathers became? Who then ever saw God or ever could see any part of him? Whoever received the Holy Spirit to such a degree that he was made worthy of seeing through Him the Father and the Son? Stop! Lest we stone you to death with rocks!'" (*ED* 9; 2:124-125). For Symeon, those who cannot see and perceive their union with Christ are spiritually dead. They think they live and see, but in fact they are plunged in unbelief when they deny that anyone can live this experience and perceive it with their senses. They deny it because "it happens only by report and by teaching of words alone" (*H* 34.11; cf. lns. 5-10). That is; holiness has become an intellectual abstraction and a literal impossibility. This is the great deceit of Symeon's age which plagues many (cf. *H*. 32.16-19).

This great deceit comes up for the severest criticism in Symeon's twenty-ninth *Catechetical Discourse*. What is the problem? It is with those who say that "there is no one in our

times and in our midst who is able to keep the Gospel commandments and become like the holy Fathers" (*CD* 29.4.139-141).[118] Those who say this are not only heretics in Symeon's eyes, but have fallen into all the heresies at once, which ultimately is impiety and blasphemy and a denial of the entire message of the gospel and the witness of the Scriptures and the holy Fathers (cf. *CD* 29.4.146-168). If these heretics are right, then holiness is impossible and heaven is shut against us.

Symeon also has much to say against a theology that has become prey to a rationalism which is satisfied with intellectual perceptions of dogma. For Symeon, mediocrity and rationalist theology are two sides to the same coin. In his fiftieth hymn, Symeon castigates those who would "hypothetically" (or by means of mental abstraction) deny that Christ assumed a body in reality. Those who approach theological truths rationalistically "suppose themselves to be children of God, / yet they do not discover their own Father" (*H* 50.170-171; cf. lns. 172-83). Symeon's twenty-first hymn is an overt polemic against rationalist and intellectualist theology: How dare you, Symeon says to his opponent Stephen of Nikomedia, "you who are yourself all flesh, / and have not yet become spirit like Paul, / to speak or philosophize about the Spirit?" (*H* 21.174-76).[119] Symeon's advice to such as who do this is to tremble before speaking of God (cf. lns. 118 & 173). In his first *Theological Discourse,* Symeon targets those rationalist and intellectually driven theologians who speak of God or investigate Him and interpret the writings of the Fathers without

[118] I should note here that his spiritual father would have been the chief person that Symeon would have had in mind as an example in his time of someone who had reached the level of holiness of the Fathers. Also, as we will see in chapters four and five, the keeping of the Gospel commandments was, for Symeon and the entire monastic-ascetic tradition, equated with repentance.

[119] Despite Symeon's often harsh criticism of the clergy, his own monks, and the general slackness of his day, overt polemic is rare in Symeon's writings. *Hymn* 21 and his three *Theological Discourses* are examples of this, as are sections of *Hymns* 50 & 58 and *CD* 29. These are only a small portion of his overall corpus of writings. We are often given the impression by scholars that Symeon spent his entire lifetime struggling against the ecclesiastical establishment. This is not true. His main struggle or conflict with the ecclesiastical establishment took place between 1003 and ended in 1009 with his exile from Constantinople. This is only a meager six years. Symeon was almost seventy-three when he died in 1022. Six years hardly counts for a "lifetime". As with many other things in Symeon's life, this impression of one, long, continuous struggle with the Church, emerges when he is read predominately as a mystic, who by nature is always in conflict with ecclesiastical authorities. Like many other things regarding Symeon's life, this view needs to be reassessed. Unfortunately, I do not have the space here to do so.

illumination. He calls such people rash and presumptuous because "such persons interpret these in every conceivable sense, not in order to gain spiritual profit, but to be admired by their audience at banquets and gatherings, and in order to make a name for themselves as theologians" (*TD* 1:107). These theologians have

> …no qualms about searching out the things that even angels and all the heavenly powers cannot understand or express. We analyse them as a pastime, categorize them, make up theories, and try to depict them all. In this we are no different than unbelievers or men who have never been initiated into the mysteries of Christ. This is how we think about the things of God, without the slightest feeling of awe, and we discourse on them in our presumption (*TD* 1:112).

In this passage it is clear that this is a wide-ranging contemporary problem, as Symeon does not single out particular people, but singles out a whole theological climate where such things not only go on, but are encouraged.[120]

2.5.2: Repentance as the "Cure"?

It is quite easy to criticize, and Symeon had no lack of things to criticize during his time. It is also one thing to diagnose a problem, but quite another to offer a solution. Symeon indeed offered a solution and it is an important hermeneutical key to his theology. Regarding a self-satisfied, mediocre, and timid Christianity, Symeon called it a heresy. It was heretical, in Symeon's eyes, to believe that the ability to keep Christ's commandments was either impossible or was a thing of the past. He held the same opinion of those who were skeptical regarding the ability to obtain the holiness of the saints of old. In the second half of his twenty-ninth *Catechetical Discourse*, Symeon lays out the path by which we can not only avoid this heresy, but how we can

[120] Symeon's use of the first-person plural "we" in this passage is peculiar. It is not clear if Symeon includes himself among those rationalist theologians or if he is speaking with their voice. The context of the entire discourse seems to lean toward the latter.

make holiness possible. The path consists of tears of repentance and humility. If we refuse the path of tears of repentance and humility, if we do not "mourn in accordance with the Lord's commandment" (*CD* 29.8.254-55), then there is no way to avoid the heresy of mediocrity. We must not refuse purification through repentant tears (*CD* 29.5.191ff). Repentant tears are a necessity in our life (*CD* 29.6). We should, like Symeon's spiritual father, live our entire lives in repentant tears if we wish to be saved and enter eternal life (*CD* 29.6). Indeed, it is repentant tears which are the sign of God's grace (*CD* 29.7). We are to live our entire lives contemplating the Scriptures and at all times be mindful of our own failures (*CD* 29.7 & 8). Finally, the discourse ends by telling us that the only way to avoid this heresy is to adhere to the gospel call of repentance (Mt. 4:7); as such a person will find mercy and will not be condemned (*CD* 29.10). This entire discourse is clear that the heresy of mediocrity can only be avoided by life-long repentance.

There is a similar cure for theologians who are enamoured of rationalistic, intellectual propositions and theories. Symeon makes a connection between knowledge of God and knowledge of self.[121] The only way we can know anything of God is by having some knowledge of ourselves. This is not a rationalistic, intellectual knowledge. It is an experiential knowledge. For Symeon, if we do not know ourselves, then our ignorance of God will be even greater. It is the ignorance of ourselves which leads us to speak rashly and ignorantly about God. If we speak about God while being ignorant of ourselves; if we speak about God by means of intellectual categories and rationalistic theories, this shows that we are unilluminated and deprived of the Holy Spirit. If we truly knew ourselves, we would never even begin to be so presumptuous as to speak of God. But what is this self-knowledge which leads to knowledge of God, and how do we obtain it? It is the knowledge of our sinfulness and it can only be obtained through repentance. It is our sins which

[121] We will explore this connection in more detail in chapter five below.

set up a dividing wall between ourselves and God. If we do not scale this wall through repentance "we will not only be unable to know God, we will not even know that we are men" (*TD* 1:116). The purpose of repentance then is "at one and the same time to dispel ignorance and obtain knowledge" (*TD* 1:117). This knowledge is first of ourselves and the world, and then of God and divine mysteries (*TD* 1:117). And Symeon is clear that these divine mysteries are invisible and incomprehensible to those who are unrepentant; and moreover, no amount of philosophy will reveal these mysteries (*TD* 1:117). Without lifelong repentance, we will live our lives in a deep blackness of ignorance. And even then, the mysteries of God are only revealed to those have fervently repented and "is in due proportion to their repentance and purification" (*TD*1:117-118). In short, repentance is no easy road; but it seems to be the only road for Symeon. Repentance is the only way out of the mess in which he sees his contemporaries. And Symeon knows it is no easy task. Looking about him, Symeon diagnoses the situation and, at least in this instance, he does seem to border on melancholy:

> It is hard for each man to know himself, and there are few who succeed in this philosophy. But small though it may be, this number will dwindle even more in our own time and in this generation when the love of philosophy is being blown out by the headwinds of prevailing apathy and [distracting] affairs of life. Men have exchanged eternal goods for those of no value, those which do not endure or which have no real existence at all because they are subject to change at the mercy of any circumstance and know no limit at which to stop. If this is so, how much more difficult it is to know God (*TD* 2:124-25).

Symeon is no stranger to his context: he knows what is going on and knows how dangerous it is. Yet, while the above quote may seem pessimistic, Symeon has not lost all hope. Symeon suggests that if we turn to Christ in repentance and keep his commandments, then not only will we be cured of this sickness, we can avoid it; and in its stead, experience Christ and the holiness of the saints in this life and more fully in the life to come. This also suggests that repentance has an integrative potential as a valuable hermeneutical key in which to interpret Symeon's life and works.

2.6: Conclusion

In line with the methodological principles set out in chapter one, it has been the goal of this chapter has been to show that Symeon's theology of repentance emerges from a particular context. That context is post-iconoclastic Byzantium which coincided with the first phase of Byzantine "humanism".

The Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843 "officially" ended iconoclasm, but its Platonic, philosophical underpinnings continued to linger on and flowed into the general stream of ideas attached to the first phase of Byzantine "humanism". This created a skepticism regarding what constituted holiness, how it was presented in an icon, and who possessed the authority to arbitrate it. These issues came to the fore in Symeon's conflict with the patriarchal synod over the issue of the holiness of his spiritual father. The synod called into question the holiness of Symeon the Pious and ruled that it was not up to Symeon to decide the matter. As a consequence, the icon of his spiritual father was destroyed.

During this same period, the first phase of humanism called into question accepted categories of holiness as well as introduced rationalism and intellectualism in regards to Christian doctrine. This led to an intellectual perception of doctrine, and when coupled with a sense of triumphalism in the Church, it led to a self-satisfied, smug, and mediocre form of Christianity which claimed it was impossible to keep Christ's commandments and that the holiness of the saints of old was impossible. This idea was reflected in contemporary hagiography which presented the communion of saints as a closed world. There was also a failure on the part of theologians to reconcile Greek notions of the soul with Biblical notions of the heart. This led to the emergence of a "mysticism" which exalted the soul at the expense of the body.

Symeon was no stranger to these developments and reacted strongly against them. As a counterweight, Symeon offered the theology of repentance as a cure for the heresy of mediocrity and the blasphemy of intellectual speculation in theology. All this suggests that repentance has an integrative potential as a valuable hermeneutical key in which to interpret Symeon's life and works.

The contextual dilemma outlined in this chapter is only one of the three problems highlighted in the literature review. The second problem concerns Symeon's so-called "mysticism" – which has been the lens through which his life and theology has largely been read and interpreted. This lens is problematic on a number of levels, so we need to examine why this is so. We also need to examine what Symeon understood by repentance and how it can be assessed in his theology. An examination of his sources is also required, in order to see whether Symeon's notion of continual repentance was a private invention, or an integral part of monastic tradition, which can be traced in the continuum of experience within that tradition.[122] Before we arrive there, an examination of Symeon's supposed "mysticism" is required. This is the subject of the following chapter.

[122] This will be the subject of chapter four.

Chapter 3

"Mysticism" vs. Continual Repentance in the Reading of Symeon's Theology

3.1: Introduction

The above chapter explored the contextual dilemma, and through a detailed study, demonstrated that the existential relevance of repentance in Symeon's theology emerges from, and is grounded in his historical, social and theological context. In addition to the contextual dilemma, the literature review also highlighted another issue: the explicit association of Symeon with "mysticism". The scholarship, especially in the early and middle periods, has predominately studied Symeon in relation to mysticism, with little attention paid to his historical, social, and theological context. Our methodological principles (especially three and four) suggests that due attention should be paid to the context within which something is written. They also suggest that if a text is severed from its wider context, injustice is done to the text and its author. Moreover, if the text is approached with premises unknown to the author, it invariably leads to misinterpretation. The aim of this chapter is to argue that a "mysticist" reading of Symeon does exactly those things. Alternatively, an interpretive hermeneutical lens of continual repentance will be proposed as an integrative methodological tool aiming at providing a more coherent view on various aspects of Symeon's life and theology that have been considered before as unclear or controversial. Yet in order to do so, this "mysticist" reading and its problems, must be examined.

The first part of this chapter will take a close look at the "mysticist" reading and argue that it is methodologically problematic on a number of levels. In the second part, I will make use of the terminology of continuous or "existential" repentance employed by Alexis Torrance, as the groundwork for positing the integrative hermeneutical lens of repentance as an alternative and

more integrative reading of Symeon. Finally, I will also examine the meaning of continual repentance in Orthodox theology.

3.2: "An intellectual mysticism of a reductive type" – The Mysticist Misreading

In this reading, mysticism *is* Symeon's existential context.[1] As already noted, Turner believes there is no compelling reason why this should be the case. Alfeyev tells us that his contextual reading of Symeon has led him to question the "mysticist" reading, and he further argues that we should revise the widespread notion of Symeon as an "inspired mystic" who opposes his personal experience against Church doctrines.[2] Alfeyev argues that this reading is a hinderance to further fruitful study because those scholars who "try to oppose a formal and rationalized 'tradition' (held by the majority in the church) to an inspired 'mysticism' (of individual enthusiasts) fall into error, not understanding the very essence of Tradition."[3] This is a strong accusation. Is Alfeyev correct in his assessment? And what exactly is this traditional view of Symeon as an "inspired mystic" and individual "mystical enthusiast"? Where does it come from

[1] This is the traditional reading. A perfect example of this can be found as recently as in the work of Jim McInnes. In his study, *The Immediacy of God* (pgs. 172-73), he writes: "…we must at least attempt to see and hear Symeon on his own terms as a mystic. A study of the immediacy of God is, after all, a study of mysticism, not monasticism, or asceticism, or history, or theology, as important as these lenses are for making sense of our tenth-century Byzantine monk." Although he pays lip service to the importance of monasticism, asceticism, history, and theology in the study of Symeon, McInnes in fact dismisses them altogether as we need "to see and hear Symeon on his own terms as a mystic." So, for McInnes, mysticism is the context for studying Symeon. The problem, which this chapter will highlight, is that mysticism is taken to be a context *in its own right*, unconnected to anything. This is methodologically problematic because it imposes its own interpretive framework for assessing its own claims. Mysticism in what context? Does it emerge from a context? This also poses another problem; one which we may call a "chicken and egg" problem. Is Symeon a mystic because he has visions of light or do the visions make him a mystic? In other words, which comes first? Does the mystic make the vision or does the vision make the mystic? This question is never answered because it is never posed. The answer however seems to be presupposed. Another problem with McInnes' view is that he gives no compelling reason why the study of the immediacy of God, should be exclusively the study of "mysticism". One could argue that God is also immediately present in the mysteries, especially the Eucharist. Symeon made that claim (see *H* 7.30-42). One could also argue, as did Symeon (see *H* 25.5-14), that God is immediately present in the reading of Scripture. Therefore, the immediacy of God is *not* the exclusive purview of "mysticism" alone, but encompasses many facets of Christian life and practise.

[2] Hilarion Alfeyev, "The Patristic Heritage and Modernity," 104.

[3] Ibid. Parentheses are in the original.

and how does it operate? Is this type of reading methodologically problematic? If so, why? Why do scholars who read Symeon in such a manner fall into error? Should scholars reconsider, revise, or perhaps jettison this type of reading? It is to these questions that we now turn.

3.2.1: The Mysticist Misreading and its Problematics

At its basic level, a mysticist reading presupposes that Symeon is a "mystic" precisely because he experiences visions of light and perceives, what Maloney called, union with God "in his consciousness of being." For Maloney, Symeon is thus a "seer" of the "inner world of ultimate reality" who, in his union with God, experiences a growth of consciousness or "increased" consciousness.[4] Furthermore, because Symeon speaks of those experiences so often, his theology constitutes a prime example of "mysticism". I will argue below that the mysticist reading is reductionist because it reduces Symeon to the definition of what precisely "mystic" and "mysticism" is supposed to mean, and is methodologically problematic because it casts him as a representative type of "mystic" and his theology as a representative type of "mysticism" without providing any contextual basis or interpretive method for defining precisely what those terms purport to describe. Scholars who employ those terms in regard to Symeon, lack any objective criteria for assessing that claim. This is compounded by the problem that most scholars silently assume the reader knows exactly what those terms mean and therefore do not bother to define them.[5] This silent assumption stems from the fact that for the last two centuries, scholars have

[4] It has also been referred to as an "expanded state of consciousness"; see James Robertson Price, "Mystical Transformation of Consciousness in Symeon the New Theologian," *Diakonia* 19, no. 1–3 (85 1984): 13. Just what Price means by this is not at all clear in his paper. His descriptions of Symeon's mystical transformations of consciousness, because they lack any interpretive framework, read more like descriptions of the effects of psychedelic drugs.

[5] Among the major Symeon scholars, only Alfeyev and McInnes attempt to define those terms. Unfortunately, they were both relying on the definition of mysticism provided by Bernard McGinn, and, as we will see shortly below, there are some serious issues with McGinn's definition.

lamented the absence of a precise definition for those terms.[6] Let us therefore take a look at the problems of defining the terms "mystic" and "mysticism" and what this means for the study of Symeon's life and theology.

3.2.2: The Problem of Definition

Defining the terms "mystic" and "mysticism" is notoriously difficult. The most glaring admission of this situation comes from George Maloney. In *The Mystic of Fire and Light* he admits "that *mysticism* is one of the most misunderstood words in our human vocabulary."[7] For someone whose book has argued otherwise, this is a stunning disclosure, as it ultimately fails to provide an adequate mystical perspective that would help in appreciating Symeon's theological contributions. Maloney's words alone should compel us to question the rationale for labelling Symeon a "mystic" and his theology "mysticism" if even the descriptives themselves lack definitions.[8]

Even a scholar on the subject as eminent as Bernard McGinn, admits to the perils of defining mysticism. In the introduction to the first of his five-volume history of western Christian mysticism, McGinn is clear that he will not attempt to define mysticism: "Rather than trying to

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[6] Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, 2nd ed (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 202–3. For similar problems in defining those terms and applying them in a purely Orthodox context, see Bogdan Bucur, "From Jewish Apocalypticism to Orthodox Mysticism," in *The Orthodox Christian World*, ed. Augustine Casiday (New York: Routledge, 2012), 466–80.

[7] Maloney, *The Mystic of Fire and Light*, 178. Emphasis in original. Note the word "human". Not just English or Greek or Chinese…*all* of human vocabulary. Considering the situation, I don't think this is a case of hyperbole.

[8] If one is inclined to think that the thorny problem of defining "mystic" and "mysticism" is confined to theologians or scholars of religion, an interesting read would be that of Raymond Nelson's "Mysticism and the Problems of Mystical Literature," *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1976): 1–26. It is a valuable study of this same issue when it comes to assessing "mysticism" in such traditionally labelled poets as William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Walt Whitman, as well as in Hindu and Islamic poetry. Nelson is quite blunt. The opening sentence reads: "In both its philosophical and artistic reference, 'mysticism' is notoriously an abused term" (p. 1). Further below he writes: "Even in its spiritual application, mysticism is only vaguely defined, and in its vagueness lumped with whatever other concerns an individual may bring to it…rigidly pious laymen, and clerics who should know better, have frequently identified it with a dislike for ecclesiastical authority – as a kind of spiritual anarchy – and mystics, consequently, have a long record of trouble with their institutional superiors. Christian theologians have traditionally treated mysticism as the highest form of religious 'science' and have acted as if it were a universally accepted concept" (pgs. 1-2). It is interesting that Nelson uses the term "spiritual anarchy." It is eerily similar to Symeon being called a "mystical anarchist."

define mysticism (any simple definition of such a complex and controversial phenomenon seems utopian), I prefer to give a sense of how I understand the term…."[9] This is problematic for a few reasons. Firstly, the reader is not provided with a working definition of the subject. Instead, it is claimed that it would be foolhardy to do so. Secondly, it is stated that any attempt to define mysticism would seem "utopian"; that is – pure fantasy. Why this is utopian is not explained. It is therefore tacitly admitted that no definition for mysticism exists and it is fruitless to try to formulate one. In addition, is it candidly admitted that the whole endeavour is fraught with complexity and controversy. Lastly, instead of a definition, the reader is given the author's *sense* of how he understands the term. This suggests that perhaps the study of mysticism is less based on "facts", but is instead based on certain preconceived strategies of thought and interpretation, without sound methodological criteria for supporting such an assertion.

So, how does McGinn understand mysticism? He understands mysticism in the following manner: "Thus we can say that the mystical element in Christianity is that part of its beliefs and practices that concerns the preparations for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God."[10] He slightly modifies this in the introduction to *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* when he says that we should understand mysticism "as that part, or element, of Christian belief and practice that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the effect of what the mystics themselves have described as a direct and transformative presence of God."[11]

There are several problems with this understanding. Firstly, mysticism is taken to be an element or part of Christianity which can be studied apart from Christian doctrine as a whole.

[9] Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, vol. 1, The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism (New York: Herder & Herder, 1991), xv.
[10] Ibid., xvii.
[11] Bernard McGinn, ed., *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: The Modern Library, 2006), xiv.

Second, mysticism is described as a practice – as separate from what other Christian practices? It is also claimed that mystics prepare for and are conscious of an immediate and direct presence of God, without describing the means in which this presence is mediated. Is not God, for instance, immediately present in the liturgy and the sacraments? And if so, would that not mean that God is immediately present to those who participate in the liturgy and receive the holy mysteries? Or is the dividing line found between those who are conscious of this and those who are not? Moreover, what constitutes "consciousness"? Is it different from one's feelings? Is it gained through purification of the bodily senses or is consciousness the result of the workings of the spiritual senses? Is it related to what Symeon and many other Greek Fathers called consciousness of God in full "perception and knowledge" (αἴσθησις και γνῶσις)? Another problem is the "experience" itself. How many times does this consciousness of the immediate or direct presence of God have to be experienced (or felt) before one can be considered a "mystic"? Once? Twice? Ten or a hundred times? As a consequence, this understanding is vague and assigns certain attributes to "mystics"; such as them being a separate, elite group within Christianity itself, who operate according to their own set of practices and possess distinct spiritual states of consciousness which allow them to have direct, immediate access to the presence of God, without providing a reasoned methodology which would clarify the circumstances for why this is so.

Returning to the introduction to *The Foundations of Mysticism*, we are met with another curious statement: "No mystics (at least before the present century [the twentieth century]) believed in or practised 'mysticism.' They believed in and practised Christianity."[12] The first question one may be led to ask is that if mystics have never believed in or practised mysticism, how is it possible to write about the subject. Furthermore, it is doubtful if anyone "believes" in

[12] McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, 1: xvi. Square brackets are mine.

mysticism any more than they "believe" in Christianity. Both mysticism (if it exists) and Christianity are not systems of belief. But it seems mystics believe in and practise one thing (Christianity) and not the other (mysticism). Or is it meant that when we read "Christianity", that we should really be reading "mysticism"? Furthermore, why is the twentieth century taken as the benchmark? Is it being implied that "mysticism" is an invention of the twentieth century? And if so, invented by whom – the mystics themselves or scholars? And here is the crucial point. One gets the sense that what is being implied is that mysticism was invented by scholars in the 20th century, rather than by the "mystics" themselves, as they neither believed in nor practised it – which is in fact what is implied in the sources. What seems to be suggested is that mystics, even though they believed in and practised Christianity, in fact believed in and practised "mysticism" – it is just that they weren't aware of it – and as such, it is the goal of scholars to prove that they did. A fundamental problem lies precisely in the fact that the sources themselves do not warrant this reading.

This can be demonstrated from the fact that "mystic" and "mysticism', as substantive nouns, do not make their appearance (at least in the West) before the seventeenth century and thus, in principle at least, we cannot refer to a "mystic" or "mysticism" until then. As Michel de Certeau points out, where we say "mystics" today, an author of the sixteenth century (or before), would have said "contemplatives" or "spirituals".[13] Certeau also points out that the substantive noun "mysticism" seems to refer globally and somewhat vaguely to that which contains mystical elements. It should also be pointed out that so-called traditional "mystics", as well as Fathers and theologians in the West, never use this terminology prior to the seventeenth century, and even beyond. These terms are never found in the writings of St Augustine, Thomas a Kempis, St Bernard

[13] Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith, vol. 1 (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 94–95.

of Clairvaux, St Bonaventure, Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckart, John van Ruysbroeck, St Teresa of Avila or St John of the Cross, to name but a few. This raises important methodological and hermeneutical questions such as: is the use of these terms anachronistic? Is it a misreading of those texts? Are the meanings of these words severed from their original contexts? What are their original contexts? Is sufficient attention being paid to the context within which these texts were written? Are these texts being read and interpreted apart from the conditions which produced them? Are these texts being approached with premises unknown to the authors? If this is the case for Western Fathers, it would certainly be the case regarding Eastern Fathers as such terms have never been used by them at all.[14]

If the primary sources themselves do not justify such a reading; if the "mystics" themselves insist that they were only practising Christianity, what warrant is there to claim that they were doing otherwise? The assumption made by scholars is that the mystics were really mystics, despite the fact that they insisted upon the opposite. This leads to a situation wherein a false identity and ideological paradigm is foisted upon "mystics" by scholars who may be operating within quite subjective methodological frameworks and strategies of thought and interpretation without providing sound methodological criteria within which their claims can be assessed. These claims become accepted, promulgated, and recycled in the scholarship without any close scrutiny and,

[14] This same point about the recent appearance of the word "mysticism" and the problems inherent in its use, have also been highlighted by the editors of the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*. In their explanation of why they chose "Mystical Theology" and not "Mysticism" in the title of the book, they explain, "First of all *we note that 'mysticism' is itself a modern term and one that few of the figures discussed in this volume would have recognized.* It was coined in an era whose theory of the relationship between experience and interpretation has been interestingly problematized; *so it sometimes carries presuppositions that can work against a thoughtful development of the hermeneutics of mystical texts* (by tending to privilege an attempted reconstruction of putative mystical experiences 'behind' the text)"; see Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1. Italics are mine. Brackets in the original. The editors make a strong point and many of the essays in this volume reflect this. This is a promising sign as it seems that scholars are now admitting that the terms "mystic" and "mysticism" not only lack definitions, but their very use can be detrimental to the study of so-called mystical texts. As such, the editors argue that we should perhaps eschew them altogether and begin talking about "Mystical Theology" instead of some vague and undefined "Mysticism."

moreover, scholars then often hide behind the façade that they cannot define their subject anyway. This implies a manipulation of the sources, which is methodologically problematic and, I would argue, trivializes the genuine experiences of these men and women. If scholars claim that they are writing a "history", then they should be cautious in not eschewing a basic principle of historical investigation; which is to let the sources speak for themselves and then draw conclusions based upon the evidence they provide. In the end, it seems that scholars manipulate the sources to arrive at a preconceived sense of how they understand them, and then foist upon their sources terms and interpretations that run counter what the sources themselves say. This is a form of denialism as scholars deny that the claims made by their sources correspond to reality as they lived it.

3.2.3: The Problem of Method

There are serious problems with the definition of "mystic" and "mysticism". There is also a serious problem with method. Describing Symeon as a "mystic" because he experiences visions of light, or because he perceives union with God in his consciousness of being; calling Symeon a "seer" of the inner world of ultimate reality who, in his union with God, experiences a growth of consciousness or "increased" consciousness; or like McGinn, who describes a mystic as someone who experiences the immediate or direct presence of God or the direct and transformative presence of God, are what is called attribute-based characterizations. They are characterizations based on attributes and definitions which are already presupposed and predefined, but not explained. This is not to say that definitions are not important – we need to define things if we are to make sense of, or set parameters around what we are trying to explain. The problem with attribute-based definitions is they tell us nothing about the circumstances, or more precisely, the *context*, behind

those characterizations and definitions.[15] Definitions affect the way one thinks about things and how one approaches them. If the definitions themselves are problematic, then they can (and often do) lead to misinterpretation. In other words, telling us that Symeon is a mystic because he has visions, tells us nothing about him, nor does it explain the context in which these visions take place. What are the visions based on? What was the context? How did it happen? What was the cause? Furthermore, these definitions are based on presuppositions and predetermined readings of the sources which do not correspond to actual reality; thus, they lead to misinterpretation of those sources, which leads to false characterizations. On the whole, attribute-based characterization is restricted in terms of its explanatory potential. It is nothing more than a check-box approach to the subject. Does Symeon have visions? Check. Is he a seer of the inner world of ultimate reality? Check. Does he experience the immediate and direct presence of God? Check. The conclusion: Symeon = mystic.

Thus, in the study of Symeon and of mysticism in general, perhaps we should consider moving toward a more circumstance-based characterization. Circumstance-based characterization looks specifically at context. It has the potential of going deeper into the investigation of underlying causes and reasons. It thus has more explanatory potential than does attribute-based characterizations. So, for instance, Symeon has visons of light. It is not enough to say that this alone makes him a "mystic". What is the context? What are the circumstances behind the visions? When Symeon describes his visions, he often mentions repentance as well as the presence and guidance of his spiritual father (see *CD* 6 and *ED* 5). This suggests that perhaps repentance and

[15] The difference between attribute-based vs. circumstance-based characterizations has been explicitly made in innovation management scholarship. See Clayton M. Christensen, "The Ongoing Process of Building a Theory of Disruption," *The Journal of Product Innovation Management*, no. 23 (2006): 39–55 and Clayton M. Christensen and Paul R. Carlile, "Course Research: Using the Case Method to Build and Teach Management Theory," *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 8, no. 2 (June 2009): 240–51.

spiritual fatherhood be investigated in more depth because it may reveal the circumstances and context in which these visions took place. Symeon also claims that his visions often took place as a result of certain practices, like fasting, prayer, or the reading of Scripture – thus perhaps his manner of living should be investigated in more depth in order to see if there is a correlation between his existential context, i.e., the way he lived, and his visions. In the end, it may turn out that repentance, spiritual fatherhood, and his manner of life, provide the existential context and circumstances behind Symeon's visions. The problem with Maloney and McGinn's attribute-based characterizations and definitions is that they eschew such deeper contextual investigation. They have their list of predefined and presupposed characterizations of what a "mystic" is supposed to be, and they proceed to check off each one as they move down the list.

Thus, using attribute-based characterizations alone has limited and restricted explanatory potential. A circumstance-based approach is a much more thorough method, which can delve deeper into context and causal relations. Thus, in the study of Symeon's life and theology, particular attributes that do not take context into consideration, should perhaps be avoided.

3.2.4: The Origins of the Mysticist Misreading of Symeon

In the foregoing discussion, it has been shown how the search for a definition of mysticism is fraught with complexities – in fact, there is no definition (or at least none that scholars can agree on). There are also serious problems in method – that is, the characterization of Symeon as a "mystic" is based on attributes which are presupposed and predefined, instead of probing deeper into the circumstances or context of his supposed "mysticism". Where, then, does such a reading of Symeon originate and how can it be justified?

Hilarion Alfeyev provides a clue when he says that the interest in Symeon primarily as a mystic "might be explained partly by the Western influence on the modern scholarly approach to Symeon."[16] It is characteristic of this approach to regard the mystic as a rebel who undermines the established hierarchy and who places their subjective, individualistic experience over and above accepted authorities and doctrines.[17] As Alfeyev notes, "this view would correspond to medieval Western mysticism, which often became individualistic and enthusiastic," yet, in spite of this, "there is a tendency among scholars to transfer this understanding of mysticism to Symeon…"[18] This is not to say that we should disparage or undervalue the seminal contributions to Symeon scholarship made by Western scholars such as Holl, Hausherr, Darrouzès, and Johannes Koder, to name but a few; yet it should be kept in mind that they were operating in and were influenced by the Catholic debates of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.[19] Consequently, these scholars often tend to read back into Symeon their suppositions arising from the contexts of those debates without realizing that they have no place there. This places Symeon in a context which is not his own. Alfeyev says that the origins of the problem may be explained "partly" by the Western influence on the modern scholarship. Where can the other parts be found? The roots of the problem can be found in the understanding, or rather misunderstanding, of the word "mystical" (*mystikos*) and how it has been interpreted and applied in the West since the late medieval period.[20] Below I will briefly sketch an outline of the problem and how it applies to the subject of this thesis.

[16] Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 3.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Golitzin, *Life, Times, and Theology*, 51.
[20] For a thorough discussion of this, see the entire Afterward to the second edition of Louth's *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*. Another relevant work which expands upon this is Martin D. Henry's "How Christian Is Christian Mysticism?," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (March 1999): 29–54.

3.2.5: The Meaning of "mystical"

Louis Bouyer has argued that in the West, the current understanding of the "mystical" has altered radically from its initial origin and meaning in Greek, as well as how the Greek Fathers understood the word *mystikos*.[21] Our modern terms such as "mystic" and "mysticism" were foreign to the Greek Fathers, and even though they are derived from *mystikos*, they are invented terms arising out of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and augmented by the nineteenth century's predilection for classifying religious "experience".[22] Bouyer's intent was to show, in contrast to Protestant accusations, that the concept of the "mystical" in Christianity was not a pagan import (though its initial origin and meaning lie there), but was, once it entered into Christian parlance, infused with meanings which were intimately tied to biblical exegesis, the Church's sacraments and liturgy, and the personal participation of each baptized believer in the life of Christ. The Greek Fathers also tied *mystikos* to the Incarnation and Christology – Christ is the *mystery* which is both hidden and revealed in the Scriptures, in the Church's *mysteria* and liturgical worship, and in the personal life of each baptized Christian. The Greek Fathers understood the term *mystikos* in those three senses.[23] Yet the conclusions of Bouyer's paper have implications for our subject which stretch far beyond his immediate context. If this is the case, then not only is the Greek Father's

[21] See Louis Bouyer, "'Mysticism': An Essay on the History of a Word," in *Mystery and Mysticism*, ed. Albert Ple (London: Blackfriars Publications, 1956), 119–37. See also Bouyer's chapter on Dionysius and *mystikos* in Louis Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, vol. 1, A History of Christian Spirituality (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), pgs. 395-421 .

[22] For a detailed explanation of this process, see the third chapter of Michel de Certeau's, *The Mystic Fable. Vol. 1*. A good example of the classifying of religious experience can be found in William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

[23] It should be noted here that in the mind of the Greek Fathers, the third sense – the personal – was intimately linked to and dependent upon the others and was never detached from them. Regrettably, that is precisely what Bouyer argued happened in the West. As a result of theological developments in the West over the course of the Middle Ages, the personal sense was severed from the biblical and sacramental and became individualized and subjective. For the Greek Fathers the 'mystical' is *never* individualistic or subjective. It is personal and communal and grounded in the objective reality of the Incarnation and experienced in the Church's sacraments. For a more detailed exposition see the Afterword to Louth's second edition of *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* as well as de Certeau's *The Mystic Fable*, chapter three.

(which includes Symeon's) understanding of the "mystical" much deeper and more nuanced than is articulated today; it is also radically different. As Louth points out, the words "mystic" and "mysticism" are not only foreign to Greek patristic literature, they also have a history which is often unknown to those who employ them.[24] Furthermore, if the *mystikos* of the Greek Fathers is Christ himself, both hidden and revealed in the Scriptures, the liturgy and the sacraments, and in the life of the baptized Christian, which is "hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3), then

> …it is very different from what we call mysticism nowadays: it does not refer to some elite group, or elite practise, within Christianity, it simply refers to the lived reality of Christianity itself. It is not something separate from the institutions of Christianity: it is the meaning that these institutions enshrine. It is not something distinct from the dogmas of Christianity, for the 'mystical' meaning of Scripture, in this sense, is often enough precisely such dogmas, which are the hidden meaning of the Scriptures.[25]

This is a far cry from the "mystic" as being some sort of rebellious upstart and "mysticism" as some sort of individualistic, subjective experience opposed to established church authority and dogmas. The problem with the modern understanding of these words, and of the ignorance (willful or not) of many scholars as to the history and meaning of *mystikos*, has led to the situation where their use goes unchallenged; they are not only endorsed, but baptized into the scholarship.[26] The result is a reading back into the past of ideas that have no place there. This should be a prompt to recognize the need to retrace the history of *mystikos* and its rich patristic application.

[24] Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 203.
[25] Ibid., 205.
[26] Ibid., 205-206.

3.2.6: Nikolaos Loudovikos' anti-spiritual shift toward repentance in Symeon as an expression of an eschatological ontology of human becoming in communion

Recently, Nikolaos Loudovikos has made a strong case against this reading of Symeon as a "mystic". As the title of Loudovikos' book suggests, he believes that we need to re-evaluate what is meant by "mysticism" and "spirituality", and that Symeon's insistence upon repentance can help us. Loudovikos argues that what is meant by "mysticism" nowadays assumes that the mystic's union with God is often construed as the fruit of one's "individual conscience which manages to possess God at the limits of its representational power" and thus becomes "a personal triumph of a super-believer who expands his personal nature [like an 'expansion of consciousness'] by adding to it the glory of possession of God."[27] This results in "a one-sided view of the activity and will of the person, which conspires against the psychosomatic reality of our nature, urging people towards an idealistic self-transcendence of their Being, rather than an entire transformation."[28] Another result of this kind of reading is that "an obsessive 'spirituality' is produced" which is "self-centred if not actually neurotic."[29] Loudovikos, however, argues that for Symeon, quite the opposite is the case. For Symeon, "the vision of God results from self-emptying, participatory initiation, in Christ, and through the Mysteries…into this mystery of Being as becoming in communion."[30] The vision of God in light thus results from self-emptying humility and repentance. Repentance guards against "mystical" subjectivism and what Loudovikos calls an Origenistic/Augustinian reading of Symeon which is a real temptation and often dominates our reading of him.[31] What Loudovikos means by "Origenistic/Augustinian" is a Platonic reading of Symeon which produces a profound difficulty

[27] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 101. Square brackets are mine. This is exactly how Maloney frames his understanding of Symeon: "Symeon, as a mystic, conceives the Christian life as a growth process in expanded consciousness, both in this life and in the life to come…"; see *The Mystic of Fire and Light*, 12.
[28] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 102.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

in the understanding of the crucial role of the body and also of the natural will, which affects people's freedom.[32]

For Loudovikos, the problem with our contemporary notion of "spirituality", is that it is a veiled form of Platonism, which retains its Origenistic remnants "coupled with Augustinian mysticism of ecstatic domination by the 'spiritual' over what is not 'spiritual'."[33] This type of spirituality is a subjective representational will-to-power and moreover, it has become the only one we have because "it has, up to a point, absorbed every other possible form."[34] Loudovikos argues that we often read Symeon's theology in such a manner; and doing so, is not only misleading, but presents us with some serious consequences.

One of those consequences concerns eschatology.[35] In this type of spirituality, creation becomes de-spiritualized which leads to a de-ontologization of the material and the historical; that is, material creation and history itself become separated and are no longer spiritual nor do they form part of our being. When this happens, "eschatology in fact collapses, because the completeness and the unity of created nature has been destroyed, with the lower part being effectively identified with the Platonic *matter*."[36] What we end up with is an eschatology which has become "symbolic," or what Loudovikos calls "an intellectual theory of principles," based

[32] Loudovikos' terminology is sometimes difficult to decipher; but he refers to the fact that both Origen and Augustine were very much influenced by Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought, especially in regards to what constitutes the image of God in man. Both disregard or downplay the importance of man's psychosomatic nature and place the image of God in man exclusively in the soul. As a result, the body is seen as something which needs to be discarded or transcended, and thus contemplation is a pure intellectual exercise. This type of "spirituality" or "mysticism" is thus disembodied, de-materialized, and fundamentally disincarnated because it lacks a healthy anthropology. Loudovikos calls this "spiritism" and argues that this has ever been a temptation for both East and West. In regards to reading Symeon in particular, this is a temptation that scholars often succumb to, with what he calls pernicious anthropological consequences. Those anthropological consequences, which involve ancient Greek and Biblical problematics, were discussed in chapter two above. Further anthropological consequences will be explored in more detail in chapter six below.

[33] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 99.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Loudovikos also notes that another consequence is anthropological, which will be discussed in chapter six.

[36] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 99. Italics in original.

upon the Platonic theory of remaining, procession, and return "to the bosom of the absolute spirit, away from which creation has, unfortunately, fallen."[37] History is nothing more than a falling away from divine perfection precisely because it encompasses matter, which is the lowest in the series of processions, and from which we must escape if the soul is to regain her divine form. This poses problems because Symeon's understanding of human perfection – which is our consubstantiality in Christ and grounded in repentance – is eschatologically oriented. In his first *Ethical Discourse*, Symeon admonishes us to "Make haste…by the grace of repentance and tears and humility, and by the fulfillment of the commandments…so that you may enjoy both the present and future good things in a state of revelation, of perception and of vision…" (*ED* 1.12; 1:80).[38] Through grace we become heavenly and divine, which begins in this life and will be perfected in the age to come when we will reign with Christ.[39] We will reign with Christ in immortal and incorrupt souls *and* bodies. If our unity with created, material nature is compromised; then our unity and consubstantiality with Christ is also compromised. If eschatology collapses and becomes symbolic or "an intellectual theory of principles," we are in big trouble because it negates the psychosomatic dimension of our deification and eschatological completeness in Christ; which means we are not only unlike him, but are also unable to reign with him. How can we overcome this problem? Is there a corrective to this? Loudovikos does indeed find a corrective to this de-materialized spirituality in Symeon's theology of repentance. In what follows, I will examine Loudovikos'

[37] Ibid.

[38] See also *ED* 2.7; 1:115, where Symeon says: "So, putting aside every other concern, let us attend so far as we are able to repentance, so that we may attain to the present and future good things, by the grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ…." In his tenth *Ethical Discourse* (devoted to the theme of eschatology) Symeon tells us that those who "give evidence of a worthy repentance," do not have to fear the future judgement because "such a man…has already been judged" (*ED* 10; 1:145-46). Thus, repentance both judges a man and ushers in the future age in this life. The Day of Judgement is now and we have nothing to fear, for our repentance has purified and illumined us. Thus, the reign of Christ has already begun and we are already reigning with him. This profound eschatological statement deserves a fuller treatment which is impossible here. It has, to my knowledge, never been fleshed out in the scholarship.

[39] For a good passage illustrating our reign with Christ, which begins now and continues into the age to come, see *ED* 3; 1:137-39.

complex argument.[40] We will also see what Symeon himself says. Along the way, we will also note some of the consequences regarding "spirituality" and "mysticism".

The second chapter of the second part of Loudovikos' *Analogical Identities* is a study of Symeon which contains some penetrating and original insights into his theology.[41] For our discussion here, the most important part of this chapter is section three (pgs. 99-107). Communion with God completes our being. Being, it is explained, is interpersonal. It is a relationship between two free beings in love (that is why for Symeon the vision and experience of God is an interpersonal communion and communication with a person – Christ – and not a thing). It is brought about by our free will which is located in the heart. This communion is a familiarity of being, which means that in communion or unity, the two free beings recognize each other in themselves and complete each other, or at least the human finds his completeness in Christ, who needs no completion as he is already perfectly complete. As Loudovikos points out, for Symeon,

[40] In doing so, we will encounter a number of terms which Loudovikos uses, and which I believe, can be used interchangeably. Loudovikos uses such terms as "familiarity of being", "co-being in Christ", "being as becoming in communion", which, if I am reading Loudovikos correctly, all pretty much mean "consubstantiality". Regarding eschatology, Loudovikos also uses terms such as "eschatology of repentance" and "eschatology of consubstantiality", which I take him to mean that our consubstantiality is eschatologically oriented or that repentance opens up for us the mysteries of the eschaton. Loudovikos' argument can be quite complex and I realize that in so short a space, I cannot and probably have not given it due justice. My only critique of Loudovikos is that he often does not define the terms he uses. Take "consubstantiality" for instance. At first glance, one could assume that Loudovikos means that we become consubstantial to Christ in his essence, which is not possible. He does not define what he means by this term. The meaning of "consubstantiality" only becomes clear after multiple readings and strenuous effort to untangle the threads of his argument. About a year and a half ago, I was fortunate to attend an on-line book launch for *Analogical Identities*, and I took the opportunity to ask him to explain what he means by "consubstantiality". He confirmed that what he meant by it was that we become consubstantial to Christ in his humanity, through the incarnation, and we become consubstantial to Christ in his divinity, through the workings of grace. See Appendix 2 for a further explanation of consubstantiality.

[41] As we have already noted in the literature review and in the second chapter of this thesis, Loudovikos begins by pointing out the significance of iconoclasm and its defeat as the historical and theological context within which Symeon's theology is formed. Loudovikos points out that the defeat of iconoclasm allowed the Byzantines to fully develop a Hellenistic humanism whose predominating feature was the search for the individual and his ontological bearings. It is next pointed out that communion with God is worked out in the ontological freedom of the will (whose locus is the heart) which is grounded in the grace of baptism. The submission of the free will to Christ in love, represents a new mode of being and embraces the unity of all things in. Communion with God in love (the act of free will located in the heart) represents the completeness of the human being and it is fundamentally eschatological.

the term which represents this interpersonal familiarity of being is repentance.[42] Repentance represents the most extreme form of humility in the face of the divine mystery of being. Repentance is the perfection of our love toward God. It completes the mutual love between us and God and constitutes our very truth of being. Repentance is a loving "enslavement" to the divine will and ushers in contemplative familiarity with God. The Christian, in tearful self-emptying through repentance, comes into a volitional and personal communion and union with Christ. It is not forced. It is volitional in that it is an act of the free will, which is the ground of being. This personal and volitional communion brings us into "universal contemplation of the work of the Trinity in the world,"[43] that is, it is ultimately eschatological because it reveals the ultimate *telos* of our existence (deification and participation in the divine nature through grace). Repentance recalls us to our being which enables us to see the work of the Trinity in the world, which is the mystery of consubstantiality of which Christ himself is the mystery and foundation and author of this unity.[44] All this is to say that repentance ushers in the vision of Christ in light, which is the result of our freely submitting our will to his commandments in love (Jn. 14:21).[45] The vision of Christ unites us to his being, in which we partake of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) which completes our being in an eschatological understanding. Being is becoming in communion.[46] In other words, Being is deification and Christ is the mystery and foundation and author of this deification.

Thus, "the vision of God results from self-emptying [through repentance], participatory initiation, in Christ, and through the Mysteries…into this mystery of Being as becoming in

[42] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities,* 100.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 100-101.
[45] See *CD* 6.8. This will be shown more clearly in chapter five.
[46] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 101.

communion" – which is what Symeon himself said.[47] It is also a guard against mystical subjectivism, which assumes that the mystic's union with God is the fruit of one's "individual conscience which manages to possess God at the limits of its representational power" and thus becomes "a personal triumph of a super-believer who expands his personal nature [like an 'expansion of consciousness'] by adding to it the glory of possession of God."[48] A cursory or shallow reading of Symeon might suggest that. Yet, such a reading and interpretation of Symeon is a distortion and presents very real dangers. From an eschatological point of view, the problem is that this interpretation of Symeon's theology "is deprived of this eschatological, Eucharistic ontology of the Being as becoming in communion, and the love of God is itself downgraded, as is the concomitant repentance, and what remains is a supernatural feat of the conscience, a therapeutic progression into a series of stages (purification-enlightenment-deification) which is supposed to lead to direct vision of God."[49] The problem with this "therapeutic" approach to the vision of God, is that if it is taken as the sole criteria, it "risks being the height of selfishness rather than the acquisition of selflessness unless it is profoundly linked to ecclesiology," which is why, it is so crucial to recognize the fundamental importance of Symeon's introduction of repentance into ontology.[50] The vision of God is the result of "self-emptying, of self-humbling, of repentance itself" which initiates us into "the self-emptying way of living of Christ Himself, which, through the cross and sacrifice constitutes the 'God-manhood', as body of the Church."[51] If this is absent,

[47] Ibid. Square brackets are mine. In *CD* 28.5, Symeon says: "For penitence is the gateway that leads out of darkness into light. He who does enter into the light has not properly gone through the gate of repentance; for had he done so, he would have been in the light."
[48] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 101. Square brackets are mine.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid. The fundamental theological contribution of Maximos the Confessor was his introduction of the will into ontology. Symeon built upon Maximos' teaching on the will by further adding repentance into the equation. Thus, it is the *repentant* will which assumes importance for Symeon. This is what I take Loudovikos to mean when he says that Symeon introduced repentance into ontology. We will look more closely at the connection between Maximos and Symeon in chapter six.
[51] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 101-102.

"any (merely 'therapeutic') vision of God could be the will to power in disguise, it could be an idealistic negation of the corporal and the historical" which negates the eschatological aspect and leads to a "peculiar kind of monophysitism."[52] Repentance thus injects a healthy and much needed dose of humility in that it opens us up to the full psychosomatic dimension of our nature, which ensures the legitimacy of the vision of God "since it is a continuous initiation, in humility, into the Church's way of Being-in-unity and is not pious narcissism."[53] Repentance also involves the "material-spiritual totality of our nature (with action and contemplation) in communion with God."[54] Repentance can help us avoid any form of spiritual monophysitism because it gives due importance to both body and soul.

Repentance in love also opens us up "to the co-Being in Christ" in whom we live, move and have our being (cf. Acts 17:28).[55] Repentance also realizes our eschatological selves, in union with Christ and the Church because repentance opens us up to the mystery of the cross, wherein the vision of God is not a "cognitive term of my conscience, and not of course as a narcissistic social foothold of my Ego."[56] In other words, I am not my own self-referent because I have totally emptied myself in loving, humble, and repentant obedience to the commandments of Christ. It is therefore not my ego who lives, but Christ who lives in me because I have opened myself up, through repentance, to the mystery of the cross of Christ and I have been crucified with Christ (cf. Gal. 2:20). Yet we will also rise with Christ when he returns again; and that is why our hope, grounded in repentance, is eschatologically oriented.

[52] Ibid., 102. This monophysitism results from assigning importance to what is spiritual (the soul) over what is not spiritual (i.e., matter or the material body). This results in the negation of the role of the body in the spiritual life in favour of intellectual contemplation. Thus, we have a "spirituality" of the head, but not of the body.
[53] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 102.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., 110.
[56] Ibid., 105.

A key observation by Loudovikos is that our consubstantiality with Christ is "analogical to the divine consubstantiality."[57] What does he mean by this? It is crucial that we understand what is meant by "analogical" because it tells us something about the nature of our relationship to Christ. Strictly speaking, when one makes an analogy, one posits that there is a likeness in one or more ways between things that are otherwise unlike. We are unlike God in many ways, but fundamentally our unlikeness rests upon the fact that we are created and he is uncreated. Therefore, it is impossible to assume his uncreated nature, or to become God. Yet how can that be reconciled with Scripture when, for instance, the Psalms tell us that "ye are gods, sons of the Most High…" (Ps. 82:6)[58] or that human beings are able to partake of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4)? How can it also be reconciled to that fact Symeon (and the entire Patristic tradition) insists that this is possible, and which is a crucial component of Symeon's theology?

It can be reconciled through repentance and the workings of grace. Loudovikos notes that repentance is a motion "towards the analogical consubstantiality" which does not require that "we destroy the subject or his relationships."[59] Moreover, it is through repentance that the "nature and reality of the subject…are saved eschatologically and completed (since they open up as a complete whole in the Spirit, to the grace of the realization of an analogical consubstantiality, in the image of God, within the context of the created)."[60] What does this all mean? It simply means that when we become consubstantial with Christ, which is opened up to us through repentance, grace ensures that we become like he is, but our personhood is not destroyed, nor is our relationship to Christ. Our personhood would be obliterated if we were to actually become like the uncreated God. Thus, we are analogically like Christ: that is, there has now become a likeness in one or more ways

[57] Ibid., 104. For an explanation of what is meant by "consubstantiality" with Christ, see Appendix 2.
[58] Christ repeats this verse in John 10:34.
[59] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 104.
[60] Ibid.

between things that are otherwise unlike. Thus, our identity as a created being, within the context of created reality, becomes like that of Christ, both in his humanity and his divinity (but in the divinity through grace). We have now come full circle in that this analogical consubstantiality, this analogical identity, is made possible only through the incarnation and is opened up to us through repentance and the workings of grace. Finally, repentance is a motion towards our eschatological salvation and completion – our perfection in Christ – which is fully realized in the age to come. It begins in this life, but is completed in the next. This is a bold and profound theological statement. It should cause us to tremble because the theological and dogmatic truth of the divine nature of Christ, which is proclaimed by the Nicene Creed, that Christ is ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρί, has now, through continual repentance and grace, become true of us. We now possess a likeness to something that we were otherwise unlike – there is an analogical identity between created human nature and the uncreated divine nature.

Loudovikos sums it up thus: "Relationship/repentance leads, as vision of God, to judgement/knowledge of the individual, with the aim of even deeper repentance/relationship, i.e. deeper vision of God. Because the sight of God leads to an even deeper desire for a vision of Him, and this is expressed as an even deeper desire for repentance."[61] Loudovikos sees a crucial pastoral service in Symeon's theology in its "deep appeal for the Christification of all," which "has as its foundation the experience of the vision of God, i.e. his repentance as a free, personal volitional and emptying initiation into the eschatological ontology of becoming in communion."[62] Repentance is an act of our free will, grounded in the heart, and motivated by our love for Christ. This love compels us to humble, repentant self-emptying, where we enter into the self-emptying life and love of Christ. This relationship completes our being as it unites us to the eschatological

[61] Ibid., 106.
[62] Ibid.

life of the church and its sacraments. It is truly a being in communion in the fullest sense. Repentance for Symeon, explains Loudovikos, is fundamentally linked to our very ontology, for without it the vision and experience of God is not possible; and if we cannot be united to Christ then we, in our very Being, are incomplete. To be united to Christ through the repentant humility of self-emptying is to also be united to his body, the Church, which is eschatological and sacramental. Union with Christ is not a subjective possession of God. To be united to Christ is to become consubstantial with him in his humanity, and by grace to his divinity, as well as to be united to the Church. Any "mystical union" in which this is absent, is no mystical union but a subjective, narcissistic will to power that has no referent beyond itself. The vision and experience of God thus becomes an end which points to its beginning – the subjective ego – which is ultimately self-negating because it does not initiate the person into a communal, eschatological ecclesiology which is being experienced now and will be fully realized in the age to come.

Concerning the importance of repentance in Symeon's theology, Loudovikos' observations should be carefully considered as they suggest that there is an integrative potential in a focus on repentance. Loudovikos has shown, and it has been seen from Symeon's own writings, that repentance is profoundly eschatological. It opens up the possibility for the eschatological completeness of our being in Christ; or what Loudovikos calls our co-being in Christ. This co-being in Christ is what it means to become consubstantial with him. There exists an analogical identity between created human nature and the uncreated divine nature – in that human nature now bears a likeness to something that it did not before. This is opened up by repentance and made possible through grace and the workings of the Holy Spirit. In Symeon's theology, repentance ensures the eschatological hope of our salvation, which is that our resurrected bodies and souls will be united to Christ the bridegroom; and in this union our souls and bodies will shine with

Christ's own glory and we will live and reign with him in the age to come. Yet, as Symeon never tires of repeating; our bodies and souls begin to shine now, in this life. We must keep this light kindled through repentance, so that "we ourselves shine brightly and meet the Bridegroom at the resurrection of His brightness and enter with Him into the kingdom of heaven and enjoy eternal benefits" (*CD* 4.16).

Repentance also helps us to avoid spiritual monophysitism because it ensures the psychosomatic totality of our nature, both body and soul, and does not favour what is spiritual over what is not spiritual. This is why Loudovikos insists upon moving beyond the language and categories of "mysticism" and "spirituality", because what is currently understood by these categories, is nothing other than a will to power of the ego disguised as "illuminations" and "theories", because the mystic has totally avoided "the all-embracing responsibility of repentance."[63] That we must move beyond such categories, is especially so in Symeon's case, because neither the category of "spirituality" nor that of "mysticism" are adequate enough to explain just what Symeon and the Fathers meant by the vision and experience of God. If Symeon is read through these categories, there is nothing that can be offered by way of proof that Symeon's experience of God was not the result of a subjective, narcissistic will to power, motivated by a devout, but poorly understood piety. How then can it be ensured that Symeon's luminous visions were authentic and not some ego projection? Anyone who interprets Symeon through such categories has to prove this is not the case because, as I argued above, such a reading of Symeon is reductionist and lacks any qualitative interpretive method; so, it cannot act as a safeguard against this. Therefore, these categories, as well as the language of scholars who interpret Symeon through

[63] Ibid., 125.

them, should be treated with caution, as they cannot offer any compelling reason why it should not be thought that Symeon was himself a victim of this subjectivist "mysticism".[64]

For Symeon, repentance thus becomes the ontological safety-valve against narcissistic projections of the ego. It provides a measure through which we can authenticate the luminous vision. Repentance, as part of being, provides the starting point of our relationship to Christ. Any "mystical" vision of Christ which is devoid of repentance could become an act of self-authenticating will-to-power, grounded in a narcissistic piety which views the subjective ego as the referent and starting point for the vision. This is pride. And Symeon was explicit that Christ never reveals himself to the proud (*H* 21.54-64). Repentance leads to self-emptying humility which demonstrates our love for Christ and our desire for a relationship with him. We show our love for Christ by keeping his commandments, which for monastics began and ended with repentance. When we do this, Christ reciprocates this love, manifests himself to us (cf. Jn. 14:21;23) and we thus enter into a unity and familiarity of being with him and the Father. This unity is enacted through the luminous vision which deifies and completes our being. It also initiates us into the mystery of the cross, the Church, and its sacraments, which point to an eschatological telos which has already begun in this life but which will be completed in the age to come. Any "mysticism" or

[64] In such a reading, Symeon's visions of light are totally detached from any kind of referent; they are detached from any context – historical or theological. The context for the vision becomes the subjective ego of Symeon himself, which is somehow supernaturally endowed with the ability to purely contemplate and unite itself to God. Symeon becomes his own self-referent and his experience of God is the culmination of the stages of "therapeutic" purification, without any explanation of how or why this purification is possible or even needed. The mystic is an esoteric figure whose visions lack any ecclesial or sacramental basis because they are the projections of a hyper-sensitive ego consciousness which, in its narcissistic piety, only needs its subjective self as referent. Such a reading of Symeon is what has predominated in the scholarship. It is little wonder that Symeon's place in Orthodox theology is nothing if not ambiguous. If he is read in this way, he becomes nothing more than another of those specially gifted "mystics", or some kind of outlier who enjoys a heightened state of "consciousness" beyond anything us mere mortals can hope to enjoy. His experiences of Christ in light become their own mystical referent and are completely detached from any context nor do they possess any value beyond the experience itself. Such a reading tells us nothing about Symeon as monk and abbot; it tells us nothing about his time and place; it tells us nothing of his theological context and debt to the patristic heritage; it tells us nothing about his influence on his contemporaries and successors; and it tells us nothing about his significance for us today. Everything we need to know about Symeon gets subsumed into the mystical vision. It purports to explain everything and elucidates nothing.

claim to a "mystical" experience of God which does not have this as its fundamental basis, is the result of satanic pride and delusion.[65]

3.2.7: Conclusion

This section has shown that Alfeyev's charge that those scholars who "try to oppose a formal and rationalized 'tradition' (held by the majority in the church) to an inspired 'mysticism' (of individual enthusiasts) fall into error, not understanding the very essence of Tradition," is quite justified. Moreover, regarding Symeon's life and theology, the terms "mystic" and "mysticism", as well as the mysticist reading itself, are methodologically problematic, and need to be re-evaluated, if not jettisoned altogether. This reading simply cannot lead to a deeper understanding of and appreciation for Symeon's life and theology precisely because it does not possess the hermeneutical tools which allow it to do so. This reading rests upon undefined terms which reveal nothing about Symeon's life and theology. It has also been seen that Loudovikos has warned us that it is a dangerous temptation which fosters a distorted and unhealthy view of the spiritual life because it posits a dichotomy between the material body and the soul as well as negates our eschatological completeness in Christ. This reading also ignores Symeon's historical, social, and theological context, preferring instead to read him with unwarranted presuppositions and according to terms that have not been properly defined. If so, how can those terms be employed as

[65] At this point, I should make it clear that I am not challenging the concept or the reality of mystical theology (nor does Loudovikos, for that matter). Mystical theology does indeed exist, even though it might be understood (or misunderstood) differently in the Christian East and West. It should be clear by this point that what I am challenging and calling into question is what is understood by "mystic" and "mysticism" today, particularly in how scholars understand them in their reading and interpretation of Symeon, as well as the consequences this has had, not only for the study of his life and theology, but for our understanding of spirituality and mystical theology in general. For it is clear that what we understand by "mystic" and "mysticism" today is tainted with Platonic spiritism, and has nothing at all to do with the Patristic roots of these terms. This has had disastrous consequences – for our understanding of "mystic" and "mysticism" is so far removed from the original meaning of *mystikos* as to render the terms almost vacuous and equivocal.

valid hermeneutical tools through which to read Symeon? What is the rationale for doing so? Why do scholars stubbornly insist on labelling Symeon a "mystic" and his theology "mysticism" when Symeon himself would not have understood those words. The result is that his works are not only severed from the conditions which produced them, but also approached with premises unknown to him. As was stated above in our fourth methodological principle, such an approach does injustice to both the author and his texts, and inevitably leads to misinterpretation. It can therefore be concluded that it is not sufficient to say, as most scholars have done, that Symeon was a "mystic" because he experienced visions of light and that's simply all that matters. Yet, it is scarcely believable how many scholars have adopted this view and have studied Symeon's theology apart from its context, which has played no small part in the continuing fragmentation of Symeon's image and his ambiguous place in Orthodox theology. If this is indeed the case, is there another, more useful, integrative hermeneutical approach within which to read and interpret Symeon's life and theology? And if so, what does it look like and can we employ specific terminology to describe it?

3.3: Defining and Tracing Continual Repentance in Orthodox Theology

As the literature review suggests, in the last three decades, repentance has come to be seen by scholars of Symeon as the defining characteristic of his theology. Scholars such as McGuckin, Hunt, and more recently, Loudovikos, have suggested that the theology of repentance is a more fruitful, integrative hermeneutical lens within which to read and interpret Symeon's life and theology. By a "theology of repentance" we should understand theology to mean experiential theology, or a theology of the direct experience of God. Theology is not to be understood in its academic sense of employing rational arguments or proofs or constructing elaborate categories.

Repentance should be understood as not referring to the act of sacramental confession nor its subsequent penances, which in Orthodox theology are seen as a medicine or an aid in the healing of the soul. Rather repentance, as will be seen in a recent work of Alexis Torrance, is defined as a state of being or existence – a continual and life-long ascesis which never ceases until death. Thus, repentance is the existential framework within which the Christian life is lived. This is in accordance with the Gospel message. [66] This was how it was understood by Eastern monastics and this is the framework within which Symeon's life as a monk was lived and within which he theologized. This understanding of repentance has remained, in the Orthodox monastic world, unchanged to this day.[67]

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[66] Repentance is a key term in the Gospels. The preaching of John the Forerunner begins with repentance (Mt. 3:2; cf. Mk. 1:4 & Lk. 3:3) as does the ministry of Christ (Mt. 4:17; cf. Mk. 1:15) – "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In Luke's version of the "great commission" Christ commands his apostles to preach the gospel of "repentance and the forgiveness of sins" to all nations (Lk. 24:47). The apostle Peter does exactly this on the day of Pentecost when he tells the crowd to "Repent and be baptized…" (Acts 2:38). Thus, the Christian life is framed by repentance. It should be noted that in Mt. 3:2 and 4:7, the word "repent" (μετανοεῖτε) is in the present active imperative, which, generally speaking, is reserved for general or repeatable instructions. This includes commands that should be practised as a way of life. In fact, those verses would better be translated as "*Keep repenting,* for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." So, from the very beginning, repentance was not considered to be a one-time action, but rather a life-long task, a lifestyle, a vocation. Nowhere is this injunction practised more literally and with more fervour than by monastics. The monks took this call to continual repentance seriously and made it the foundation of the monastic life. They also understood it to be a command not limited to their vocation alone, but one that was imperative for all baptised Christians – it was the framework of the Christian life. Indeed, Symeon himself interprets Mt. 3:2 exactly in this manner. In his third *Theological Chapter* (3.46) he states "…it is a good thing to repent each day as the commandment instructs us: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven draws near'. This imposes upon us a duty without limit." Thus, the command to repent continually was not something invented by monastics. It is not a distortion of the Gospel. The monks did not live and preach something that was foreign to tradition. On the contrary, this call to continual, life-long repentance is embedded in the Gospel itself.

[67] Examples of this are legion, so only a few will be cited here. The biographer of Saint Paisios notes that the saint "considered contrition and repentance to be a monk's chief work," and that we should not ask God for visions of light or spiritual gifts, but only for repentance. Moreover, never-ending repentance was the core of Saint Paisios' teaching, which stressed that monks are dressed in repentance and their entire life is one of repentance; see Hieromonk Isaac, *Saint Paisios of Mount Athos*, trans. Hieromonk Alexis and Peter Heers (Chalkidiki, Greece: Holy Monastery "Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian," 2016), 376, 378, 381–82. In his study of Athonite Fathers, Saint Paisios himself notes that wherever a monk resides, is referred to as his "place of repentance," and in the case of Hieromonk Anthimos (f. 19th century) "He made the whole of Athos his place of repentance…"; see Saint Paisios of Mount Athos, *Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters* (Souroti, Thessaloniki, Greece: Holy Hesychasterion "Evangelist John the Theologian," 1999), 73, 90, 96, 139. Athos as a place of repentance is also highlighted by Archimandrite George Kapsanis: "Athos is indeed a place of repentance." Repentance is also not only for monks, but "it comprises the foundation of the whole Christian life." Regarding monks in particular, Archimandrite Kapsanis notes that "The whole life of the monk becomes a study of repentance, his way of life a way of repentance"; see Geōrgios Kapsanēs, *The Eros of Repentance: Four Homilies on the Theological Basis of Athonite Monasticism*, Second and Revised Edition (Mount Athos, 2016), 15, 18, 35.

3.3.1: Defining Continual Repentance

If the roots of repentance as a way of life can be found in Scripture, can they also be found in the Orthodox tradition more broadly; and more specifically in the continuum of experience in the monastic-ascetic tradition? And if so, did it influence Symeon? And what exactly is meant by "existential" or continual repentance, and can we trace it in the texts prior to Symeon? Alexis Torrance has provided some useful terminology for assessing repentance, specifically in Eastern monastic-ascetic theology: 1) initial repentance (which is applied to the beginning of the Christian life and leads to baptism); 2) existential or continual repentance (which is a state of being "achieved through the practise of virtue and the keeping of Christ's commandments"); and 3) Christ-like repentance (which is likened to the experienced Christian's repentance for others and the world in imitation of Christ's "vicarious repentance" on the cross).[68] The essential thesis of Torrance's book is that the theology of repentance provides, especially for monastics, the existential framework for living out the Christian life. His terminology or threefold framework for assessing repentance "provides an effective tool for appreciating the varied approaches to both repentance and Christian self-identity more broadly in Eastern Christian ascetic literature."[69] Torrance's framework is a valuable guide for interpreting how ascetics saw themselves and their vocation which was one "of growing in likeness to Christ, which was always to be cultivated through the art of repentance."[70] Torrance's book applied this framework in the examination of the writings of Mark the Monk, Barsanuphius and John, and John Klimakos. He also points out that a further challenge and research implication for this is that it has yet to be applied not only to ascetic texts beyond the seventh century, but to what have traditionally been labelled "mystical" texts. Torrance states that

[68] Torrance, *Repentance in Late Antiquity*, 2.
[69] Ibid., 179.
[70] Ibid., 180.

the texts he has studied do seem to have a "mystical" bent, although often not considered strictly as such.[71] He argues that, if we are to understand so-called mystical texts, "they should be approached from the perspective of repentance," and that his framework seems to fit more naturally with "the ethos and mysticism of these ascetics."[72] Such a study would be fruitful, according to Torrance, because the three-fold framework of repentance could demonstrate how "this idea of a permanent repentance was understood in the sources" and "could in turn contribute to our understanding of mysticism…particularly among the monastics, as a way of ascent constantly conditioned by one kind of repentance or another."[73] It is the aim of this chapter to assist in partially filling in this gap and is, in part, a response to Torrance's challenge to see if "further study will vindicate such a model for the study of…repentance in a monastic context,"[74] and, in the case of this thesis, what it means for the study of Symeon in particular. We will be concerned here only with the second aspect of Torrance's framework: existential or continual repentance.[75] The other two – initial and Christ-like repentance – will not be considered because, although they appear in Symeon's writings, references to them are sparse and thus they are not as valuable a framework and do not possess as strong an integrative potential as does continual repentance. The task of examining in detail the role of continual repentance in Symeon's writings and what potential insights into Symeon's theology emerge if we employ it as an integrative hermeneutical key within which to read and interpret him, will be the focus of chapters five and six. For the present, the remainder of this chapter is concerned with establishing the background and terminology of continual repentance in Orthodox theology more broadly, in order to understand

[71] Ibid., 183.
[72] Ibid., 184. While Torrance uses the word *mysticism*, he does so sparingly and is not unaware of the inherent problems with the word. On the previous page he notes that the main difficulty facing the scholar applying his threefold method to "mystical" texts will undoubtedly have to do "with the various meanings ascribed to 'mysticism'."
[73] Torrance, *Repentance in Late* Antiquity, 184.
[74] Ibid., 185.
[75] In the rest of this thesis, I will use "continual" for the sake of not having to use both terms all the time.

why it is a valuable hermeneutic tool in interpreting Symeon's theology. Then, in the next chapter, it will be traced in specific patristic and monastic sources as well as in Orthodox life and practise.

3.3.2: Continual Repentance in Orthodox Theology

In the Orthodox tradition, as Kallistos Ware points out, repentance is the starting point of the good news and without it "there can be no new life, no salvation, no entry to the kingdom."[76] Moreover, this remains a current in contemporary monastic-ascetic theology; specifically in the practice of the Jesus Prayer, which is fundamentally a prayer of repentance.[77] Ware points to an early patristic work, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, which defines repentance as being a "great understanding"; that is, discernment. As such, repentance is not an emotional crisis, a paroxysm of remorse and self-pity, but conversion, the recentering of our life upon the Holy Trinity.[78] Repentance is a new mind and as such it is positive, not negative. If repentance is interpreted positively, then it is seen not just as a single act, but a continuing attitude.[79]

Ware also notes that Christ's call to repentance in the Gospel of Matthew (4:12-17) is preceded by a reference to a great light shining in the darkness (from Isaiah 9:2) and followed by a reference to the immanence of the kingdom. Repentance then is illumination, a transition from darkness to light; to repent is to open one's eyes to the divine radiance. It is also eschatological, an openness to the last things "that are not merely in the future, but already present."[80] To repent

[76] Ware, "The Orthodox Experience of Repentance," 18.
[77] Ibid., 19. Stanley Harakas also points out that "The daily repetition of the Lord's prayer, with its petition, 'forgive us our trespasses' provides a Dominical authority for the understanding of repentance as a continual process." Thus, we have further evidence that repentance as a continual state is embedded in the Gospel message. See Stanley Samuel Harakas, "Perpetual Conversion: Repentance in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition," *New Catholic World* 229, no. 1370 (March-April 1986): 56.
[78] Ware, "The Orthodox Experience of Repentance," 20. A more detailed examination of *The Shepherd of Hermes* will be done in the next chapter (4.2.1).
[79] Ware, "The Orthodox Experience of Repentance," 20.
[80] Ibid.

is to recognize that the future eschatological kingdom is already in our midst, at work among us, though not yet brought to its future perfection and fulfillment.[81] It is no coincidence that Lent, the great season of repentance, takes place in the spring; because for Ware, the Lenten season of repentance "is a time of gladness, not of despondency" and repentance is a flower in bloom.[82] Repentance means to come back home, to return from isolation to fellowship, to be reintegrated into the family (the Church).[83] We see this most aptly illustrated in the parable of the Prodigal Son (which was a frequent image used by Symeon himself).

John Chryssavgis notes that repentance "is a continual enactment of freedom, a movement forward, deriving from renewed choice and leading to restoration."[84] The motive for repentance is humility, not self-justification, or an abstract idea of goodness or hope of some future reward.[85] Like Ware, Chryssavgis also points to *Hermas* as an early example of repentance being a "great understanding" (discernment) which means that it is not about particular acts of contrition, but as an attitude, a state of mind.[86] In repentance, our total limitation and insufficiency is placed before God, and not just the sum total of any particular sins. As such it restores and returns us to our original state: to repent is to transcend our fallen condition.[87] Chryssavgis also points out that repentance is "the gateway to oneself, to one's fellowmen, and to heaven. It leads inwards, but it also leads outwards by leading inwards." By this is meant that the world ceases to rotate around the self "and begins to gravitate toward the other – the divine and human other."[88] Repentance is

[81] Ibid. This eschatological dimension of repentance in Symeon's theology was seen in section 3.2.6 above. See also Symeon's tenth *Ethical Discourse*.
[82] Ware, "The Orthodox Experience of Repentance," 22.
[83] Ibid., 26.
[84] Chryssavgis, "Repentance and Confession in the Orthodox Tradition," 4.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid., 5.
[87] Ibid., 6.
[88] Ibid., 7. This also suggests that there is an ethical dimension to repentance. While not a major theme in this thesis, we will look at this in chapter five, when we look at how Symeon's theology of repentance effects knowledge of God, self, and others. For now, it is sufficient to point out that if we look at John the Forerunner's preaching on the fruits

not a dwelling in sinfulness, but the realization of limitations. It should not be accompanied by guilt but by an awareness of one's estrangement from God and neighbour. God is not only at the end of the journey of repentance, but at its beginning.[89]

Repentance is also not a stage which one passes through on the way to holiness and which subsequently gets left behind; it is rather an attitude which infuses one's whole life and for which we must struggle continually, as it is gift of the Holy Spirit who transforms the heart of the human person.[90] This transformation is often seen physically through tears (a major component in monastic-ascetic theology as well as in Symeon's writings), which are the result of purification through repentance, which has as its ultimate goal, transcending light and delight.[91] Repentance and confession are thus comprehensive ways of "rediscovering God and oneself and thereby being set on the road to full and loving relationship with God and other men."[92]

That the idea of repentance as being a continual state or way of living, is well attested in the broad spectrum of Orthodox theology. This understanding of repentance is embedded in Scripture, especially in John the Forerunner and Christ's call to repentance. Is it also possible trace this thread in the continuum of experience in the tradition, beginning with the earliest patristic

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of repentance in Luke 3:7-14, it clear that these "fruits" bear ethical dimensions. According to Guy D. Nave, John's call to repentance and the need to bear the "fruits worthy of repentance," means that *metanoia* indicates a "fundamental change in thinking and living that radically alters the way things are, and creates an environment where diverse and once alienated people can live together as a community of God's people." As such, repentance addresses "the manner in which human beings interact with each other"; see Guy D. Nave, *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts* (Atlanta, Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 158 & 166. This is also echoed in Christ's preaching in the gospel of Luke. Referring to passages such as Luke 6:20-49; 13:1-9; and 14;12-14, 21, Nave notes that "Like John the Baptist, the Lukan Jesus suggests that the fruits worthy of repentance are those that are manifested in the context of human interpersonal relationships and that demonstrate ethical social concern for the well-being of others. It is the fruits worthy of repentance that enable diverse individuals to accept and care for each other and to live together as a community of God's people. Such fruits represent the 'good fruit' produced by the 'good tree'"; see op. cit., 174-75.

[89] Chryssavgis, "Repentance and Confession in the Orthodox Tradition," 8.

[90] Ibid., 9.

[91] Ibid., 10-11.

[92] Ibid., 15.

texts responsible for the formation of monastic-ascetic theology through to Symeon's time, in order to see if they influenced his writings?

3.4: Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter, we explored the problems of defining "mystic" and "mysticism" and demonstrated why they are inadequate as descriptors for Symeon and for this theology. We also argued why the mysticist reading of Symeon is not only methodologically problematic, but should probably be discarded altogether. Scholars who adopt "mysticism" as the context for Symeon's theology read him out of his context, and thus misinterpret him; which creates a distorted image of the saint. I also pointed out how Loudovikos' observations suggest the integrative potential of a focus on repentance; which could help toward moving beyond the reading of Symeon simply as a mystic.

In the second part of this chapter, I proposed an alternative hermeneutic of continual repentance and began to trace its contours within Orthodox theology in general. Using the language of continual repentance employed by Alexis Torrance, we saw that this concept is clearly defined within the broad spectrum of Orthodox theology. Torrance's terminology is a valuable tool to define something that has its roots in Scripture and can traced as a concept that is still the norm in current Orthodox theology, especially in monastic circles. Yet, continual repentance can also be traced in the wealth of Symeon's patristic sources as well as within monastic life and practise. It is to these sources that we now turn.

Chapter 4

The Framing of the Christian Life: Symeon's Sources for Continual Repentance in the Patristic Tradition

4.1: Introduction

In this chapter, the sources for continual repentance in the patristic and monastic tradition as well as in Orthodox life and practise, will be traced and examined. These sources were crucial for Symeon and formed the basis of his own articulation and understanding of continual repentance. The first part of this chapter will examine and trace the main sources which influenced Symeon's understanding of continual repentance in the patristic and monastic tradition. A variety of monastic texts will be examined, using Torrance's terminology that was described in the previous chapter. The second part of this chapter will then examine the function of continual repentance in Orthodox liturgical worship, hymnography, and hagiography, which has, until recently, been curiously understudied in relation to Symeon's theology.

4.2: Tracing Symeon's Sources (1): Continual Repentance in the Patristic and Monastic Tradition

As has been seen, the idea of continual repentance has a Scriptural warrant, but what about once the post-apostolic period begins? Can it be found in texts from the second and third centuries, prior to the beginnings of monasticism? If so, is it possible that these texts may have influenced the development of early monasticism and in the monks' understanding of the role of repentance?

4.2.1: The 1st and 2nd Century: Clement of Rome and The Shepherd of Hermas

The *Second Letter of Clement* (late 1st or early 2nd century) is one of the oldest preserved sermons outside the New Testament. It is also curious that this first sermon should have a call to

repentance as its subject matter.[1] Moreover, this call to repentance seems to be linked with the keeping of Christ's commandments. We are told that "while we are yet on earth, let us repent" (*2 Clement* 8.1). This suggests that repentance accompanies us through life and is not just a one-time action. Further on we are admonished "So it is with us: as long as we are in this world, let us repent with our whole heart of the evil things that we have done in the flesh, in order that we may be saved by the Lord while we still have time for repentance" (8.2). This is important because after we have left the world, we cannot confess or repent (8.3). Therefore "if we have done the will of the Father and have kept the flesh pure and have observed the commandments of the Lord, we will receive eternal life" (8.4). The "will of the Father", as suggested by the text, is repentance. And doing the will of the Father (repentance) is keeping the commandments of Christ. Further on, repentance is also seen as a form of healing: "While we still have time to be healed, let us place ourselves in the hands of God the physician, and pay him what is due. What is that? Sincere, heartfelt repentance" (9.7-8). Again, repentance is an act appropriate to this life and it is seen as something that we must continually do in order to be healed. There are further exhortations to repentance in the letter,[2] but it is sufficient to point here that in such an early text as *2 Clement*, we already have evidence suggesting that repentance is 1) lifelong, and 2) somehow linked to the keeping of Christ's commandments. Would Symeon have read and been influenced by this letter? It is possible, as Alfeyev has pointed out, that Symeon did read Clement of Rome.[3] It is also likely that the notion of repentance found in *2 Clement* lived on to influence the later tradition.

[1] See the brief introduction by the translator in Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd Edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2007), 132. The text of *2 Clement* follows on pages 138-165. I will use inline citations to the text.
[2] See 13.1, 16.1, 17.1, and 19.1.
[3] See *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 197-98. Although Alfeyev points out that Symeon's reading of Clement of Rome is in the context of his understanding of church hierarchy, which is similar to that found in Clement's first letter. Yet there is no reason not to think that Symeon did not read *2 Clement* as it has always appeared alongside it in the manuscript tradition.

Alexis Torrance has shown that the early patristic text called *The Shepherd of Hermas* (c. mid to late 2nd century) exerted a huge influence on later monastic-ascetic reflection upon and articulation of repentance; especially concerning the notion of repentance as a life-long state and task.[4] As we have seen above, the text describes repentance as a "great understanding" which has been interpreted as meaning discernment. It is also linked to a variety of commandments. It is not only available once, but for life. Repentance is seen less as a specific act and more of an integrated lifestyle.[5] The text states that the commandments are to be adhered to by all for life "in order that their repentance may be pure the rest of the days of their lives."[6] Moreover, the commandments "are profitable to those who are about to repent, for if they do not walk in them, their repentance is in vain" (61.3). Therefore, if we walk in Christ's commandments…our repentance will "be strong and pure" (66.6). Torrance suggests that this text might have served to spur the early monks, as they insisted upon living out repentance as a vocation grounded in the Lord's commandments.[7]

Torrance also suggests that there is a verbal continuity between the text of *Hermas* and the monastics which "involves linking repentance not so much with a particular action or ritual, as with the living out of revealed commandments."[8] Torrance also points out that later Fathers picked up on the text's emphasis on repentance – for instance, in the fourth century, Didymus the Blind called *Hermas* "the book of repentance."[9] For Torrance, if anyone read and took seriously the message of *Hermas*, it was the monks, whose way of life and devotion to the commandment of

[4] Alexis Torrance, "The Angel and The Spirit of Repentance: Hermas and the Early Monastic Concept of Metanoia," *Studia Patristica* 44 (2013): 16.
[5] Ibid., 17.
[6] *The Shepherd of Hermas,* 46.2 in Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 549. Further citations will be inline.
[7] Torrance, "The Angel and The Spirit of Repentance," 17.
[8] Ibid., 19.
[9] Ibid., 18. Torrance is quoting from Didymus' *Commentary on Zechariah*.

repentance seems to encapsulate the vision of *Hermas* more vividly than anything else.[10] The key point here is that by the end of the second century, even before the advent of monasticism, we have evidence from at least two important texts that repentance was already being considered the framework of the Christian life. Two important points emerge here in that 1) repentance is seen as continual and life-long and that 2) repentance is already being linked to the keeping of Christ's commandments. This would not be lost on the monks and, as will be seen below, Mark the Monk would seize on both points in his formulation of repentance, which would have a singular influence on the tradition in general, and on Symeon in particular.

4.2.2: The 3rd and 4th Century: Early Monastic Texts

Torrance's contention that the monks took seriously the message of *Hermas*, seems to be correct, for if one takes a look at the sayings of the Desert Fathers, the notion of continual repentance is found in a number of sayings. The sayings of the Desert Fathers, although compiled much later, were passed along in the oral tradition from the beginning. John Colobos (or John the Dwarf) councils his monks to make a fresh start every day in the practice of the virtues, and this involves, among other things, continual fasting, repentance and weeping.[11] Abba Miles says that he had come out to the desert to repent and weep for his sins.[12] And Abba Sisoes, as he lay dying,

[10] Torrance, "The Angel and The Spirit of Repentance," 20. The Spirit of Repentance also appears in the writings of Abba Ammonas, a disciple and successor of St Antony. In his seventh letter we read: "The spirit which approaches other souls is…but the spirit of repentance. The spirit of repentance comes to other souls since it calls them all and washes them from their impurity. And when it has cleansed them completely, it gives to them the Holy Spirit, and does not cease pouring fragrance and sweetness upon them…"; see *Letter 7* in Abba Ammonas, *Useful Servanthood: A Study of Spiritual Formation in the Writings of Abba Ammonas*, ed. Bernadette McNary-Zak, trans. Nada Conic, Lawrence Morey, and Richard Upsher Smith, Cistercian Studies Series 224 (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2010), 134–35.

[11] See John Colobos 34 in John Wortley, ed., *Give Me a Word: The Alphabetical Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. John Wortley (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2014), 139. Symeon had read these sayings and knew them intimately. For Symeon, the lives and sayings of the Desert Fathers were supreme examples of repentance and the monastic life and he exhorted his own monks to study their lives and writings constantly; see especially *CD* 6.2-3.

[12] See Miles 2 in op. cit., 203-204.

begged the angels who had come to take his soul to God, to allow him a little more time to repent. His disciples, amazed at this, told him that he had no need of repentance. In response, Sisoes says "I really do not know whether I have made a beginning."[13] This suggests that repentance is a difficult, lifelong task; one in which the monk is called to but never completed in this life.

Moving further into the fourth century, the notion of continual repentance is hinted at in several important texts. The first is found in the homilies of Makarios. The purpose of grace, Makarios tells us, "is to encourage man again to tears and repentance in order that he may repent because of those things by which he formerly sinned."[14] St. Basil's *Morals* and *Long Rules* exerted an immense influence on the development of monasticism in the fourth century, in both East and West. Basil's *Morals* begins with a call to continual repentance: "That they who believe in the Lord must first do penance according to the preaching of John and of our Lord Jesus Christ himself," because "this present life is the time for penance and for the remission of sins."[15] Yet the mere renouncement of sin in the process of initial repentance is not enough for Basil. One's life must be a constant showing forth from the heart "all the other appropriate works of penance," because the "fruits worthy of penance are also required" of us.[16] John Chrysostom preached a series of nine homilies on the subject of repentance in Antioch sometime in 386-87.[17] The notion

[13] See Sisoes 14 in op. cit., 284.

[14] See *Homily* 15.17 in Pseudo Macarius, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, 114. Although Symeon does not quote Makarios, it seems evident that Symeon knew his works well. For a good study of this see Hatzopoulos, *Two Outstanding Cases in Byzantine Spirituality: The Macarian Homilies and Symeon the New Theologian*.

[15] See *Morals*, Rule 1.1 in St. Basil, *Ascetical Works*, trans. M. Monica Wagner, The Fathers of the Church 9 (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 71. For references to continual repentance in the *Long Rules*, see the Preface to the work (pgs. 224 and 230) and Question 55 (p. 336). Symeon was familiar with Basil's writings, but does not quote from them often. For a discussion of this see Turner, *Spiritual Fatherhood*, 50; and Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 129.

[16] See Rule 1.2 and 3; op. cit., 72-73.

[17] For the texts of these homilies, see St. John Chrysostom, *On Repentance and Almsgiving*, trans. Gus George Christo, The Fathers of the Church 96 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998). All citations will be from this edition and cited in-line. I should note here that after Gregory the Theologian, Chrysostom is the Father that Symeon quotes most often. Surprisingly, very little has been done in the way of assessing Chrysostom's influence on Symeon's theology in general, and especially regarding repentance. For a brief discussion of this, see Turner, *Spiritual Fatherhood*, 49-50; and Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 129.

of continual repentance is strong in these homilies as is its ecclesial context.[18] For Chrysostom, our whole life is one of repentance "Now while we are alive is the time for repentance" (*Homily* 7.5.17). Repentance is also a perpetual "surgical procedure that excises sin" (7.1.2) and is a "medicine for salvation" (7.3.10). Repentance is also shown forth in deeds, especially in almsgiving (*Homily* 3.4.14). For Chrysostom, the Church is where the daily living-out of repentance takes place: "…why do we not go to Church every day in order to embrace repentance? If you are a sinner, come to Church in order to tell your sins; and if you are righteous, come to Church…because the Church is a harbor for both the sinner and the righteous" (*Homily* 2.1.1).

It is thus clear that in the early stages of monasticism, the idea of repentance as a continual state is fairly well-attested. Symeon was familiar with these texts and they influenced his thought, even though he does not quote from them directly. Yet, as the continuum of experience in the monastic tradition widens in the fifth through the seventh centuries, there are several Fathers whose idea of continual repentance will come to exert a more profound influence upon Symeon.[19]

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[18] In the Introduction (xiv-xv) the translator notes that for Chrysostom "Repentance is ordained by God as a perpetual conversion for the human being to exercise his free choice correctly in order to recapture his image in its pristine state and heal it," and that "in this sacramental or ecclesial context that repentance has its fullest expression and validity."

[19] Up to now, we have been looking at the notion of continual repentance in the Orthodox tradition. Yet perhaps it is timely here to point out that the idea of continual repentance is not unknown in the Western tradition; but was not subsequently developed past the late fourth or early fifth century. Tertullian (AD 155-220) expresses this idea in his work *On Penitence*: "Repentance, then, means life, since it is preferred to death…lay hold on it and grip it fast, as one who is shipwrecked holds to a plank of salvation. It will buoy you up when you are plunged into a sea of sin and bear you safely to the haven of divine mercy." See *On Penitence* 4 in Tertullian, "On Penitence," in *Treatises on Penance*, trans. William P. Le Saint, Ancient Christian Writers 28 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1959), 20. In a newly discovered sermon of St. Augustine (# 351, dated c. 391), we also find the notion of continual repentance expressed quite forcefully. For Augustine, repentance is a daily medicine (351.5) which draws us near to God (351.1). Repentance is a perpetual supplication which we should practise "throughout the whole of this life" (351.3). It is because of the mortal nature of this life "that we ought to practice repentance and regret every day…" (351.4); see St. Augustine, *Sermons*, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. 10, The Works of Saint Augustine 3 (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1995). More recently, the Cistercian abbot André Louf noted that the monastic life is "entirely consistent with the experience of Christian repentance" which is a perpetual conversion and turning to God. Moreover, "It is only in the heart of repentance that the monk can learn and perceive interiorly how asceticism and the taste of God are not within man's reach as a result of his efforts, or the extension of the world" as repentance is the result of God's mercy; see Andre Louf, "Repentance and Experience of God," *Monastic Studies* 9 (Autumn 1972): 26, 29–30. So while the notion of continual repentance is not unknown in the West, the idea of repentance very early on became tied up and somewhat confused with the notion of ecclesiastical penances, and in turn was conceived and considered in a more juridical

4.2.3: The 5th to the 7th Century: The Formative Period of Monasticism

By the fifth century, according to Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, repentance was seen as the way to transform the monk into a new man.[20] It was an integral part of the essential deeds which the monk performed in order to shape his way of life. This was reflected in many monastic texts written during this period.[21] Repentance in these texts was seen as the path leading to the gate that

manner. This approach to repentance has subsequently influenced how even Orthodox theologians approach the subject. For a good discussion of this development see the first chapter of Torrance's *Repentance in Late Antiquity*.

[20] Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "Penitence in Late Antique Monastic Literature," in *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, ed. Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa, vol. 83, Studies in the History of Religions (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 1999), 179. The entire thesis of Torrance's *Repentance in Late Antiquity* is that by the fifth century repentance acted as the framework of the Christian life. Torrance argues that repentance was essentially a cipher for living out the commandments of Christ, and as such it contained all the variety of Christian ascesis and labour, so long as these were always geared toward being like Christ, through Christ, in whom the only authentic goal and source of repentance could be found. Repentance thus became the vehicle for the formation of Christian self-identity. Ascetics in late antiquity conceptualized their life-journey as one of growing in the likeness of Christ, which was always to be cultivated through the art of repentance. For Torrance, the eschatological significance of repentance for Christianity went far beyond penitential rites, embracing the totality of Christian life.

[21] Torrance's book traces the development of continual repentance specifically in the works of Mark the Monk, John Klimakos, and Barsanuphios and John. Yet, it can easily be traced in a variety of texts from this period, of which we simply do not have the space to cover in detail. Beginning in the late 4th and early 5th centuries, we see it reflected in work of Isaiah of Scetis; see *On Guarding the Intellect: Twenty-Seven Texts* (Text 22) in St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, eds., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume One*, trans. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 26. It also appears in several of his discourses; see discourses 16, 21, and 25 in Abba Isaiah of Scetis, *Ascetic Discourses*, trans. John Chryssavgis and Pachomios Penkett (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 2002). We also find it in the works of Diadochus of Photike, whose works Symeon knew very well; see his *Discourses on Judgement and Spiritual Discernment*, 87 & 100 in Diadochus of Photike, *Following in the Footsteps of the Invisible: The Complete Works of Diadochus of Photike*, trans. Cliff Ermatinger, Cistercian Studies Series 239 (Trappist, Kentucky: Cistercian Publications, 2010). Moving into the sixth century, we see it in the writings of Dorotheos of Gaza, a contemporary and disciple of Barsanuphios and John; see his discourses *On Humility* and *On the Holy Lenten Fast* in Dorotheos of Gaza, *Discourses and Sayings*, trans. Eric P. Wheeler, Cistercian Studies Series 33 (Trappist, Kentucky: Cistercian Publications, 1977). It appears in the accounts of the life of Daniel of Scetis; see Tim Vivian, ed., *Witness to Holiness: Abba Daniel of Scetis-Translations of the Greek, Coptic, Ethiopic, Syriac, Armenian, Latin, Old Church Slavonic and Arabic Accounts*, Cistercian Studies Series 219 (Kalamazoo (Mich.): Cistercian Publications, 2008), 88, 204. In the seventh century we see it in the writings of Maximos the Confessor; see *Ambiguum* 37 and 49 in Maximos the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, trans. Nicholas Constas, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2014), 75, 223. See also *The Ascetic Life* 45 and *The Four Centuries on Charity* 3.55 in St. Maximus the Confessor, *The Ascetic Life, The Four Centuries on Charity*, trans. Polycarp Sherwood, Ancient Christian Writers 21 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1955), 134, 183. It also appears in the writings of Hesychios of Sinai (8th or 9th century?); see *On Watchfulness and Holiness* 123 & 152 in St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia, Volume 1*, 183, 189. We should also note that Hannah Hunt has pointed out that we should not discount the influential role of repentance in Syrian patristic writings, which also had an influence on Symeon. For a general overview of this, see Hunt, "The Soul's Sorrow in Syrian Patristic Thought." Although we will look at Isaac the Syrian in detail below, the following are a few brief examples of continual repentance in other Syrian Fathers: we find it in the 4th century text *The Book of Steps*; see *Memra Twenty-Four: On Repentance* in *The Book of Steps: The Syriac Liber Graduum*, trans. Robert A Kitchen and Martien F.G. Parmentier (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 2004. We also see it in the writings of Philoxenus of Mabbug (6th C.) and Babai (6th C.); see Sebastian P. Brock, ed.,

offered access to individual salvation, but it was much more than that. It was also an integral part of the monk's routine, apart from the official sacramental system, which highlighted the difference between penitence in the Church and in monastic society. Repentance was also psychosomatic – involving body and soul – prayers, compunction, fasts, vigils, almsgiving, and tears were the more common means of attaining this state. There are several Fathers in this period whose articulation of continual repentance had a profound impact on Symeon – Mark the Monk, John Klimakos, and Isaac the Syrian.

Mark the Monk

Mark was a fifth century ascetic who probably lived in Asia Minor.[22] His works have had a profound influence on monasticism in both East and West. They also had a seminal effect on Symeon's theology, especially regarding repentance. Symeon himself tells us (*CD* 22.2) that Mark's works were the first piece of spiritual reading that his elder, Symeon the Pious, gave him to read – which testifies to Mark's enduring influence in the East.[23] Symeon quotes Mark three times, from two specific works.[24] Yet, it is Mark's work, *On Repentance* (hereafter referred to as *OR*), which seems to have been just as important, especially in Symeon's own understanding of repentance.[25]

The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life, trans. Sebastian P. Brock, Cistercian Studies Series 101 (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 115–16, 145, 153.

[22] For a general introduction to Mark's life and works and the debates surrounding his dates and location, see the general introduction to Mark the Monk, *Counsels on the Spiritual Life*, trans. Tim Vivian and Augustine Casiday (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009). All citations from Mark's works will be from this edition and in-line. For a good exposition on Mark's teaching on Baptism, which also exerted a strong influence on Symeon (of which we cannot treat here), see Kallistos Ware, "The Sacrament of Baptism and the Ascetic Life in the Teaching of Mark the Monk," *Studia Patristica* 10 (1970): 441–52. While almost all scholars acknowledge Symeon's debt to Mark, there has yet to appear any substantial discussion of this influence – another lacuna in the scholarship.

[23] This is also corroborated by Stethatos in his biography of Symeon; see *Life*, 4.

[24] In *CD* 22.2, Symeon has two quotes from Mark's *On the Spiritual Law* (hereafter referred to as *OSL*), 11 & 69; and from *Concerning Those Who Imagine That They Are Justified by Works* (hereafter referred to as *Works*), 57.

[25] Although Symeon never quotes directly from this work, there is no reason to doubt that he read it; as from at least the seventh century, Mark's works were circulated in one collection – see the general introduction to *Counsels on the*

There are three aspects to Marks's teaching on repentance that are important for Symeon.[26] The first is that Mark links repentance to the keeping of the commandments: "…he [Christ] set down the law of freedom by means of a variety of ordinances and ordained one goal appropriate for everyone when he said, 'Repent'. Because of this, it is possible for us to know that all the various laws have as their goal one end: repentance" (*OR* 1). Further he states that "Repentance, I think, is not limited to certain occasions or certain acts, but rather is practised by keeping Christ's commandments proportionately to their nature" (*OR* 6). Elsewhere, quoting John 14:21, Mark tells us that Christ has hidden his self-revelation in the commandments (*Works* 210) and that Christ made himself "the guarantor of our repentance" (*OR* 12). Thus, we see that by linking repentance to the keeping of the commandments, Mark is reiterating the tradition, this time more forcefully. We have seen this as early as *2 Clement* and this seems to support the contention by Torrance, that *The Shepherd of Hermas*, which also links repentance to the keeping of the commandments, exerted a huge influence on later monastic practise.

The second aspect is that Mark sees repentance as not only continual and lifelong, but that it is for everyone, not just monastics: "I think that repentance is an appropriate concern for everyone, at all times, both sinners and righteous, if they wish to obtain salvation" (*OR* 7); and "Repentance should therefore be a requirement for everyone" (*OR* 12). Repentance also never ceases until death (*OR* 6, 10 & 11). This aspect of continual repentance in the tradition prior to Mark, has already been seen.

Spiritual Life, p. 28. This is also a good example of the danger of relying solely on the quotations which Symeon provides. As we are looking here for deeper influences on Symeon in the continuum of experience in the tradition, we need to look beyond what Symeon quotes directly. Mark is a good example of this. His teachings on repentance have too many parallels in Symeon to be mere coincidences.

[26] For a more thorough analysis of Mark's teaching on continual repentance, see chapter four of Torrance's *Repentance in Late Antiquity.* Another link to Mark will be examined in the next chapter; namely the link between repentance and the keeping of the commandments in John 14:21.

The third and final aspect of Mark's teaching on continual repentance is that it is not only both cosmological and eschatological, but comprises the very fabric of our being. For Mark, quoting Eph. 1:14, repentance is the pledge of the inheritance to come, "the first fruits of eternal good things" (*OR* 2). It is repentance, Mark believes, "that holds together the whole cosmos" (*OR* 11), although he does not elaborate on just what this means. Finally, Mark seems to link repentance to ontology when he states that "Just as we eat and drink and speak and hear, so too by nature ought we to repent" (*OR* 12). This is important because we have already noted how Loudovikos sees one of Symeon's major theological contributions as being his introduction of repentance into ontology,[27] but it seems here that Symeon may not have been the first to do so. Mark's words equate repentance to the very acts which comprise our human nature, and without which, we certainly could not survive. Eating and drinking and speaking and hearing are part of the fabric of our being. So too, for Mark, is repentance. Just as we die physically if we don't continually sustain ourselves by food and drink, we also die spiritually if we do not sustain and purify our souls through continual repentance. These three aspects of Mark's teaching on continual repentance left their mark on Symeon.

John Klimakos

Another formidable influence on Symeon regarding continual repentance is that of John Klimakos.[28] Klimakos is another source we know Symeon to have read. Symeon's biographer tells

[27] We will look at this in more detail in chapter six.

[28] Klimakos' *Ladder* needs no introduction here. Its influence on monasticism in the both the West and the East has been profound. For a good introduction to Klimakos and his work, see John Chryssavgis, *John Climacus: From the Egyptian Desert to the Sinaite Mountain* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004). Chapter five of Chryssavgis' book discusses both Steps 5 (On Repentance) and 7 (On joy-making mourning). For a thorough exegesis of Step 7 of the *Ladder* (On joy-making mourning), see section two, chapter three of Hannah Hunt's *Joy-bearing Grief*. For the discussion of continual repentance in John's work, see chapter six of Torrance's *Repentance in Late Antiquity*. All citations for the *Ladder* will be from John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Archimandrite Lazarus Moore, Rev. ed (Boston, Mass: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 2012). Citations will be in-line.

us that before Symeon entered monasticism, he made a journey to his parent's home and found a copy of the *Ladder* in his father's library. He read and studied the text and took its words to heart.[29] What exactly did Symeon take to heart? Chryssavgis tells us that for John, repentance was regarded not as a stage through which an ascetic must pass, but is rather "an attitude that colors one's whole life," and one for which we must continually struggle.[30] Thus for John, repentance is a way of life, "a perennial striving, an all-embracing motion."[31] Hunt also observes that for John, "the need for continual repentance, demonstrated by a sense of mourning and tears, lies at the heart of the spiritual journey" and that through repentance "we may attain the grace of the final step on the ladder, namely the presence of God."[32] That is why Torrance notes that for John, Christianity is "a religion of repentance before Christ who as 'Son of God and God', enlightens and raises man in his repentance."[33]

For John, repentance and mourning were the standard by which all will be judged. We will have to give an account for our lack of continual repentance (*Ladder* 7.70). In the fifth step, John describes repentance as the "renewal of baptism" (5.1); "a contract with God for a second life" (5.1); it is "self-condemning reflection, and carefree self-care" (5.1); it is "the daughter of hope and the renunciation of despair" (5.1). Repentance reconciles us to God and purifies our conscience (5.1).[34] John's teaching on repentance did not go unnoticed by Symeon. On two occasions he says

[29] See *Life*, 6. Nikitas also tells us that it was during Lent that Symeon read this work. This is a significant detail as the reading of the *Ladder* was required reading for Eastern monastics during Lent, not only in Symeon's time, but to this day. Lent is also the supreme season of repentance. For a discussion of Klimakos' influence on Symeon, see Turner, *Spiritual Fatherhood*, 45-46.
[30] Chryssavgis, *John Climacus*, 137-138.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Hunt, *Joy-bearing Grief*, 81.
[33] Torrance, *Repentance in Late Antiquity*, 170.
[34] We should note here that John was not the first (nor the last) to link repentance to the "renewal of baptism" (or a second baptism). The same idea is found in Mark the Monk (see *OR* 12). Symeon also does the same (see *CD* 30.6). Our first baptism purifies us of sin, but we continue to sin after baptism. This does not erase our first baptism, but as Mark, John, and Symeon state; we are in need of further purification on account of the sins committed after baptism. For those Fathers, purification comes through continual repentance, which renews our baptismal purity.

that his own teaching on continual repentance comes straight from the *Ladder* (see *CD* 4.12 & *CD* 30.6, where he specifically recommends his monks read step five).

The fifth step was of particular importance for Symeon because John describes a certain "prison" whose "inmates" practised continual repentance. John himself tells us that he intended the example of those "convicts" to provide his readers "with a rule, and a pattern, and a model, and a living picture of repentance" (*Ladder* 5.42). Symeon does likewise. In *CD* 30.6-8, he outlines his own methods of repentance which are strikingly similar to those found in the fifth step. What is notable here is that the forms of repentance that John describes (which are sometimes quite brutal and painful) and those which Symeon recommends to his monks (modelled on what he read in step five) are profoundly *physical*. This suggests that for John as well as for Symeon, repentance not only possesses a spiritual aspect, but is profoundly psychosomatic, involving both the soul and body.[35] The fervour of the convicts' repentance does not arise from a morbid desire for self-harm, but rather as Torrance notes, it comes from the convicts' realization that they once possessed great grace, but had fallen from it.[36] Continual repentance and dwelling in the land of repentance was the only way to restore that grace.

We can thus see that Klimakos was an important source for Symeon on what true, continual repentance was like. Not only did Symeon claim he derived his understanding of repentance from John, but also recommended his monks read Klimakos if they wanted to emulate such repentance.

[35] We will discuss the physical dimensions of repentance in chapter six.
[36] Torrance, *Repentance in Late Antiquity,* 170. Symeon's rather strict methods for repentance outlined in *CD* 30 served the same purpose. He says that the purpose of the methods he is recommending is that one "may propitiate God and recover that divine dignity which he has lost through his sinful life" (*CD* 30.6).

Isaac the Syrian

Another Father who seemed to have had a strong influence on Symeon, both generally and specifically, regarding continual repentance, was Isaac the Syrian.[37] Isaac's ascetical homilies were translated into Greek most likely at the end of the eighth or beginning of the ninth century and they spread rapidly throughout the Greek-speaking world.[38] It is highly probable the library of the Studios monastery possessed a copy, in which case it is also highly probable that Symeon was familiar with Isaac's homilies. Unfortunately, there is no direct textual evidence from Symeon's writings, that he read Isaac; as such one has to rely on similarities of thought within the continuum of experience in the tradition.[39]

Echoing the earlier tradition, Isaac sees repentance as a continual state: "…at every moment we should know that we stand in need of repentance throughout the twenty-four hours of the night and day" (*Homily* 70:487). Isaac defines repentance as a "continual and intense

[37] For a good introduction to Isaac's world and his works, see Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publ, 2000). For a good assessment of Isaac's legacy in the Orthodox world, see the collection of papers in Hilarion Alfeyev, ed., *St Isaac the Syrian and His Spiritual Legacy: Proceedings of the International Patristics Conference, Held at the Sts Cyril and Methodius Institute for Postgraduate Studies, Moscow, October 10-11, 2013* (Yonkers, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2015). All citations from Isaac's works will be in-line (homily number, followed by page number) from Saint Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, Revised Second Edition (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 2011).

[38] For a thorough discussion of the various translations of Isaac's homilies and the manuscript tradition, see the 'Introduction' to *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, pgs. 64-100; esp. pgs. 64 & 81.

[39] Hegumenos Dionysius makes this point when he states: "It is very difficult to see the continuity between St Isaac and St Symeon on the formal level of quotations. It is easier to find similar ideas"; see Hegumenos Dionysius, "Isaac the Syrian and Symeon the New Theologian as Teachers of Stillness," in *St Isaac the Syrian and His Spiritual Legacy*, 218. Hegumenos Dionysius is referring to Isaac and Symeon's teaching on stillness, but I will also argue that this also applies to their understanding of repentance. There is no shortage of scholars who believe that Symeon read Isaac and was influenced by him. As early as 1944, Irénée Hausherr claimed that Symeon "must surely have read Isaac"; see Irénée Hausherr, *Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1982), 133. Krivocheine also states as much; see note 43, pgs. 117-118 in Basil Krivocheine, "The Most Enthusiastic Zealot: St. Symeon the New Theologian as Abbot and Spiritual Instructor," *Ostkirchlische Studien* 4 (1955): 108–28. Golitzin also remarks that Symeon is definitely following Isaac in the tradition, especially in their shared understanding of the "baptism of tears"; see *Life, Times, and Theology*, pgs. 101-103 and p. 118. Alfeyev also argues for the same; see *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 131-132. Surprisingly, Turner, in his detailed chapter on Symeon's heritage and influences (chapter four of *Spiritual Fatherhood*), makes no mention of Isaac or his possible influence on Symeon. For a good overview of Isaac's understanding of repentance, see Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, 129-134.

supplication" (*Homily* 70:487). Indeed, for Isaac, one's entire life is framed and defined by repentance: "This life has been given to you for repentance; do not waste it in vain pursuits" (*Homily* 74:513). Like Symeon after him, Isaac saw no limit to repentance – it is universal; that is, required of all baptised Christians: "For a man can never complete the work of repentance. It is always suitable for every sinner and righteous man who wishes to gain salvation. There is no limit to perfection…. And for this very reason repentance is bounded neither by periods of time nor by works until a man's death" (*Homily* 32:278; cf. Symeon's *PTC* 3.46 and *CD* 5.3).

Like Mark the Monk before him as well as his near contemporary John Klimakos, Isaac also sees repentance as a second baptism or a regeneration of one's baptism: "Repentance is given to the sons of men as grace after grace, for repentance is a second regeneration by God. That of which we received an earnest by baptism, we receive as a gift by means of repentance" (*Homily* 46:357). For Isaac, "The grace that we have lost after baptism by leading lax lives, repentance renews in us through the discernment of the understanding" (*Homily* 64:447). As we saw above, Symeon (in *CD* 30.6) also states the same. Thus, it is seen that in this matter, there is a distinct thread in the tradition of which Symeon inherited.

In a striking and profound image, Isaac likens repentance to a ship, upon which we sail over the sea of this life of sin, in order to arrive at the eschatological port of God's love. For Isaac, repentance leads us to God's love, "unto the isle that lies beyond the world" (*Homily* 46, 359). Anyone who leaves the ship will drown in the sea of sin. This suggests that for Isaac, repentance is a life-long journey, whose end is the haven of God's love.[40]

[40] Symeon was also fond of using nautical metaphors, which could indicate another influence from Isaac. See *PTC* 1.17 & 1.78; *H* 19.108-109; and *CD* 1.5, 11.2, 12.1, 13.1, 25.7 and 27.1.

4.2.4: Conclusion

In this part we have examined the continuum of experience in the tradition, and traced, if only roughly, that from the Gospels and into the post-apostolic period; through the fourth century and into Symeon's day, there is a distinct and clear teaching on repentance which defines it as a continual and life-long struggle; an existential state of being. I have demonstrated that Symeon imbibed deeply from this tradition, and that it shaped his understanding of repentance. Yet there are other sources – ones that are potentially rich, but little studied – which influenced Symeon. It is to these unexplored sources which we now turn in the final part of this chapter.

4.3: Tracing Symeon's Sources (2): Repentance in Orthodox Liturgy, Hymnography, and Hagiography – An Unexplored Context

Perhaps we should pause at this juncture and ask a simple question: who was Symeon? That is, what was his vocation? Was he a soldier? A blacksmith? A fisherman? He was a monk and abbot. And what do monks and abbots do? They pray, work, and attend the monastic offices. This much is obvious. These may be banal questions, yet they need to be asked because surprisingly, most scholars of Symeon take these facts for granted. The point being here is that Symeon was a monk for almost fifty years and would have spent the greater part of his monastic life in liturgical worship. If someone were looking for possible sources of influence on Symeon, should they not consider examining the crucial role that liturgical worship played in Symeon's life? If someone were also looking for possible sources of influence on Symeon, say, in the matter of repentance for instance, would it not be worthwhile investigating if repentance is an important element in the Orthodox liturgy; and if so, could Symeon's theology of repentance have been shaped by liturgical worship? As Alfeyev has pointed out, divine worship is crucial in the life of a monk, and any examination of Symeon's background and context would be incomplete without

taking into account the enormous role that liturgical worship played in shaping his life and spirituality.[41] Sadly, as Alfeyev has also pointed out, this has been completely overlooked by most scholars of Symeon.[42]

4.3.1: Psalmody and Continual Repentance

The psalter has been the basic text for Christian worship since the beginning of the Church. In monasteries, the psalter is read weekly and numerous psalms are incorporated into the daily rounds of the monastic offices. Like most monks, Symeon would have known them by heart. In his letter to Marcellinus, St Athanasios tells us that "the Psalms comprehend the one who observes the commandment as well as the one who transgresses, and the action of each," and "he who hears the one reading receives the song that is recited as being about him, and either, when he is convicted by his conscience, being pierced, he will repent…."[43] It is clear here that St Athanasios places prime importance on the Psalms as leading us to repentance and encourages the reader to fulfill and embody what he has read and/or sung. Symeon does likewise. In his fourth catechetical discourse, he tells us to "Practise what you daily sing and read," which will lead us to repentance and joy (*CD* 4.12). Symeon constantly exhorted his monks to pay careful attention to the words of the Psalms (cf. *CD* 30.8). This should not surprise us, as from among all the Old Testament books,

[41] Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 73. Symeon's biographer also gives us a detailed account of Symeon's liturgical life; see *Life*, 25-28.
[42] Alfeyev, "The Patristic Age and Modernity," 103-104. Symeon's relation to church worship is the substance of the entire third chapter of Alfeyev's book *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, and was until recently, the only detailed examination of this. As we will see below, this is changing. I would also like to note here that in this short section, I can only begin to sketch the contours of what would perhaps require an entire thesis of itself. As such, the purpose of this last section is to argue that indeed, liturgical worship was important for Symeon, but fundamentally, it was (along with its hymnography and hagiographical elements) crucial in shaping his theology of continual repentance and deserves a more careful study.
[43] St. Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1980), 110–11.

the Psalms exerted the most influence on Symeon.[44] Not only did Symeon consider the Psalms to be crucial in the practise of continual repentance, he also held up their author, David, as the supreme example of a repentant sinner who through continual repentance and weeping for his sins, was welcomed into the glory of God. After giving many examples of David's repentance, Symeon asks his monks: "Why then have you not imitated him and those like him?" (*CD* 5.14). Thus, we can see here that the Psalms and their author were considered by Symeon to be models of repentance that were to be read and imitated. For Symeon we should be daily weeping and repenting of our sins after the manner of David and the Psalms. Considering the vital role that the Psalms played in the liturgical life of a monk, we should not be surprised that the theme of continual repentance, which figures so prominently in many of the Psalms read in the daily monastic offices, exerted an enormous influence on how Symeon came to understand, formulate, and articulate his theology of continual repentance. Why this has gone virtually unnoticed in the scholarship is, I think, the result of insufficient attention being paid to Symeon's context. Consequently, scholars should be paying more attention to how liturgical worship shaped the development of Symeon's theology.

4.3.2: The Lenten Cycle and Continual Repentance

In the forward to his book *Great Lent: Journey to Pascha*, Alexander Schmemann says that Great Lent "is indeed a school of repentance to which every Christian must go every year in order to deepen his faith, to re-evaluate, and, if possible, to change his life" – for Great Lent

[44] See Turner, *Spiritual Fatherhood*, 40-41. Turner notes that Symeon quotes from or alludes to the Psalms no less than 458 times, which would make them the third most oft quoted book of the Bible after the gospels of Matthew and John. Moreover, Turner notes that of those 458 quotations or allusions, no fewer than 27 of them are to Psalm 50 (51), the classic Psalm of repentance. St. Athanasios also remarks that when one sings the words of Psalm 50, one is "speaking the proper words of his own repentance"; see *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, 111.

answers the questions of what repentance is, why we need it, and how to practise it.[45] In the Orthodox tradition, Great Lent is the supreme season of repentance. Every liturgy, every hymn is a call to repentance. Great Lent and its call to continual repentance would not have been lost on Symeon and it is safe to assume that the entirety of the Lenten cycle of liturgies and hymns would have exerted a profound influence upon how he understood and articulated his theology of continual repentance. It is surprising then, how this has escaped most scholars.[46]

By Symeon's time, the most important service book used during Great Lent was the *Triodion*, which was the product of St Theodore the Studite and his brother St Joseph. It was a compilation of previously existing hymns, with many additions made by the two brothers. Although further additions were made in the five centuries after Symeon's death, by the end of the ninth century it had been disseminated widely in both the cathedral churches and in the monasteries, and its structure and the majority of its contents were already in place during his lifetime.[47] The purpose of the *Triodion*, then as now, is to guide a person on their Lenten journey of repentance. The text makes ample use of Old and New Testament exemplars of repentance, such as David and the Ninevites, the Prodigal Son, and the Publican and the Pharisee; as well as hymns and canons from St Romanos the Melodist and St Andrew of Crete. The purpose of the

[45] Alexander Schmemann, *Great Lent: Journey to Pascha*, Rev. ed (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 9.

[46] This situation may be due to one of two factors – or a combination of them. The first, is the failure on the part of many scholars to adequately study Symeon's context *in its entirety*. As such, liturgical worship gets overlooked. The second factor may be that Symeon himself never quotes directly from any of the liturgical texts, which could lead to the assumption that they played no part in his theological development; therefore, liturgical worship again gets overlooked. But as I am arguing here, liturgical worship is crucial in the life of a monk, and the liturgy (especially the Lenten liturgies) feature a call to continual, life-long repentance which would not have been lost on Symeon and should be considered in any study of his context.

[47] For a thorough discussion of the development and use of the *Triodion*, see Kallistos Ware's introduction to the *Triodion* in Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware, trans., *The Lenten Triodion* (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2002), 13–68. A more recent addition to the *Triodion* which has become quite popular are the Lamentations which are sung during Matins of Holy and Great Saturday. They are a fourteenth or fifteenth century addition and thus were unknown to Symeon. For the text see *The Lamentations of Matins of Holy and Great Saturday* (Boston, Mass: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1981).

Lenten liturgies in general, and of the material found in the *Triodion* in particular is, according to Schmemann, to lead us to a state of "bright sadness".[48] "Sadness" because we recognize our sinful, fallen state which leads to death, yet "bright" because our sincere and heart-felt repentance (along with our ascetic struggle) purifies us and restores our nature and leads to the glory of God. For Schmemann, those Fathers and writers who composed the hymns in the *Triodion* "truly knew the art of repentance, and every year during Lent they make this art accessible to everyone who has ears to hear and eyes to see."[49] Symeon certainly possessed both ears to hear and eyes to see. The Lenten cycle and the *Triodion* needs to be further studied in relation to Symeon's theological development and should be treated as a serious source for his understanding of continual repentance.[50]

4.3.3: Hymnography and Continual Repentance

Orthodox hymnography is another potential source which influenced Symeon's understanding of continual repentance. Two recent studies have highlighted how the themes of compunction and continual repentance in hymnography had a profound effect in shaping the understanding of the Christian self as a repentant self, not only for laymen, but also for monastics.[51] While the richness and depth of hymnography cannot be covered in detail in so short a space, two brief examples should suffice to make it evident that that Symeon most likely had an intimate knowledge of theses hymns, although he never quotes from them directly.

[48] Schmemann, *Great Lent*, 32.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Several of Symeon's *Catechetical Discourses* were delivered during Lent. *CD* 11, "On Fasting", was delivered on the Sunday beginning the second week of Lent; *CD* 12, "Of Abstinence and Endurance", was delivered on the Sunday beginning the third week of Lent; and *CD* 13, "Of Christ's Resurrection", was delivered on the Monday of the second week of Pascha. Perhaps they were part of a cycle of Lenten discourses delivered in the same year.
[51] See Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*. The last chapter of Krueger's book is devoted to a study of the influence of the liturgy and hymnography on Symeon's articulation of continual repentance. See also Andrew Mellas, *Liturgy and the Emotions in Byzantium: Compunction and Hymnody* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

One of the most important hymnographers was Romanos the Melodist (c. 490-560). By Symeon's time, many of Romanos' hymns and *kontakia* had already become a staple of liturgical worship, especially that of the Lenten cycle.[52] A crucial trope in Romanos' writings is that through the use of the first person, he offers himself as a model of repentance to his readers. Some of Romanos' most important *kontakia*, such as "On the Harlot", "On the Prodigal Son", and "On Peter's Denial", offer up to Romanos' audience biblical models of repentance which they are encouraged to emulate. These *kontakia* were already a mainstay of Lenten liturgical worship by Symeon's time and it can be safely assumed that he knew them well. Furthermore, many of Romanos' hymns, such as "On the Repentance of the Ninevites" (sung on Wednesday of the first week of Great Lent) feature profound reflections of repentance and were also already in long use in the Lenten liturgies by Symeon's time. Although Symeon never quotes directly from Romanos, his use of the first person in his own hymns and his insistence to his own monks that they emulate, not only himself, but the same biblical figures, points to a definite link in the continuum of experience in the tradition.

Another hymnographer which almost certainly influenced Symeon was St Andrew of Crete (c.650-c.740). His *Great Canon*, parts of which are sung in the first week of Great Lent and in its totality on Thursday of the fifth week, was already a mainstay of the Lenten cycle by Symeon's time and therefore we can infer that Symeon knew its text very well.[53] Again, like Romanos before

[52] For good studies of Romanos' hymns and *kontakia*, see the two works by Kreuger and Mellas cited in the note above. Kreuger has also published some other insightful studies of Romanos; see Derek Krueger, "Christian Piety and Practice in the Sixth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 291–315. See also Krueger, "Romanos the Melodist and the Christian Self in Early Byzantium." In this study he makes some parallels between Romanos and Symeon's use of the first person. For the text of Romanos' *kontakia*, see St. Romanos The Melodist, *On the Life of Christ: Kontakia*, trans. Ephrem Lash (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014). For the text of some of his hymns which highlight repentance, see Saint Romanos the Melodist, *Hymns of Repentance*, trans. Andrew Mellas (Yonkers, N.Y: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2020).

[53] For an in-depth study of repentance in Andrew's work see the works by Kreuger and Mellas. For the text of the *Great Canon*, see Saint Andrew of Crete, *The Great Canon: The Work of Saint Andrew of Crete* (Jordanville, New

him and Symeon after, Andrew uses the first person and offers himself to his audience as a model of repentance which should be emulated. Furthermore, like Romanos, Andrew's work invites the audience to enact in themselves the mystery of repentance. Schmemann remarks that in the first week of Great Lent the *Great Canon* acts as a doorway to repentance and by the time it is recited in full during in the fifth week "it sounds like a 'summary' of repentance and its fulfillment," and as such we should have appropriated it and made it our own: "If at the beginning we merely listened to it, now hopefully its words have become our words, our lamentation, our hope and repentance…."[54] The purpose of the *Great Canon* as well as Romanos' hymns and *kontakia*, is to invite the listener to enact the events of sacred time in their own lives – to make the repentance of the Old and New Testament exemplars, as well as those of the saints, their own in order to fashion a unique understanding of the Christian self as a repentant self. This also aligns with Torrance's thesis that repentance was the existential framework for living out the Christian life, both for laymen and monastics. Torrance's study, and what has already been demonstrated in the sections above, has shown that this is most certainly the case in the Patristic tradition prior to and including Symeon's time. It is now clear that this understanding of continual repentance is also reflected in the liturgy and hymnography. A closer examination is needed, as liturgical worship and hymnography were part of Symeon's theological context, especially his monastic context, and most certainly shaped his teaching on repentance. If Symeon's context *in its entirety*, is to be properly understood, it is no longer expedient to ignore these fundamental elements of monastic life and how they shaped his theological outlook.

York: Holy Trinity Monastery, 2017). For an excellent one-volume study of repentance in Andrew's *Great Canon* see the recently reissued Olivier Clément, *The Song of Tears: An Essay on Repentance Based on the Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete*, trans. Michael Donley (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2021). This work also contains (as an appendix) a complete text of the *Great Canon*.

[54] Schmemann, *Great Lent*, 78.

4.3.4: Hagiography and Continual Repentance

It has already been seen how Symeon upholds David's repentance as a model for his own monks to follow. Symeon also points to other biblical examples of repentance such as the Prodigal Son, Mary Magdalene, and the sinful woman (Lk. 7:36-50). Many of these biblical exemplars were already featured in the Lenten cycle and in the *Triodion.* But these were not the only examples Symeon mentioned in his writings. Aside from constant psalmody, church offices, the Lenten cycle, and hymnography; hagiography also afforded Symeon with multiple exemplars of repentance which influenced him and which he exhorted his monks to imitate. As Turner notes, Symeon was very familiar with the lives of the saints and encouraged his monks to read and learn from them (cf. *CD* 6.1).[55] Some of the saints mentioned by Symeon include St Antony (*CD* 6.2), St Arsenios (*CD* 6.3), and Sts Euthymios and Sabas (*CD* 6.4). He also points to the lives of former patriarchs and bishops such as John Chrysostom, John the Almsgiver, Ignatios, Methodios, Basil, Gregory the Theologian, and even western saints such as Ambrose, as models of repentance and emulation (*CD* 5.15). Symeon even goes as far as to suggest that after death his monks will be judged by these Fathers (*CD* 5.15).

The lives of the Holy Fathers, patriarchs, and bishops were not the only sources for Symeon. He also held in very high esteem, the lives of repentant women, both biblical and post-biblical. Among those Symeon held up for particular notice and imitation are the lives of St Pelagia, St. Mary of Egypt, St Theodora, St Euphrosyne, and St Xenia (*CD* 5.13).[56] Symeon held

[55] Turner, *Spiritual Fatherhood*, 51. See also Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*. 132-136 for the same discussion. Alfeyev notes (p. 133) that the lives of the saints were especially prized by all levels of Byzantine society as reading them was considered to be a means to salvation.

[56] Turner notes (*Spiritual Fatherhood,* 51) that Symeon cites from the life of St Mary of Egypt three times: *CD* 5.13, 9.3, and 12.6 (which is the same as Mark the Monk). It appears her life of repentance deeply moved him. For the texts of some of these lives as well as a good short study of how the lives of these repentant women exerted such a strong influence in monastic circles as well on their concept of continual repentance, see Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources*, Cistercian Studies Series 106 (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1987). Ward notes (p. 8) that "Repentance is not a theory to be worked out but a way of life; that is why

the lives of these women in such high regard that he asked his monks "Why have you not imitated those and similar women…?" (*CD* 5.13). It is also important to note here that the lives of some of these repentant women, like those found in Scripture, had by Symeon's day been incorporated into liturgical worship, especially the Lenten cycle. St Mary of Egypt is of particular importance because by Symeon's time, she was already being commemorated on the fifth Sunday of Great Lent. As well, at Matins on Thursday of the fifth week the canon of St Mary as well as her life written by St Sophronios of Jerusalem was read along with the *Great Canon* of St Andrew of Crete. It is not for nothing that the Church considers her life of repentance to be of singular importance and it was no less for Symeon, as he cites from her life more than he does of some of his major sources. As such, close attention should be paid to this.

In the litany of supplication, the Church prays that "we may spend the rest of our lives in peace and repentance." This prayer, along with the constant refrain of "Lord, have mercy" is a reminder to us that repentance is a continual process. Thus, the liturgy is a major source for the understanding of continual repentance. It was no less so for Symeon. As Alfeyev remarks: "In the case of Symeon, almost all pieces of literature which are quoted by him belong to the cycle of reading in the church."[57] If this is the case, it may well be asked why scholars have hitherto simply ignored the liturgy as a legitimate source for the study of Symeon's life and theology. As I have demonstrated in this section, albeit simplistically; the liturgy, including the Lenten cycle and the *Triodion*, as well as hymnography and hagiography, can and should no longer be ignored as important sources for Symeon's theology of continual repentance – as they were an integral part

the stories about repentance are more useful than any amount of teaching on the subject. In them the reader is not instructed directly but shown the working of God within human lives, with all their subtlety and variety. It is not a pattern to follow but an experience to be shared."

[57] Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 132.

of Symeon's monastic and theological context; and within them lie promising and rewarding insights which are well worth exploring.

4.4: Conclusion

The first part of this chapter was devoted to tracing the concept of continual repentance in the patristic and monastic tradition and literature beginning from the post-apostolic period through to Symeon's time. It was seen that continual repentance was clearly articulated and defined in these writings. Moreover, these are writings which Symeon was familiar with and influenced his thought, especially the writings of Mark the Monk, John Klimakos, and Isaac the Syrian.

In the second part of this chapter, other sources for Symeon's theology of continual repentance; namely the liturgy, with its psalmody and Lenten cycle, hymnography, and hagiography, were considered. As a monk, Symeon possessed intimate knowledge of them. Yet, these crucial sources have remained virtually unmined. This should no longer be the case as continual repentance is clearly articulated in these sources, and thus should be taken seriously, if we want to understand Symeon's context *in its entirety*.

The contextual dilemma and the mysticist misreading are two factors which have contributed to Symeon's fragmented image and ambiguous place in Orthodox theology. All things considered, this shouldn't surprise us – for if Symeon's texts are approached with premises unknown to him; if the man and his theology cannot be seen in relation to his own time; not only will he be misinterpreted, but it will simply be impossible to configure him within the larger continuum of experience in the tradition. Such a configuration will be the goal of the remaining chapters of this thesis. The next chapter will contain a close reading of Symeon's writings in order

to flesh out how continual repentance informs key aspects of his theology and how it functions as a valuable integrative hermeneutical key.

Chapter 5

The Integrative Explanatory Potential of the Focus on Continual Repentance in Symeon's Writings

5.1: Introduction

Several key questions have formed the basis of this study, namely: What are the problems and gaps which have emerged from the literature review? How has Symeon's life and theology been traditionally interpreted and can problem areas, as well as new directions in the scholarship be identified, which could provide opportunities for alternative readings? What is Symeon's context and why does it matter? Does Symeon's theology of repentance emerge from *within* a context? And if so, can it be located it within that context? Furthermore, is there a language available wherein continual repentance can be defined and described, and moreover, can it be traced in the continuum of experience in the tradition?

The first chapter highlighted two underlying problems in the traditional interpretation of Symeon's life and theology. For the most part, Symeon's life and theology have been interpreted through the lens of "mystic" and "mysticism" to the virtual exclusion of all other aspects of his theology. This interpretation emerges because Symeon's personal, historical, social, and theological context is virtually ignored or downgraded in favour of "mysticism" as his context. In its place I posited the integrative potential of repentance and proposed a contextual reading of Symeon with repentance as the hermeneutical key and outlined its methodology.

In the second chapter the contextual dilemma was examined and I argued that Symeon's theology of repentance does indeed emerge from within a context and that it is possible to locate it. It was seen that Symeon's theology of repentance emerges from the historical, social, and theological context of tenth-eleventh century Byzantium wherein several key factors played an important role in shaping Symeon's thought – such as Iconoclasm and post-Iconoclasm and the

questions it continued to raise concerning the limits of representation and the nature of holiness; as well as the consequences of the first wave of Byzantine "humanism", which ushered in an attitude of skepticism and intellectualism regarding theological questions. It was seen that Symeon reacted strongly against a mediocre form of Christianity which not only relegated holiness to the saints of the past, but considered the communion of saints closed. Symeon also pushed back against rationalism, skepticism, and intellectualism; and in its place he proposed repentance as a cure.

The third chapter looked at the problem of "mystic" and "mysticism". I argued that these terms are not useful descriptors for Symeon's person and theology, because like repentance, they must emerge from *within* a context. To demonstrate this, I pointed out that the focus on "mystic" and "mysticism" is an attribute-based characterization and not a circumstance-based characterization. This makes it weak and inappropriate in terms of its potential explanatory power. In other words, it fails to account for the contextual grounding of the study and interpretation of Symeon's life and theology.[1] Instead, "mysticism" and "mystic" are invented terms possessing a language which is not grounded in the sources, but rather emerge from preconceived strategies of categorization and interpretation. Moreover, these terms lack definitions and there exists no consensus on what those terms purport to describe. These terms emerged from a misunderstanding of the root word *mystikos* and its interpretation and use in Greek patristic thought. Therefore, the use of these terms in regards to Symeon's life and theology are reductionist and create a situation where his life and theology are interpreted out of his context, which leads to misinterpretation. It was also seen that recently, Nikolaos Loudovikos has critiqued "mysticism" and "spirituality" and how they are understood in both West and East; and especially regarding Symeon's theology, their misunderstanding can make the reading of Symeon a dangerous undertaking. Loudovikos has also

[1] See the discussion of this in section 3.2.3 above.

singled out repentance as a key point of departure in Symeon's theology, which hints at its potential to integrate various aspects of the contextual setting of the saint. Additionally, I pointed out that Alexis Torrance has provided a comprehensive definition of repentance as well as a valuable terminological framework referring to continual or "existential" repentance.

Finally, the fourth chapter explored a multitude of Patristic and monastic sources prior to Symeon's time, wherein it was seen that continual repentance emerges from within the continuum of experience in the tradition, and that these sources exerted a profound influence upon the way Symeon came to understand the role of continual repentance. It was also demonstrated that continual repentance is clearly articulated in hagiography, hymnography, and the liturgical tradition; all of which were sources Symeon knew intimately and which exerted a profound influence on him.

It is now time to relate what has been summarized above to the context of Symeon's writings. Thus, it is the goal of this chapter to engage in a close reading of Symeon's texts in order to examine the integrative potential of the theology of continual repentance as a hermeneutical key in approaching his writings. As such, this chapter will constitute a shift in focus from a macro view of Symeon's context to a micro view of his texts with commentary. In this particular chapter I will demonstrate how the theology of continual repentance informs key aspects of Symeon's theological outlook. This chapter will thus be divided into several sections – The Keeping of the Commandments; Spiritual Fatherhood and Spiritual Authority; Holiness and Witness; Asceticism; the Spiritual Senses; Knowledge of God, Self, and Others; and The Vision and Experience of God.[2]

[2] Symeon was no systematic theologian. Therefore, I should point out here (as a "disclaimer") that breaking down his theology into constituent parts is counterintuitive and may give the impression that there are no links between them. On the contrary, it is often difficult to separate them when reading Symeon, as they are intimately linked to one another, and he often discusses the vision of light and spiritual fatherhood together; or asceticism with holiness, for example. Unfortunately, the nature of academic theology dictates that I treat them separately, but the reader should bear in mind that there is no such division in Symeon's writings. As such, what I hope to show in this chapter is that what binds them all together is repentance.

In this chapter, I will argue that a close reading of Symeon's texts not only reveals the inner workings of repentance as part of his life and theology, but also its central importance as a hermeneutical key, and its integrative potential to enrich our understanding and appreciation of his theological contributions.

5.2: Repentance and the Keeping of the Commandments (John 14:21)

This first section will focus on examining how Symeon exegeted a certain passage of Scripture, namely, John 14:21: "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." This is crucial because understanding the manner in which Symeon exegeted this verse, will be the key to how he saw continual repentance in regards to spiritual fatherhood and spiritual authority, holiness and witness, asceticism and the spiritual senses, knowledge of God, self and others; and ultimately how Symeon linked repentance to the vision of God. Repentance and the keeping of the commandments or a combination of both, will often be seen in the texts from Symeon which will be examined in the remaining sections below. Therefore, it is important to understand how Symeon himself read this verse, so that when it is encountered in his texts, it will be read in the same manner.

As Alfeyev has noted, although Symeon was quite traditional in his interpretation of Scripture, he was not an exegete in the same manner as say, Origen or John Chrysostom – that is, he usually did not use a verse-by-verse explanation, nor did he often interpret biblical texts precisely or consecutively.[3] That being said, Symeon could be quite original, and his exegesis of

[3] Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 55. For a detailed and thorough analysis, with examples, of Symeon's method of exegesis, see the entirety of chapter two in Alfeyev's study. See also Theodore Stylianopoulos, "Holy Scripture, Interpretation and Spiritual Cognition in St. Symeon the New Theologian," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 46, no. 1–2 (Spring-Summer 2001): 3–34. For a good general study of the

John 14:21 falls into this category. In fact, although influenced in part by Mark the Monk, I believe that Symeon's exegesis of this passage is unique in patristic literature.[4]

Symeon's reading of Mark the Monk had an impact on how, in general, he interpreted Scripture. In *On the Spiritual Law*, Mark states that when someone humbly reads the Scriptures, "he will apply everything he reads to himself and not to someone else" (*OSL* 4). Symeon echoes this when he says that when the Scriptures are being read "a man ought to look at himself, and reflect on his soul as in a mirror" (*CD* 31.2). This is important to keep in mind because for Symeon, the Scriptures contain a message that is addressed to each one personally. This also means that when reading and interpreting the Scriptures, Symeon looked to his own experience and those of biblical personages, to verify their truths. Symeon thus read John 14:21 in light of his own experience and that of others. A final point to keep in mind here is that Symeon's exegesis was very traditional in so far as he held that when interpreting Scripture, one should aim to ascend from the letter to the inner meaning, and in turn from that "to Him Who stands behind biblical words" – that is *the* Word, Christ himself.[5]

So, let's see again what Christ says in John 14:21: "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." The first thing to note is the emphasis on love. Our love for

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interpretation of Scripture in the Orthodox tradition, see John Breck, *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and Its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001). Pertaining to the New Testament in particular, see Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective* (Brookline, Mass: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997).

[4] Later in the fourteenth century, there is a passage from Gregory Palamas which may betray the influence of Symeon. In his *Topics of Natural and Theological Science* (56), Palamas states: "What, then, is the divine commandment now laid upon us? It is repentance, the essence of which is never again to touch forbidden things." Palamas is explaining the consequences of Adam's transgression. In paradise, Adam broke God's commandment not to eat of the forbidden tree. So now, in our fallen state, the divine commandment is to repent of our sins. Did Symeon's exegesis of John 14:21 influence Palamas in this regard? It is hard to tell. In any case, Palamas seems to be linking repentance to the divine commandments. See St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, eds., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume Four*, trans. G. E. H Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Ware, Kallistos (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 372.

[5] Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 71-72.

Christ is shown by keeping his commandments. This love is reciprocated by both the Father and the Son. Furthermore, the action of keeping the commandments is mirrored by another action; Christ manifesting himself to us. This simple reading would correspond to the 'letter' of the verse. Yet what about the inner meaning? Or, to be more precise, what did Symeon see as the inner meaning? This rests on what he understood as the "commandments". For Symeon, the "commandments" were not viewed legalistically, as in keeping the proscriptions of the Mosaic Law, as the rich ruler believed (cf. Mt. 19:16 ff.; Lk. 18:18 ff.). Nor did he see the commandments, at least in this case, as loving God with all your heart and loving your neighbour as yourself (cf. Mt. 22:34-40; Mk. 12:28-34; Lk. 10:25-28). Rather, Symeon saw the commandments as summed up in repentance. As we saw in chapter four above, but worth reiterating here, Symeon was following Mark the Monk when he said that God "set down the law of freedom by means of a variety of ordinances and ordained one goal appropriate for everyone when he said, 'Repent' [Mt. 4:17]. Because of this, it is possible for us to know that all the various laws have as their goal one end: repentance" (*OR* 1).[6] Further on he says, "Repentance, I think, is not limited to certain occasions or certain acts, but rather is practised by keeping Christ's commandments proportionately to their nature. Certain commandments are comprehensive, incorporating within themselves numerous individual commandments and circumscribing numerous evils in one stroke" (*OR* 6). So, for Mark, the keeping of the commandments, is equal to or is summed up in repentance. It was likewise for Symeon: "Hope therefore in these promises of God with unwavering faith, as we have said, and with much zeal and unremitting effort resolutely fulfill all His commandments. This is the first commandment, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at

[6] Biblical verse in square brackets in original translation.

hand'" (*CD* 14.2). Like Mark before him, Symeon quotes Mt. 4:17, and sees the fulfilling or the keeping of the commandments being summed up in Christ's command to repent.

Yet, there is also a promise embedded in Jn. 14:21. If we keep the commandments (i.e., repentance) Christ will "manifest" himself to us. In the Greek text the word used is ἐμφανίσο, which comes from the root φαίνω, which means "appear", "come into being", or "be made manifest".[7] So for Symeon, the inner meaning of the text was clear: if we keep Christ's commandments (repentance), he will appear to us – that is; we will see him. For Symeon this was no empty promise. When describing his first vision, Symeon tells us that he was reciting "God have mercy upon me, a sinner" and "suddenly a flood of divine radiance appeared from above and filled the room" (*CD* 22.4). Symeon's repentance brought about Christ's manifestation to him. Elsewhere Symeon tells us that the more we practise and keep Christ's commandments, "we shall be found worthy to see God" (*CD* 8.6). Thus, Symeon urges us to keep Christ's commandments "with all our might, so that we may…enjoy both the present and future blessings, that is, the very vision of Christ" (*CD* 13.5). Through the practising of the commandments a man "becomes radiant, he is illuminated, there is granted to him to see revelations of great mysteries…" (*CD* 14.3).[8]

In his fifth *Ethical Discourse*, Symeon states the matter plainly: "And that you may know that those who love Him and keep His commandments also see Christ, listen to the same Lord Himself when he says [here Symeon quotes Jn. 14:21 in its entirety]…Let it therefore be known

[7] See the entry for φαίνο in G.W.H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 1469. See also the same entry in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 1912–13.

[8] There is no shortage of passages in Symeon's writings where he links repentance and the keeping of the commandments to various aspects of the Christian life. For some examples, see *PTC* 3.48 where Symeon states there is no illumination without the keeping of the commandments. Regarding keeping of the commandments and its relation to knowledge of God, see *CD* 24.3 & 4. Repentance and the keeping of the commandments also act as a pledge of the Holy Spirit wherein we acquire the virtues through asceticism; *PTC* 3.55. Moreover, a person will lose this pledge of the Spirit if he becomes careless regarding the commandments or abandons "his constant repentance" (*PTC* 3.51). Also, the grace of the Holy Spirit is preserved by the keeping of the commandments (*PTC* 3.56-57). We are also united to Christ by the keeping of the commandments (*ED* 1; 1:45).

to every Christian that Christ does not lie, that He is true God and confessedly manifests Himself to those who show their love for Him by keeping his commandments…" (*ED* 5; 2:58).[9] When Christ manifests himself to us, we will initiated into the mysteries of God. But the only way to arrive at this knowledge is "through the faithful observance of his precepts" (*TD* 2:133). We cannot be negligent in keeping the commandments; because if we do so we will be far from the kingdom of God. Therefore, Symeon concludes his second *Theological Discourse* by observing that, "In proportion to their fervor and zealous joy," in the observance of the commandments, "then sooner or later, in a greater or lesser degree, they will earn the reward of the vision of God and become participants in the divine nature" (*TD* 2:133). These two passages in particular show how clearly Symeon makes the link between repentance and the keeping of the commandments and the vision of God.

It should also be noted here that for Symeon, the manifestation of Christ is experienced in this life and is not reserved solely for after death: "So when will this manifestation occur? In this life or the future one? It is clear that He means the present life. For wherever the commandments are kept exactly, there, too, is the manifestation of the Saviour…" (*ED* 5; 2:48). It is thus important to keep in mind that for Symeon, the manifestation of Christ through repentance and the keeping of the commandments was a promise given and which is readily available for all Christians. All a person has to do is show their love for Christ by keeping his commandments (repentance) and they will see him. That his contemporaries doubted the possibility or rejected it outright, was a source of constant frustration to Symeon.

[9] Krivocheine makes the same observation; see *In the Light of Christ*, 250. He also notes (same page) that, "This is Symeon's favorite quotation, one that summarizes well his entire spirituality." On p. 258, Krivocheine states that Symeon's entire spirituality is based upon the promise embedded in John 14:21. Golitzin also makes the same observation concerning the frequency of Symeon's reference to John 14:21, saying he quotes it "continually"; see *Life, Times, and Theology*, 97.

I have taken Symeon's exegesis of John 14:21 as the starting point for this chapter because, in what follows, it is essential to understand how Symeon read that particular verse. If we are to see the integrative potential of repentance as a hermeneutical key to Symeon's theology, we need to read Scripture as Symeon did. We thus saw that Symeon follows Mark the Monk in seeing repentance as summing up all the commandments; but he is unique in the tradition in his interpretation of John 14:21.[10] Symeon sees in this key verse a promise which was not only available to all in this life, but one which he had experienced personally. And this is fundamental; for like Mark the Monk, Symeon regarded Scripture not only as a mirror into his own soul, but as a measuring rod, so to speak, for his own experience within the continuum of experience in the tradition. Symeon could thus read John 14:21 and see in it a promise which was fulfilled in his own life and that of the saints and holy men of old. He could point to that verse and assure us that what Christ said was true, because it had happened to him and others. In this instance, as Krivocheine has noted, Symeon's "personal experience corresponds precisely to the facts of Scripture and they are supported by it."[11] Repentance, which is summed up in the keeping of the commandments, becomes for Symeon, the guiding principle of his theology and informs all aspects of it. It is a hermeneutical key with profound integrative potential. It is now time to examine the potential of this key to open a more insightful perspective on Symeon's life and theology.

[10] Mark the Monk does not use John 14:21 as a proof text for his argument. It is here where Symeon's 'originality' lies. He takes Mark's idea and further builds upon it.
[11] Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ*, 237.

5.3: Repentance, Spiritual Fatherhood, and Spiritual Authority

For Symeon, the relationship between a spiritual father and his disciple was of the utmost importance, as it formed the entire basis of the monastic and spiritual life.[12] Moreover, this relationship was anchored in repentance. The practice of spiritual fatherhood was well established in the East by Symeon's time.[13] It began in earnest with the Desert Fathers and is well attested in their collected sayings as well as in the letters of Barsanuphios and John, and in *The Conferences* of John Cassian. John Klimakos also wrote a short treatise on spiritual fatherhood.[14] Yet it has biblical precedents in that Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, speaks of them as his children and he as their father who has given birth to them through the Gospel (cf. I Cor. 4:14-15).[15] He also speaks to "my little children" of being in the pains of childbirth until Christ be formed in them (cf. Gal. 4:19). Thus, we can say that the practise or tradition of spiritual fatherhood has a long pedigree. Symeon was not unaware of this and he himself points to the lives of SS Antony, Arsenios, Euthymius, and Sabas as examples of important spiritual fathers before recounting the life of his own spiritual father, Symeon the Pious (*CD* 6.1-4). Symeon's relationship to his own

[12] Not only for monks. In his *Epistles*, Symeon is emphatic that a spiritual father was just as important for laymen. The most in-depth study of Symeon and spiritual fatherhood is found in Turner, *Spiritual Fatherhood*. See also H. J. M. Turner, "St. Symeon the New Theologian: His Place in the History of Spiritual Fatherhood," ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, vol. 23, *Studia Patristica* (Leuven: Peeters, 1989), 91–95. For other related papers on this subject, see Hilda Graef, "The Spiritual Director in the Thought of Symeon the New Theologian," in *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Munster: Aschendorff, 1970), 608–14; Krivocheine, "The Most Enthusiastic Zealot: St. Symeon the New Theologian as Abbot and Spiritual Instructor." See also Kallistos Ware's forward to Irénée Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1990).

[13] The standard work on this subject still remains Hausherr's *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*. For a good short summary of the role of the spiritual father, see John Chryssavgis, "The Spiritual Father as Embodiment of Tradition," *Phronema* 1 (1986): 19–31.

[14] The entire purpose of collecting and preserving the sayings of the Desert Fathers was to provide spiritual direction for succeeding generations who did not have the benefit of knowing or consulting them personally. Cassian also cites this as the main reason for his recording his encounters with the desert monks; see Cassian's preface to his conferences in John Cassian, *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers 57 (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1997), 29–31. For Klimakos' treatise, see *To the Shepherd* in the volume of Klimakos already cited; pgs. 249-65.

[15] These verses are illuminating in that the whole context of chapter four concerns the ministry of the apostles. Part of that ministry, it seems, was spiritual direction. As the tradition of spiritual direction developed in the East, the notion of the spiritual father begetting children becomes important.

spiritual father coloured his entire life.[16] Indeed, it has been observed that many of the most important events of Symeon's life centred around his profound devotion to his spiritual father.[17] The life-changing relationship between a spiritual father and his disciple(s) still remains an important element in contemporary Eastern monasticism. One can look at the rich tradition of spiritual elders at Optina monastery in nineteenth century Russia, described so well in the novels of Dostoyevsky. The miraculous renewal of monasticism on Mount Athos in the latter half of the twentieth century was due in large part to the presence there of competent and holy spiritual fathers such as St. Joseph the Hesychast and his disciple Elder Ephraim, as well as SS Porphyrios and Paisios, to name but a few. There is also the example of the deep relationship between St. Sophrony and his spiritual father, St. Silouan.

5.3.1: Repentance as the binding agent between spiritual father and disciple

What connects and binds the spiritual father to his disciple? For Symeon, the binding agent was repentance as well as unswerving and complete obedience to one's spiritual father, which served as the foundation of the relationship between them. Obedience to one's spiritual father was, for Symeon, absolute. One does not follow one's own will – not even in the matter of almsgiving or even of food and drink. A spiritual father is to be regarded as Christ himself (*PTC* 1.21; 24-28). Symeon is clear that the basis for obedience comes from humility and repentance (*PTC* 1.60-62). We are "to repent each day," Symeon tells us, so that we "receive the complete remission of our sins from our father and sponsor" (*PTC* 3.46). Therefore, the action of continual repentance "imposes upon us a duty without limit" (*PTC* 3.46; cf. 1.84). The necessity of finding someone

[16] For detailed discussions concerning the relationship between Symeon and his spiritual father, see chapter four of Turner, *Spiritual Fatherhood* and chapter four of Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition.*
[17] Graef, "The Spiritual Director in the Thought of Symeon the New Theologian," 608.

worthy enough to bind oneself to them in repentance and obedience should be the deciding factor in the acquisition of a spiritual father. Symeon says that when he was looking for a spiritual father, he "wanted to find a mediator and an ambassador…that through his intercession and my submission to him I might find forgiveness for my many offences…" (*CD* 35.4). And when Symeon found his spiritual father, he felt as though he was being led out from "the deceitful world and the affairs and pleasures of the world" and he "drew near to him and in penitence and faith took hold of his feet" (*CD* 35.6). The image here is striking, as Symeon literally takes hold of his spiritual father and binds himself to him.

5.3.2: The teaching and practice of repentance as the main duties of spiritual father and disciple

Why does one need a spiritual father? What are the duties of a spiritual father?[18] A spiritual father has many duties, but for Symeon, the chief among them was to lead his spiritual child to repentance. In this he was following closely the tradition set down before him. In *To the Shepherd,* John Klimakos states that it is the role of the spiritual father to bring "rational souls" to God through repentance.[19] Moreover, the spiritual father's doling out of penances was to aid the disciple in repentance and the disciple should also demonstrate his repentance to his spiritual father without shame.[20]

It is in Symeon's epistles where we find his thoughts on the duties of the spiritual father outlined in great detail.[21] The spiritual father is physician, guide, mediator, and sponsor; but most

[18] See chapter seven of Turner, *Spiritual Fatherhood,* for a detailed discussion of the spiritual father's duties. See also Chryssavgis' "The Spiritual Father as Embodiment of Tradition."
[19] *To the Shepherd*, 90.
[20] See *To the Shepherd*, 12 and *Ladder* 4.62. See also Chryssavgis "The Spiritual Father as Embodiment of Tradition," 25.
[21] As mentioned before, Symeon's letters are pastoral in nature. He is writing to his spiritual children and offering them advice and reminding them not only of their duties toward himself but his own duties as their spiritual father. It is in his letters where Symeon's "programme" of spiritual fatherhood is laid in detail. We unfortunately do not know who exactly these letters were addressed to, but as Krivocheine pointed out some time ago, Symeon was widely known

importantly, the purpose of all this is to foster continual repentance in the disciple. In his first letter, Symeon, like Klimakos before him, states that we must run to our spiritual physician and vomit out the poison of our sins in sincere repentance and without shame (*Ep*. 1.164-72). Further in the same letter Symeon says that one needs to search for a good spiritual father who, as a counsellor, will suggest "ways of repentance" (*Ep.* 1. 196-202).[22] Like the apostle Paul, Symeon speaks of conceiving his spiritual children through teaching and bearing spiritual children "by means of repentance" (*Ep.* 3.9-10).[23]

These ideas are further expressed and elaborated upon in Symeon's other writings. In his *Catechetical Discourses*, Symeon tells his monks that they need to submit themselves to an experienced "craftsman" who will teach and guide them in the way of repentance (*CD* 14.1). One of the means of doing so was to prescribe certain Psalms "such as contain words of penitence and compunction" (*CD* 26.12).[24] In his *Hymns*, Symeon speaks thus of his spiritual father: "Who brought me up from the depth of worldly deceit?... / Who showed to me the way of repentance… (*H* 18.125;128). In another hymn, Symeon states that he had been led by God to the arms of his spiritual father, like the Prodigal in the gospel, and shown the way of repentance (*H* 56.13-18).[25] Indeed it was the main role of the abbot (who acted as prime spiritual father to the monks in his monastery) to teach and guide his monks in the way of humility, contrition of heart, and repentance

among the population of Constantinople and many laymen, both prominent and not, came to him for spiritual direction; see Krivocheine, "The Most Enthusiastic Zealot," 120.

[22] See also Kallistos Ware's 'Forward' to Hausherr's *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, xiii.

[23] In the same letter he also states that it was his own spiritual father "who gave me birth in the Holy Spirit through repentance" (*Ep.* 3.80-83).

[24] This is an instance of Symeon using the Psalms and other liturgical readings as a means of fostering continual repentance. See the discussion of this in chapter four above.

[25] Regarding these lines, Turner points out that the reference to the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11 ff) "suggests that Symeon was helped to repent deeply, and in light of all we know of the importance which both he and his father attached to repentance accompanied by tears, we may reasonably assume that help towards this is being implied"; see Turner, *Spiritual Fatherhood*, 184. For an example of Symeon the Pious' teaching on tears, see *Discours Ascétique* 32 in Simeon le Studite, *Discours Ascétique*, 113.

(*CD* 18.18). Symeon tells his monks that this is one of the main reasons he preaches to his monks: "For this reason I cannot endure to be silent about the things I have seen, about the wonders of God I have known by fact and experience. Rather, I testify of them to all others as in God's presence, and say with a loud voice, 'Run, all of you, before the door of repentance is closed to you by death. Run, that you may take hold of it before you depart this life; make haste that you may receive it, knock, that your Master may open to you before you die, and that he may show himself to you'" (*CD* 34.3).[26]

The duty of repentance, however, was reciprocal. If it was one of the main duties of a spiritual father to teach and guide his disciple in the way of repentance, it was also the duty of the disciple to show sincere repentance and to confess his sins to his spiritual father. Symeon is clear that the disciple must show humility and confess his sins and repent before his spiritual father (*PTC* 1.60-62; 84). This was a duty without limit; that is "to repent each day" in order to "receive the complete remission of our sins from our father and sponsor" (*PTC* 3.46). In a letter to a spiritual disciple, Symeon exhorts him to "display repentance and penitence" to his spiritual father, not through works such as fasting and vigils, but through a sincere "disposition of the soul" (*Ep.* 2.10-15).

It is evident then, that repentance is the cornerstone of the relationship between a spiritual father and his disciple. As Hilda Graef has pointed out, the entire "edifice" of spiritual fatherhood and discipleship rests upon "a firm foundation of humility and the practice of penance" because without that, "contrition would not be authentic and the spiritual life would be a sham."[27]

[26] In this passage Symeon is also making an express link between repentance and the vision of Christ. It is through the door of repentance that Christ will manifest himself to us (Jn. 14:21). We will discuss the link between repentance and vision and Symeon's interpretation of John 14:21, in section 5.8 below.
[27] Graef, "The Spiritual Director in the Thought of Symeon the New Theologian," 613.

5.3.3: Repentance and spiritual authority

In chapter two it was seen Symeon reacted strongly against the over-intellectualizing theology of his day. He saw it as presumptuous and arrogant to attempt or desire to teach others without first having been purified and taught by the Holy Spirit. For Symeon the roots of spiritual authority lie in repentance and humility. Spiritual authority is also tied to ascetic practise which leads to dispassion and holiness.

In his first *Theological Discourse*, Symeon states his case plainly: "Tell me, what more unclean thing can there be than a man who in his presumptive pride tries to teach the things of the Spirit without the Spirit? What is more abominable than an unrepentant man who does not purify himself beforehand, but neglecting this task tries to theologize on the basis of pseudo-knowledge and a worldly wisdom?" (*TD* 1, 116). Symeon here makes the express link between repentance and purification which leads to being taught by the Spirit. Only then can one have authority to teach others or "theologize". If we neglect continual repentance, which leads to purification, then we are relying solely on our own wisdom. Such a person is surely in darkness. Symeon makes this point elsewhere where he states: "And while we sit in the subterranean regions we want / to philosophize about the things above the earth, and even the things in heaven… / and to be called knowledgeable, / consummate theologians" (*H* 52.91-92; 94-95). For Symeon this is the folly of those who seek their own glory; which is only attainable through suffering (in humility) like Christ on the cross. By refusing to suffer like Christ suffered, we cannot be participants in his glory and are left in the darkness of conceit and arrogance (cf. *H* 52.140-150).

This link between repentance and spiritual authority is also prominent in Symeon's *Ethical Discourses.* In the sixth discourse Symeon says: "If, though, you have been made worthy of the grace from above, then speak freely about what concerns it and theologize without hinderance

about him who is God by nature" (*ED* 6; 2:77). If you can't do that then "why do you not embrace the beauty of silence and try, with repentance and tears, to receive and learn these things instead of vainly talking about matters of which you have no true knowledge and wanting to be called a 'saint' without having fulfilled these conditions, and carrying on as if you had already been saved while daring to pick up strange notions and teach them to others?" (*ED* 6; 2:77). Repentance here brings about the conditions (such as dispassion and purity of heart) necessary to be receptive to the teachings of the Spirit which is a condition for being a saint (i.e., that of holiness) – which ultimately gives one authority to teach others. Without repentance one is only a sick physician who is trying heal others of their wounds without being aware of one's own (cf. *ED* 6; 2:77).[28]

It is clear then, that the whole relationship between a spiritual father and his disciple is conditioned by repentance. This is the first necessary condition. This is why one seeks for a spiritual father – to learn the way of repentance. If it is absent or insincere in either party, the relationship either cannot be forged or it breaks down. Repentance acts as the "bond of trust" between a spiritual father and his disciple. The disciple trusts his growth in the way of continual repentance to his spiritual father and the spiritual father trusts that his disciple will repent continually and sincerely before him and God. Repentance also is the guarantee of spiritual authority. It creates in the person the conditions necessary for purity of heart and dispassion which makes the person receptive to the teaching of the Spirit.[29] This in turn gives the person spiritual

[28] There are many other instances of this in the *Ethical Discourses*. See for instance *ED* 4; 2:34-36, where Symeon argues that only the dispassionate (brought about through repentance) can teach others; *ED* 5; 2:58-62, where Symeon states that we need to pray in humility and repentance for the gift of the Holy Spirit and to keep repenting if we want to have the authority to teach others; *ED* 9; 2:119, where Symeon argues that without purity of heart and the practise of the virtues, brought about through repentance, one has no authority to teach; and *ED* 11; 2:152-53, where Symeon clearly states that one has no authority to lead and teach others (as bishop, priest, etc.) without first acquiring purity of heart and dispassion through repentance and humility.

[29] As Turner notes, "Symeon's teaching … envisages dispassion as something to be attained at the end of a process. This process includes repentance, and it is one which a man's own efforts play a prominent and decisive part"; see *Spiritual Fatherhood*, 174.

authority. The fulcrum upon which this all turns is repentance within the relationship between spiritual father and disciple. This in turn leads to holiness and witness.

5.4: Repentance, Holiness, and the "Golden Chain of Witnesses"

In chapter two it was seen that the intellectuals and theologians of Symeon's time fiercely contested the nature of holiness and claimed that it was a thing of the past and beyond the reach of ordinary Christians. This was due, in part, to related questions left over from iconoclasm. It was seen that the saint's lives compiled by Symeon Metaphrastes gave the impression that the communion of saints was closed. The whole storm of controversy which erupted between Symeon and the patriarchal court, hinged on the sanctity of Symeon's spiritual father. Symeon vehemently fought against any "downgrading" of holiness, which he believed led to a mediocre form of Christian living.[30] What is important here, however, is how continual repentance fits into the equation. Does continual repentance lead one to holiness and is this available to all baptized Christians? Symeon believed it did; [31] as can be seen in one of the key passages in Symeon's writings regarding sainthood and holiness:

> The intelligible orders of the higher powers are illumined by God from the first order to the second, and from there to all the others in the same way until the divine light passes through them all. The saints, too, are illumined in the same way by the divine angels…These saints themselves come after the saints who preceded them, and from generation to generation they join [their

[30] For a more detailed discussion of this, see chapter two above.

[31] For a good general survey of the issue of holiness and its relation to spiritual authority, see Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*, Second Edition (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010). See also chapters two and three of Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005). Also useful is Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," in *Society and the Holy and Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 103–52. See also his chapter "Arbiters of the Holy: the Christian holy man in late antiquity" in Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Also useful is John Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314-631* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). See also Jennifer L. Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

> predecessors] through the practise of God's commandments. Like them, they are enlightened and receive this grace of God by participation. They become just like a golden chain with each one of them a link, bound to all the preceding saints in faith, love, and good works. So it is that they become one single chain in the one God, a chain that cannot easily be broken (*PTC* 3.4).[32]

Here it can be seen that the prerequisite to becoming a link in this chain is the keeping of God's commandments, which is repentance.[33] The saints that Symeon has in mind are all the baptized Christians who keep God's commandments. There are no exceptions.[34] They are all part of an unbreakable link in a golden chain, with each succeeding generation illuminating the next. Symeon saw his own spiritual father as an example of just such a living saint.

Holiness of life is what binds each link in the unbreakable chain. And for Symeon, there is no holiness without repentance. It is the first prerequisite for holiness. In his *Catechetical Discourses*, Symeon is emphatic in this regard: "No one ever became holy or received the Holy

[32] This passage shows some affinities to a passage in one of Makarios' homilies (15.38): "Similarly, as many lamps are lighted from the one, same fire, so also it is necessary that the bodies of the saints, which are members of Christ, become the same which Christ himself is"; see *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies*, 123. See also Homily 1.2,4, and 12; 34.2. Golitzin sees in this passage a direct influence of Dionysios' *Celestial Hierarchy* 4.3 and 5 as well as *Divine Names* 3; see Alexander Golitzin, "Hierarchy Versus Anarchy? Dionysius Areopagita, Symeon the New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, and Their Common Roots in Ascetical Tradition," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1994): 131–79. See also Ware's "Forward" to *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, vii.

[33] In *ED* 9; 2:121-22, Symeon argues that a saint is anyone who keeps the commandments (i.e., repentance) and that such actions are a sign of holiness and sainthood. Symeon even quotes directly from John 14:21 to this effect. In *Hymn* 27.56-58, Symeon asserts that Christ is united to and known in all the saints whose souls are purified through repentance.

[34] Turner (*Spiritual Fatherhood*, 174) notes that "in Symeon's opinion seculars as well as monks were obliged to struggle to acquire dispassion if they wished to be saved," because "all Christians are called on to repent…." In the centuries leading up to Symeon, this was, as Peter Brown has noted, a common belief that as "A community of believers, endowed by baptism with the gift of the Holy Spirit, all Christians were potentially 'holy'"; see "Arbiters of the Holy" in *Authority and the Sacred*, 60. Further in that chapter (p. 74), Brown notes that one of the principal functions of the holy man was as "a preacher of repentance." The expectation of finding holy men and women and even knowing them personally, is well attested in monastic texts. To give but one example, Barsanuphios speaks of knowing personally "a servant of God in this present generation" who could raise the dead, cast out demons, cure illnesses and perform other works of power "no less than the apostles." This was taken to be commonplace because in Barsanuphios' view "…our Lord always has genuine servants, whom he no longer calls servants but sons"; see Letter 90 in Barsanuphius and John, *Letters*, trans. John Chryssavgis, vol. 1, The Fathers of the Church 113 (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 111. Symeon's' understanding of the universality of sainthood and holiness is most explicitly outlined in *PTC* 3.65-70, where he argues that all persons (monastics and laymen) and all walks of life and professions have equal value, as long as they are running to the same goal because Christ welcomes "all who come to him in repentance" (3.70).

Spirit, or had the vision of God or experienced his dwelling withing himself, or ever had Him dwelling in his heart, without previous repentance and compunction and constant tears ever flowing as from a fountain" (*CD* 4.10).[35] Quoting the words of the liturgy "The holy things for the holy," Symeon says that "he who does not daily bring forth the secrets of his heart, he who does not display worthy penitence for them," is not holy or worthy, in this case, of approaching the sacred mysteries (*CD* 4.13; see also 4.14 where a failure to repent renders one unworthy of the mysteries).[36] Moreover, this repentance is to be daily and continual (*CD* 4.12 & 15), which suggests that partaking of the mysteries was a daily occurrence at St. Mamas.

The path to holiness through repentance was a daily struggle. Pointing to Paul's admonition to strive for holiness in Heb. 12:14,[37] Symeon entreats his monks: "Why did he say 'Strive'? Because it is not possible for us to become holy and to be saints in an hour! We must therefore progress from modest beginnings toward holiness and purity…we must always struggle for it every day" (*CD* 5.1). This struggle, furthermore, is accompanied by repentance: "Let us repent with all our heart" so that we may rid ourselves of our "evil deeds" and the "unclean thoughts of our hearts" (*CD* 5.1). In the tenth *Catechetical Discourse*, whose subject is holiness, Symeon again says that holiness is a daily struggle and that we reach it through the keeping of the commandments which leads to good deeds (cf. *CD* 10.2 & 3).

In the sixth *Catechetical Discourse,* Symeon uses the examples of the holiness of life of his spiritual father as well as the lives of SS. Antony, Arsenios, Euthymios, and Sabas to argue that it is through repentance and humility that one becomes holy like those Fathers of old. It is

[35] This passage is a good example of Symeon linking repentance to vision. For a good discussion of Symeon's views on tears and contrition, see Hannah Hunt's *Joy-Bearing Grief*, chapters 10-14.
[36] Symeon's teaching of daily repentance and tears before approaching the mysteries is similar to that of his spiritual father; see Simeon le Studite, *Discours Ascétique*, 12.
[37] "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

through imitating their lives of holiness that one becomes holy as well as becomes a witness to the Spirit, and is found worthy to become a God bearer (*CD* 6.1). Ultimately, though, it is by imitating Christ's sufferings, through repentance, that enables one to become God bearers: "For this reason, therefore, I say and will not cease to say that those who have failed to imitate Christ's sufferings through penitence and obedience and have not become partakers of His death…will neither become partakers of His spiritual resurrection nor receive the Holy Spirit" (*CD* 6.10).[38]

It has thus been seen that repentance is the prerequisite for a life of holiness which binds us to the saints in an unbreakable chain of sanctity that can be traced and witnessed throughout history. The path to holiness is entered through repentance and is a daily struggle to imitate the life and deeds of not only the saints of old, but of Christ himself. If Christ suffered, then we will suffer. Furthermore, this is required of all Christians, regardless of rank, station, or profession. No one is excused from continual repentance which enables us to partake in the life of Christ and receive the Holy Spirit dwelling within. We will then be like the God-bearers of old, a holy witness to Christ, in our generation. Symeon not only believed this was possible for all, but that he had seen such an example in the life of his spiritual father. But the struggle has its physical side as well; in the ascetic life.

5.5: Repentance and the Ascetic Life

Just as there is no entry into the life in Christ without first repenting and being baptized, so for Symeon, there is no way of living the ascetic life without repentance. It is the foundation of the monastic life and its continual practise is its purpose. The monk is clothed in repentance and it dictates the rhythm of his daily life. In this, Symeon both reflects prior experience in the continuum

[38] Just before this Symeon states: "But if we are ashamed to imitate His sufferings, which He endured for us, and to suffer as He suffered, it is obvious that we shall not become partakers with Him in His glory."

of experience in the tradition, and as we will see in this short section, he gives a special place to continual repentance in the monastic life of ascetic struggle.[39]

Like his own spiritual father, Symeon's approach to ascetism and the monastic life, places a premium on repentance, tears and compunction.[40] Where I believe Symeon's teaching differs from his spiritual father is in the singular emphasis which Symeon places upon continual repentance. Before a person enters the arena of ascetic struggle, their soul is captive to worldly pleasures and becomes inert and incapable of performing the virtues or keeping any of God's commandments – but for Symeon, "when it is awakened by the trials of asceticism and tears of repentance," the soul will shake off the burden of the flesh and the tyranny of the passions and attain the pure light of Christ (*PTC* 1.77). One of the principal purposes of the monastic life is the shedding of the passions and the acquiring of the virtues. This is done through ascetic toil. In a striking metaphor, Symeon likens the virtues to a series of houses which one must dwell in before finally reaching the "royal vaults of purity" in which one sees Christ enthroned within. What is unique in this image is that for Symeon, the first house (which is the beginning of acquiring the virtues) is that of humility and one can only enter that house through the gate of repentance (*ED*

[39] In this section we are not concerned here with the specifics of Symeon's understanding of asceticism, its roots in the tradition, or how Symeon reflects that tradition. This has been examined in detail by others. The purpose here is to focus on the integrative potential of repentance as an element in Symeon's teaching on asceticism. For an examination of Symeon's views on ascetism, see Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ*, chapter ten; see also Golitzin's chapter "The Shape of Symeon's Thought" in *Life, Times, and Theology*, 55-79, and chapter four of Alfeyev's *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*. For a detailed comparison of Symeon's asceticism with that of his spiritual father, see chapter four of Alfeyev's study. For a good discussion of Symeon's asceticism, see Lysack, "Charismatic Reformer, Mystic or Father? The Reception of Symeon the New Theologian by Pentecostal/Charismatic Theologians." The idea of a monk being clothed in repentance was also expressed as recently as in the life of St Paisios of Mount Athos. His biographer notes that "In particular, he taught that monks are dressed in repentance. The entire life of the monk is repentance"; see Hieromonk Isaac, *Saint Paisios of Mount Athos*, 382.

[40] See Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 103. For some examples of Symeon the Studite's teaching on this matter see *Discours Ascétique* 5, 8, 9, 11, 16, 19, 20, 23, 24, and 32.

11; 2:131-32). Repentance is the gateway which allows one to enter the arena of struggle. There is no other door. No repentance, no entry – and one is left outside in the darkness of the passions.[41]

Although much of Symeon's teaching on asceticism is directed at his monks, who were engaged in the life of ascetic struggle by virtue of their vocation, it was also directed to those living in the world. As was seen above, Symeon made no distinctions between professions and ways of life. All were worthy as long as those engaged in them were also engaged in the struggle to acquire the virtues and live their lives devoted to the keeping of Christ's commandments. Regarding ascetism in general and the role of repentance in particular, Symeon is quite clear that laymen were not exempt. In a striking passage in one of his epistles, Symeon recalls the apostle Peter's denial of Christ, as well as the tax collector, the thief on the cross, the prostitute, and the prodigal son; and asks his spiritual child by what actions did they gain pardon for their sins. Was it through fasting and vigils or by charitable actions? No, it "was simply by repentance" and being "condemned by their conscience" (*Ep*. 2.33-39). Symeon is not saying that ascetic struggle and the practise of the virtues do not play their part (as further in the letter he prescribes quite a number of those activities for his spiritual child to perform), but what he is making clear is that all of these things are useless if not preceded by heartfelt, continual repentance, which is the foundation of the ascetic life which makes possible the practise of the virtues (cf. Mt 3:8 & Lk 3:8-14).[42]

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[41] Here Symeon differs slightly from Klimakos, who placed renunciation of the world as the first step in his ladder, and repentance as the fifth step. I should also note that this metaphor of a succession of houses, is rare in Symeon's writings, as he usually does not have a strict hierarchy or progression of stages in the "spiritual" life (or in his theology in general) that we sometimes encounter in monastic writings; the prime example being Klimakos' *Ladder*. Yet, Symeon no doubt has Klimakos in mind when in the same discourse he says: "To take another comparison, the ascent of those who hurry toward heaven is like a ladder and its steps…it is altogether impossible and beyond human power to avoid beginning at the bottom and going up step by step, and instead somehow by-pass the first rungs in order to get to the higher ones…Just as it is never possible to climb up into an elevated house without a ladder…so it is impossible for the man who does not place his feet according to the order described to enter into the Kingdom of heaven" (*ED* 11; 2:133).

[42] In another letter Symeon states that not only are the ascetic practices such as fasting, vigils, voluntary poverty, and self-denial, etc., useless without a firm foundation of repentance and humility; they could, if not practised with humility and in the sincere wish to imitate Christ, be used by the "demon of arrogance" as a means for bolstering the passion of pride (see *Ep*. 4.293-311). In one of his discourses Symeon calls repentance and compunction the "constant

Furthermore, if the tools of ascetic practise, such as fasting and vigils, are useless without continual repentance as a foundation, they are conversely aided by it. In a discourse on fasting, given during the first week of Great Lent, Symeon speaks of fasting as the foundation of all spiritual activity. Yet it cannot be accomplished in a day or a week. It requires intense struggle and is aided by one's willingness according to one's faith, and additionally "it is also in accordance with the fervor of his ceaseless penitence…that this is accomplished more quickly or more slowly" (*CD* 11.3). Continual repentance here acts as a tool or an aid in one's struggle. Once one has entered the arena of ascetic struggle, repentance is a powerful weapon which gives strength: "Hour by hour, day by day, let us by penitence work at being renewed, so that we may learn to fight and wrestle with the devils, our enemies who are always at war with us" (*CD* 3.9). If a person becomes negligent or slack, they will be wounded by despair. Even if wounded, "we may through fervent penitence become more courageous and skillful fighters" (*CD* 3.10). Continual repentance is thus necessary for the monastic life, both as foundation and as an ongoing tool, for as Symeon notes, even if the monk has given up everything to follow Christ, "tears of penitence" would still remain "vital for his life" (*CD* 5.2).

The final goal of all ascetic struggle is to attain to dispassion which purifies the soul and enables a person to be united to the divine light (cf. *H* 30.576-83). Continual repentance is a key element; for it raises a person up and prevents the passions from touching them. One cannot be free of the passions "unless our mind is borne aloft by penitence and tears and by the humility of spirit that results from them to the height of mastery of the passions" (*CD* 5.24). Dispassion brings a person to God, but it is only through perseverance in continual repentance that he "will gradually

occupation" of the monk and that "if we fail to take pity on ourselves and through penitence find our souls purified and filled with light, the practise of all other things [i.e., ascetic labours and the virtues] will avail us nothing" (*CD* 30.11-12). Square brackets are mine.

perceive…mysteries that are even greater by being taught them by the grace that comes from above" and also experience liberation "from all passions" (*CD* 30.10). This quest for continual repentance will "quickly bring a man to make progress and to attain purification and impassibility" (*CD* 30.10). This results, finally, in the summit of all repentance and ascetic practise – which is union with the divine light: "…all askesis and all practices / are accomplished by us so that we may share in / the divine light like a lamp, like one candle / the whole soul may cast her light before the unapproachable light" (*H* 33.130-33).

In this section continual repentance has been seen as both the foundation of the ascetic life as well as a useful tool in its arsenal of practises. It is the door and its continual practise functions as a vital aid in order to reach the state of dispassion which ultimately unites us to the divine light.

5.6: Repentance and the Spiritual Senses

Repentance helps a person reach the state of dispassion. Dispassion aids that person in uniting to the divine light. Yet, how can it be known that he has been united to this light? How does he perceive or sense it? Can it be perceived or sensed? Symeon was adamant that it could and he castigated many of his contemporaries who claimed that it was not possible to sense the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.[43] The term used – by both Symeon and by those in the tradition before him – to describe this sense perception is 'αἴσθησις και γνῶσις', which could be translated as "perception and knowledge. It is also referred to in the secondary literature as the "spiritual senses". This term had a long history in the patristic tradition before Symeon and his use of it is no doubt indebted to that tradition; but where Symeon is unique is in the frequency of his use of

[43] See especially Symeon's whole argument in his fifth *Ethical Discourse*.

the term (or variations of it), and moreover, what is interesting here is that he seems to be the first in the tradition to link it to repentance.[44]

There is no shortage of references in Symeon's writings for the need to perceive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the union with the divine light, etc., in full knowledge and perception.[45] In *Hymn* 28.86, Symeon calls it "sense perception", which could also be rendered as "consciousness", which has a sense of felt experience.[46] Symeon's main teaching on this is found in his third *Ethical Discourse*:

> It is thus that man, created according to the image and likeness of God, is also honored. He possesses a single perception in a unique soul and intellect and reason. While this perception is divided up five ways according to the physical necessities of the body, it manifests its activity by changing unchangeably, such that it is not sight which sees, but the soul which sees by means of sight, and the same holds true for hearing and smelling, for tasting, and for distinguishing by touch. With regard to spiritual matters, however, the soul is no longer obliged to discern through the windows of the senses. It no longer seeks to open the eyes in order to see or contemplate some existing thing, nor the ears in order to admit discourse…Rather, perception goes outside all of these and is gathered together wholly within the intellect, as being naturally consequent upon the latter and inseparably one with it. To put it more precisely, it possesses the five senses within itself as one rather than several (*ED* 3; 1:122-23).

To summarize this complex passage: a person has both physical senses (sight, hearing, etc.,) and the senses of the intellect or *nous*. It is only when the senses of the body are gathered in the intellect and are united to it, is what enables a person to perceive spiritual realities, such as the Eucharist. For example, when one partakes of the holy mysteries, their bodies "sense" the taste of bread and

[44] The most detailed study of the spiritual senses in Symeon's writings is B. Fraigneau-Julien's *Les Sens Spirituels et la Vision de Dieu selon Syméon le Nouveau Théologien*. The author traces the use of the term αἴσθησις και γνῶσις (and its variations) through Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Makarios, Diadochos, and Maximos to Symeon. Also somewhat useful is Miquel, "La Conscience de La Grace Selon Symeon Le Nouveau Theologien." It is not my purpose here to cover the same ground. What I wish to point out is the emphasis Symeon places upon repentance and its relation to the spiritual senses. For the occurrences of αἴσθησις in patristic texts prior to Symeon, see Lampe, 52.

[45] There are so many references that it would be impossible to note them all here. But for example, see *PTC* 1.7, 34, 41, 53, 79, and 2.2 & 2.3. See also most of *ED* 3, 4, 5, and 6 (but especially *ED* 5).

[46] See the note to this line in Grigg's translation, p. 213.

wine, but what translates those bodily senses into the spiritual reality of them being Christ's body and blood, is the unity of both physical and "intellectual" parts of the whole person (as they are psychosomatic beings). The only way the senses can be united is through them being purified through ascetic practise and the keeping of Christ's commandments. Once the senses are united, hearing becomes sight and sight hearing. They function as single sense perception (αἴσθησις). In this way the whole person is united in both his body and soul and is able to sense spiritual realities. That is why Symeon, using the example of Paul's "rapture" to the "third heaven" in 2 Cor. 12: 2-4, explains that the "ineffable" speech that Paul heard, was heard by both his physical and spiritual senses. His senses acting as one, Paul was able to hear "things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" (v.4).

How are the senses gathered within the intellect (or *nous*)? It is done through a variety of things such as asceticism, stillness (hesychia), practising the virtues, keeping the commandments, etc. The point here being that if the above-mentioned practises are absent, the senses will be scattered among the visible things of this world. Herein lies the importance of asceticism because it is through it that the passions are expunged and dispassion and the purification of the soul achieved; all of which, enables the senses to be united into a single perception.

Yet the key here – and this is where Symeon takes this teaching to a different level – is repentance; because without it, there can be no unity of the senses into a single perception. Symeon states the matter clearly: "So, let us strive to purify ourselves through repentance and humility, and to unite all our senses as one to the God Who is good and transcends the good" (*ED* 3; 1:126). When purity is attained through continual repentance, the person will be taught everything at once by the Holy Spirit and "You will hear with your sight, and see with your hearing" (*ED* 3; 1:126). Moreover, we will be able to hear "the higher things of the Spirit." The things of the Spirit are the

good things which are promised in the life to come, yet "Even in the present life He gives to those who love him that enjoyment, in part, of His own good things. He mysteriously allows them both to sense with the intellect and [like Paul] to hear the ineffable speech which is hidden from the many" (*ED* 3; 1:127).[47]

In the continuum of experience in the tradition, Symeon seems to be unique in that he expressly links repentance to the purification and unification of the senses into a single perception – with the aid of the Holy Spirit. This is a significant contribution, but should come as no surprise as the very things which are required for the purification and unification of the senses (like asceticism, etc.) cannot be accessed without continual repentance. When the senses are united within the intellect (*nous*) into a single perception, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we are then able to perceive spiritual realities.[48] This leads to knowledge of God in full "perception and knowledge" (αἴσθησις και γνῶσις) and union with Him in the divine vision. It is both a pledge of the future and also a present reality. Yet knowledge of God is also dependent upon one's continual repentance – as is the knowledge of one's self and that of others.

[47] Square brackets are mine.

[48] Without the transformative role of the Holy Spirit, this is not possible. Both in Maximos and Palamas the transformative role of the Holy Spirit is key. It is the One Spirit who transforms the natural human senses and makes them one because they are all transformed and by the same Spirit: "They were made to see." The "spiritual" in the spiritual senses comes from the Holy Spirit. A close reading of the first homily of Gregory Palamas on the Transfiguration of Christ will help in clarifying this point: "The light of the Lord's transfiguration does not come into being or cease to be, nor is it circumscribed or perceptible to the senses, even though for a short time on the narrow mountain top it was seen by human eyes. Rather, at that moment the initiated disciples of the Lord 'passed', as we have been taught, 'from flesh to spirit' by the transformation of their senses, which the Spirit wrought in them, and so they saw that ineffable light, when and as much as the Holy Spirit's power granted them to do so. Those who are not aware of this light and who now blaspheme against it think that the chosen apostles saw the Light of the Lord's Transfiguration with their created faculty of sight, and in this way they endeavour to bring down to the level of a created object not just that light — God's power and kingdom — but even the power of the Holy Spirit, by which divine things are revealed to the worthy"; see *Homily* 34.8 in Gregory Palamas, *Saint Gregory Palamas: The Homilies*, trans. Christopher Veniamin, 2nd Reprint ed (Dalton, PA: Mount Thabor Publishing, 2016), 269. It can be seen here that between Maximos and Palamas, Symeon occupies an important place in that he expressly links repentance to the purification and unification of the senses into a single perception – with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

5.7: Repentance and the Knowledge of God, Self, and Others

Once the senses are united within the intellect into a single perception, then a person is able to perceive spiritual realities. This cannot occur without continual repentance which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who plays a crucial role in enabling spiritual perception. The end result leads to knowledge of God in full "perception and knowledge" (αἴσθησις και γνῶσις). Now αἴσθησις concerns the spiritual senses; but what about γνῶσις or "knowledge"? Obviously for Symeon, perception is intimately linked to knowledge. What is this knowledge? Symeon is clear that it is not worldly knowledge, nor is it acquired through book learning. It is only when a person humbles themself and becomes like a fool, and even loses the pseudo-knowledge that they think they have, that they "will see and learn things which no other man has looked upon or can ever see or learn. He will then be taught by God himself" (*PTC* 3.84).[49] The mysteries of God, according to Symeon, remain unknown to those who will not humble themselves in continual repentance and mourning (cf. *H* 44.184-87).[50] Symeon never disparaged the usefulness of worldly knowledge and wisdom, but for him it was utterly worthless in comparison to the knowledge of God gained through humility, repentance, and purity of heart.[51]

[49] On Symeon's own claim to have been taught by God, see the discussion of this in Jim McInnes, "A Byzantine Theodidact: Symeon the New Theologian's Claim to Be Taught by God," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 38, no. 2 (2012): 193–210.

[50] See also *H* 5.16-17 where Symeon states that daily mourning brings about knowledge of God. On the connection between humility and the knowledge of the mysteries of God, see *H* 21.54 ff.

[51] See *ED* 9; 2:112-115 where Symeon has an extended discussion of this. He states that it is the Holy Spirit, and not human learning, which leads to knowledge of God. He compares the "outer wisdom" of secular learning (meaning the Greek philosophers) with the "inner wisdom" of the Holy Spirit. Golitzin correctly (I think) sees in this passage a tension between the Byzantine humanists of Symeon's time vs. monastic learning (which was experiential). For a discussion of this see chapter two above.

There is, then, a link in Symeon's theology between continual repentance and knowledge of God.[52] In a striking passage from his first theological discourse, Symeon makes himself clear beyond doubt:

> We are visible creatures, corruptible and sensual, blind and devoid of light, how then can we know something which is outside all created reality, whether visible or invisible? In addition to this, our sins set up a dividing wall between God and ourselves and separate us from him. If we do not destroy it or scale it through repentance, we will not only be unable to know God, we will not even know that we are men…And if we do not know ourselves, how much greater will be our ignorance of him who is incomparably superior to us? (*TD* 1:116).[53]

This is a remarkable passage for a number of reasons. Symeon is stating here that created beings cannot come to the knowledge of the uncreated because they live in darkness and are devoid of light. They can come to the knowledge of both visible and invisible realities only if they destroy or scale the dividing wall of sin which separates them from this knowledge. And that can only be done through repentance. Then and only then, will they not only obtain knowledge of God, but of themselves as men. Repentance then, also leads to self-knowledge. This passage also has profound anthropological consequences because Symeon is saying that, what is in modern terminology

[52] We should note here that Symeon was not the first to make such a link. We find the same idea expressed in one of Isaac the Syrian's homilies: "It is not, however, the fear of God that gives birth to this spiritual knowledge…but rather this knowledge is conferred as a gift upon that working which belongs to the fear of God. As soon as you search well into the work of the fear of God, you will find this to be repentance, and from this arises spiritual knowledge." See *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, Homily 47:361. For Isaac, spiritual knowledge, which is knowledge of God, is gained through the workings of repentance. The link between knowledge of God and repentance in this passage from Isaac is very similar to Symeon's thought, and may be an instance of direct borrowing. But at the very least, it provides further evidence that Symeon was most likely aware of Isaac's works and was influenced by them (for a discussion of this see chapter four above). Symeon differs from Isaac in his absolute insistence that knowledge of God is impossible without repentance and how he unpacks this in greater detail. For other passages in Symeon where this idea is expressed see *PTC* 3.23; *ED* 5; 2:54-55; *H* 23.525-530 and *H* 43.113-14.

[53] The idea of a "dividing wall" between ourselves and God is similar to a passage from Eph. 2:14, where Paul states that Christ has broken down "the dividing wall of hostility" between ourselves and God. Although not sated explicitly by Paul, the context of the passage seems to suggest that the dividing wall of hostility is sin. In another passage Symeon uses the image of a "veil lying on the understanding" of the heart, and if we do not repent, we "cannot he lifted up to the height" of the knowledge of God (*CD* 14.2). We also find the knowledge of God gained through repentance likened to an ascent to God (*ED* 9; 2:128). Repentance brings us to true knowledge of God, but if we abandon it, we will search vainly for knowledge of God (cf. *H* 22.82-92). Moreover, knowledge of God comes through repentance and imitating "exactly the lives of all the saints," which is the life of asceticism (cf. *H* 29.294-306).

called "the self," is bound up with repentance. The true self is a repentant self.[54] This is a profound statement. But what exactly is "knowledge of self"?

Writing to one of his spiritual children, Symeon exhorts him to imitate David's repentance and humility "because it is through repentance that the cloud of ignorance lying over us is forced to disappear completely and the veil is taken away. When this is done, we both know ourselves more fully and also see the condition of our personal affairs, and look upon the wounds and stains of our soul" (*Ep*. 3.519-24). What are the wounds and stains of our soul? It is nothing other than the realization of our sinfulness (the dividing wall) which separates us from God. Symeon tells us that "in proportion to his repentance and fulfillment of the commandments" a person "is first deemed worthy of knowing by grace what is proper to him and his entire self" (*ED* 9; 2:127). Then, as this repentance and humility increases, so does his knowledge of God, which brings further knowledge of his own unworthiness and sinfulness (*ED* 9; 2:127). It is a cyclical process in which further knowledge of self brings further knowledge of God, which is turn brings further knowledge of one's sinfulness and the need for repentance.

Repentance teaches us about our own fragility (*PTC* 1.13). As such, "Each man must look at himself and understand himself" accompanied by humility and tears of repentance (cf. *PTC* 3.9).[55] As Symeon always theologized from his own experience, he tells us that he did exactly this. Symeon looked at himself and realized his own fragility and sinfulness. In one of his hymns, Symeon calls himself an "adulterer," a "sodomite," a "blasphemer," a "thief," a "liar," etc. (*H* 24.71-81).[56] Symeon was cast out of God's sight and into the vileness of evil. But he tells us that

[54] As far as I can tell, this passage and its implications have not been studied at all. Symeon is asserting something profound here, and we should be paying attention. Anthropology will be discussed in chapter six below.

[55] Symeon also knew very well that this was no easy task: "It is hard for each man to know himself, and there are few who succeed in this philosophy" (*TD* 2.124).

[56] In the lines following this rather unsavory description of himself, Symeon was insistent that he was not speaking in images or metaphorically. Nor was he using hyperbole or embellishing his sins just to make a point. He was telling the truth (see lines 82-83). I believe he should be taken at his word. One would search desperately through the writings

when he came to God in repentance, humility, and mourning, he also came to the knowledge of his sinfulness and it made him turn to God (cf. *H* 54.124-33). Perhaps more than any Father before him, Symeon was acutely aware of his shame and sinfulness and his need for repentance (cf. *H* 55.1-25). This awareness of one's sinfulness and need for profound, continual repentance is the knowledge of self to which Symeon constantly refers. Without this knowledge we remain in ignorance of our own frail condition as well as remain ignorant of God.

But it doesn't end there. Repentance not only brings one to the knowledge of God and self; it also brings knowledge of others and of the true state of the affairs of the world, as well as one's place in the world: "The fruit and role of repentance is at one and the same time to dispel ignorance and obtain knowledge. I mean primarily knowledge about ourselves and human affairs, and after this of things above us and of the divine mysteries which are both invisible and incomprehensible to the unrepentant" (*TD* 1:117).[57] Why is this important? It is important because, as we have already seen (see *PTC* 3.65-70), Symeon made no distinctions between professions and vocations, and ways of life – deeming them all worthy if we are leading a life of repentance and the keeping of the commandments. Yet knowledge of human affairs (gained through repentance) opens one up to the realization that all are sinners in need of repentance and that we also need to help those in need. In the last ten *Theological Chapters* (*PTC* 3.90-100), Symeon makes it clear that it is through humility and continual repentance that we are able to recognize those who are in need, feed the hungry, and clothe the naked. These actions are the fruits of repentance (cf. Lk. 3:8 ff). Thus, it is clear here that in addition to continual repentance bringing knowledge of God and oneself, it also

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of the Holy Fathers in order to find such a self-deprecating litany of one's sinfulness. For a similar passage, see *H* 54.89-104.

[57] Symeon extends this to the knowledge of the mysteries of God revealed in the Scriptures: "The divine matters and those which concern the divinity are laid down in the Scriptures so that all men can approach them for their own benefit, but they are only revealed to those who have fervently repented and been purified by this sincere repentance; indeed, [the revelation] is in due proportion to their repentance and purification" (*TD* 1:117-18). See also Symeon's discussion of spiritual knowledge as related to the Scriptures in *CD* 24. Square brackets are in original translation.

confers knowledge of others and the true state of the affairs of the world. This leads to the fruits of repentance which is practising the virtues and right actions toward others. When you know that your brother is as sinful and in need of repentance as much as yourself, then you are more likely to be merciful towards him. Moreover, when you feed the hungry and clothe the naked you are fulfilling the commandment of loving your neighbour as yourself and "Since Christ himself is in all of these, as we feed the least of them, we feed him" (*PTC* 3.93; cf. Mt. 25:40).

Continual repentance thus leads to knowledge of God, self, and others. This knowledge is inaccessible to the unrepentant. Continual repentance dispels our darkness and ignorance concerning God and opens us to knowledge of him, ourselves and others. Regarding the latter two, there are profound anthropological as well as ethical implications here, as it is only continual repentance which reveals what the "self" really is (a sinner in need of repentance), what the true state of the world and of others is (a sinful world full of sinful people in need of repentance), which in turn leads to right actions toward others (ethical behaviour).[58] Symeon is implying that when we see our own wretched, frail, and sinful state, we can also see it in others; and this moves us to mercy and compassion. This is Christ-like behaviour. And it is impossible without continual repentance. Ultimately, there is no knowledge of God without divine illumination, and in the final section below, it will be seen that even the vision of God is impossible without continual repentance.

5.8: Repentance and the Vision and Experience of God

In this chapter's study of the integrative potential of continual repentance as a hermeneutical key in Symeon's writings, it is fitting that it end with its relationship to the vision

[58] In this vein one could argue that continual repentance is the foundation of all ethics. A bold statement, but one that I think Symeon is clearly implying.

of God.[59] As both Krivocheine and Alfeyev have noted, Symeon's teaching on the vision of God (or light) is the most important aspect of his teaching.[60] Even a cursory glance at the secondary literature on Symeon reveals that the word "light" appears the most often in the titles of scholarly papers and book length publications on Symeon. To take an example from Symeon's writings, the word φῶς (light) and other related words like φωτίζειν (to enlighten or illuminate) are the most oft used words in his hymns.[61] It is no exaggeration to say that, with few exceptions, this aspect of Symeon's theology has been the singular object of concern for most scholars. And perhaps rightly so. In this section, however, I am deliberately leaving aside those aspects of the vision itself which have occupied most scholars. That is, I will not be concerned here with the question of *who* Symeon sees in the light; or the nature of the light (created vs. uncreated); or how Symeon's articulation of the light was a major influence on Palamas and the hesychasts; nor will I be concerned with paradigms of interpretation[62] or prior patristic writings on the vision of light.[63] All these questions have been discussed, analyzed, argued over, and debated by others at great length in the literature. What I will be concerned with, and make a strong case for, is the direct link which Symeon makes between repentance and the vision of God. With the exception of Golitzin, McGuckin, and Loudovikos, this link has hardly been mentioned, much less explored.[64]

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[59] There are multiple ways of expressing this term. Aside from "vision of God", we could use "divine vision", "vision of light", "vision of Christ", "luminous vision", etc. They can all be used interchangeably. For the sake of uniformity, I will, for the most part, use the term "vision of God".

[60] See Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ*, 215 and Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 226.

[61] See the index of Greek words in the third volume of Symeon's hymns in the *Sources Chrétiennes* series (*SC* 196), 387-389.

[62] For a discussion of this see McGuckin's paper "The Luminous Vision."

[63] For a discussion of this see Hilarion Alfeyev, "The Deification of Man in Eastern Patristic Tradition (With Special Reference to Gregory Nazianzen, Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas)," *Colloquium* 36 (2004): 109–22. For a useful general study of this topic, see Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[64] Curiously, both Krivocheine and Alfeyev do not seem to make this link, or at least not overtly. McGuckin goes as far as to say that the classic concerns which occupy most scholars when analyzing Symeon's luminous visions, can be distracting, as they often do not notice the express link between repentance and vision that Symeon himself makes;

As seen in the first section of this chapter, Symeon's interpretation John 14:21 is crucial in this regard. Christ's words in the gospel of John were read quite literally by Symeon – if we love Christ we keep his commandments, and in turn we will be loved by him and he will manifest (or show/reveal) himself to us. Symeon (influenced by Mark the Monk) interpreted the keeping of the commandments as continual repentance. Therefore, if we continually repent, then Christ will reveal himself to us. The vision is not always granted to the "perfect", nor is it necessarily granted to those who have been purified of the passions (although this helps); and it is definitely not granted to the lazy or proud. It is also not the result of intellectual contemplation or altered states of "consciousness". Rather, Symeon is clear that only those who sincerely and continually repent, will see God. Continual repentance is the gateway to the vision of God and as we continually repent our desire to see God increases as does our need for continual repentance; which leads to a deeper communion with God in light. For Symeon, there is no other way. The more we repent, the more we know ourselves as sinners. This deepening humility leads to a sincere self-emptying and submission of our will to Christ. This is how we show our love for him. In turn, he reveals himself to us. This is what constitutes the experience of God for Symeon.

In my own close reading of Symeon's texts I have found no less than seventy direct references linking repentance to the vision of God, as well as a possible six more indirect inferences.[65] My approach, then, will be to go systematically through Symeon's writings, as I believe this will allow us to draw our conclusions based upon what Symeon himself says.

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see McGuckin's paper "Repentance as Divine Communion in St. Symeon the New Theologian's Hymns of Divine Love," 11.

[65] How these references have been either ignored or gone unnoticed is quite baffling, as in some instances Symeon's language is unequivocal: without sincere, heart-felt repentance, one simply will not see God. Of course, it will be impossible to either cite or closely analyze all of the relevant texts, but by focusing on some of the most explicit references, I hope to make my point clear. As a curious aside, in his epistles, Symeon does not make any explicit link between repentance and the vision of God. This is perhaps due to the pastoral nature of those epistles, where Symeon is focused on giving practical spiritual advice. Symeon does, however, link repentance to the keeping of the commandments, spiritual fatherhood, ascetic practice, and knowledge of self.

In his *Practical and Theological Chapters*, Symeon states the matter plainly: "It is one thing to be content with shabby clothes...but a different matter to put on the light of God...only they [put on the light] who constantly search for it through all kinds of penitence; those who become children of light and of the day through the fulfillment of the commandments" (*PTC* 1.90).[66] Symeon is here directly linking putting on the light of God, which comes through the vision of him, to constant repentance and the fulfillment of the commandments. Elsewhere he states that when, through ascetic toil we have overcome the body, we will see God – but only when our eyes are opened by the tears of repentance (cf. *PTC* 1.101).[67]

Several key passages are also found in the *Ethical Discourses* where Symeon links repentance to the vision of God. In the final exhortation at the end of his first discourse, Symeon calls upon his monks to repent ceaselessly and search after the mysteries of God. Yet the searching is fruitless without continual repentance: "Make haste instead by grace of repentance and tears and humility, and by the fulfillment of all the commandments, to purify your own souls…so that you may enjoy the both the present and the future good things in a state of revelation, of perception and of vision" (*ED* 1.12; 1:80). This passage is also interesting in that Symeon, on top of linking repentance to vision, also connects it to the revelation of God (or knowledge of God) and perception (αὶσθήσει). Speaking of Adam's failure to repent and his subsequent fall from grace in Paradise, Symeon tells us that God gave Adam, and now he gives to us, the "saving medicine of repentance," so "that those who fall from everlasting life out of sloth and inattention may ascend to it again with a brighter and more resplendent glory" (*ED* 2.7; 1:115). In another discourse, Symeon similarly likens our continual repentance to an ascent to the light of God: "Thus, purified

[66] Words in brackets are in the text of the translation and are not mine.
[67] For more references in the *Practical and Theological Chapters* to repentance and/or tears to the vision of God, see *PTC* 3.21-23, 3.39, 3.46 & 3.77.

by virtue of daily and unceasing penitence, and by the tears which spring from and through it…we must hasten as sons of the light to ascend to the light which is above" (*ED* 4; 2:38). Of course, who but Christ is in this light? The light is for Symeon the revelation of Christ's divinity; and this divinity is not revealed to everyone – for it is unapproachable and invisible to those who are mired in the darkness of the passions and of unbelief. However, the light of Christ's divinity is seen and revealed "to those who with faith and in fear and trembling do the commandments and give evidence of a worthy repentance" (*ED* 10; 1:145). A worthy repentance also gives us boldness before God and a familiarity with him which allows us to converse with him face to face like a friend. Those who speak with God in such manner are those who, through repentance, "see Him plainly with the eyes of the intellect [νους] (*ED* 13; 2:171). If we do not see Christ with the eyes of our intellect, then we are not to ever claim that it is not possible. Christ said it was possible to see him, for he is "the light of the world" (Jn. 8:12). Our failure to see Christ, according to Symeon, is because of our blindness. More importantly, those who are blind "have remained so because they have not loved Him and kept his commandments. If they had loved him and kept his commandments, then they would have longed to see Him…and He Who is not false, but is by nature true and the truth, would have manifested himself to them" (*ED* 13; 2:172). And finally, if we ever find ourselves in the condition where we cannot see Christ because we have fallen from his glory, we should grieve for ourselves and "then make haste by repentance and confession to attain to the good things which are eternal" – namely the glory of the light and vision of Christ (*ED* 13; 2:172).[68]

Moving into the *Catechetical Discourses*, the instances where Symeon links continual repentance to the vision of God become more numerous. In the closing words of his very first

[68] For other important references to repentance and the vision of God in the *Ethical Discourses*, see *ED* 1.12; 1:77, *ED* 3; 1:125, *ED* 4; 2:23, *ED* 7; 2:101-102, & *ED* 11; 2:136-37.

discourse given to his monks shortly after becoming abbot of St Mamas, Symeon exhorts them to continue progressing in their monastic life and hopes that they may increase in faith, purity, the fear of God, compunction and tears of repentance, because by these things "the inward man is purified and is filled with divine light…" (*CD* 1.5). When we are filled with divine light, we have Christ abiding in us. Christ's abiding in us, however, will only occur "when we have kept God's commandments" and our hearts have been cleansed "by tears and penitence, so that henceforth we may see the divine Light, Christ Himself, and possess him abiding in us" (*CD* 2.15). This is a promise for all baptized Christians, monks and laymen included. Using King David as an example, Symeon states that it is possible for all people to "be penitent at all times"; because when we daily weep and repent over our sins, we "can receive the Holy Spirit and become a friend of God and enjoy the vision of Him" (*CD* 5.3).

Symeon sometimes used metaphors when speaking of repentance and the vision of God. One of those metaphors was likening repentance to a door or gateway to the vision. In his ninth discourse, Symeon compares repentance to the narrow door to the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt. 7:13). We must enter this narrow door of repentance by mortifying our flesh and denying our worldly lusts. Only when we have done so by mourning daily, can we enter the kingdom of heaven. Without entering the narrow door of repentance, "it is impossible to see God, who Himself is the light that enlightens the heart of every man" (*CD* 9.9). In another discourse Symeon, likens continual repentance to the gateway that leads one out of darkness to the light, and furthermore "He who does not enter into the light has not properly gone through the gate of repentance; for had he done so, he would have been in the light" (*CD* 28.5). As such, Symeon practically begs his monks to practise continual repentance through the keeping of the commandments: "Run, run, while it is still the time when He shines on you…Run, seek, knock, that the door of the kingdom

of heaven may be opened to you…it is here that we have been commanded to ask, to seek, and to knock by means of penitence and tears…" (*CD* 15.5).[69]

Continual repentance also brings knowledge of one's own sinfulness and need for repentance, which in turn ignites our desire to see God and deepen our communion with him, which spurns a deeper repentance.[70] This cycle was played out in Symeon's own life and he provides a detailed description of this in his final two discourses. Speaking of his own experiences now, Symeon says that he had frequently seen the light, sometimes from afar, and sometimes it was hidden from him. This caused him "unbearable pain" – but "when I lamented and wept and displayed complete solitude and obedience and humility it appeared to me again" (*CD* 35.8). When he lost the light, Symeon sought it again with tears of repentance, and this cleansed his mind and the vision of light increased, permitting him to see God's glory even more (cf. *CD* 36.9). This continuous cycle of repentance and vision, bringing about more desire for God and deeper repentance was a source of hope for Symeon, for "It is in faith that hope is planted, and in this soil, it is watered by penitence and tears; then, as Thy light shines on it, it takes root and grows well" (*CD* 36.12). And as Symeon saw his little plant of hope grow, watered in the tears of continual repentance, he was both taught by God and enlightened by him, so much so that he could exclaim that "I live in joy, as though I have passed above all faith and hope…For if I possess Thee, what more do I hope for?" (*CD* 36.12). Indeed, what more could we ourselves hope for?[71]

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[69] In *CD* 23.5-6, Symeon also used another powerful metaphor for continual repentance – that of a winepress. For a full discussion of this, see Hannah Hunt's paper "Divine Light and Spiritual Intoxication: Symeon the New Theologian's Image of Penitence as a Mystical Winepress." For a discussion of the theme of 'spiritual intoxication' in Symeon's writings, see Basil Krivocheine, "Le Theme de l'ivresse Spirituelle Dans La Mystique de Saint Symeon Le Nouveau Theologien," ed. F.L. Cross, vol. 5, *Studia Patristica* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962), 368–76.

[70] Loudovikos (*Analogical Identities*, 106) makes this point when he states: "Relationship/repentance leads, as vision of God, to judgement/knowledge of the individual, with the aim of even deeper repentance/relationship, i.e., deeper vision of God. Because the sight of God leads to an even deeper desire for a vision of Him, and this is expressed as an even deeper desire for repentance."

[71] For other references in the *Catechetical Discourses* concerning repentance and the vision of God, see *CD* 2.8; *CD* 6.4; *CD* 14.3; *CD* 17.3-4; *CD* 29.7; and *CD* 32.3-4. In this section I have deliberately left out Symeon's detailed

The link between continual repentance and the vision of God is laid out with profound clarity in Symeon's final, culminating work – the *Hymns*. When we continually repent, we become children of the divine light, "little children of God" (cf. *H* 8.10-12). The only way we can become children of God and dwell in God's house is through repentance: "…and let us run by repentance! / For by this conversion all we who have been cast out shall enter in, / there is no other means of going inside…" (*H* 15.257-59; cf. also lns. 250-54, where again Symeon mentions being children of God through repentance).

Continually repenting and mourning over our sins allows God to see us and display "his unspeakable and strange glory" to us (cf. *H* 16.16-20). It also elicits God's mercy as he sees us repenting and weeping over our fallen state, which brings purification and illumination: "…your mercy is beyond / the mind, which You abundantly / pour out to those who fall / and fervently repent, / You both purify and enlighten them, / and You make them participants of light, / companions of your divinity" (*H* 17.63-68). God's mercy also makes Symeon desire more repentance, as he begs God to "turn me again to repentance, to tears, to remorse, / so that I may be washed, and purified, and see / your glory shining clearly in me" (*H* 24.365-67). Continual repentance brings about the revelation of both God himself and his joyous light. In his mercy, God reveals himself to us. For Symeon, this is what we should be constantly striving for. We, as repentant servants of God, are called upon to serve him; and if our repentance is acceptable, our service will be well-pleasing to God (cf. *H* 27.158-61.) The reward of this repentant service is our friendship with God and our union with him: "and then having been made wholly a friend of God by these virtues, / the whole person is united and sees him face to face" (*H* 27.162-63).

descriptions of his own visions of light, found primarily in *CD* 16 and 22 (as well as in *ED* 5). I have done so because I will discuss them in the final chapter. Symeon's descriptions of his first two visions contain key anthropological concepts which fit in well with the contents of that chapter. Having said that, Symeon does indeed link continual repentance to his own visions of God; see *CD* 16.3 & 5; and *CD* 22.3-4, 6, & 10.

In several hymns Symeon once again refers back to the keeping of the commandments – but now he is linking them to the vision of God: "Those whom He shall enlighten by his illumination, / to *these* he will give to see / things in the divine light. / In proportion to their love, / and their keeping of the commandments / do the enlightened ones see, / and they are initiated into the depth / of divine and secret mysteries" (*H* 29.209-16).[72] Moreover, those who purify themselves with "zeal and repentance" are the ones who show their love for Christ and are thus capable of contemplating his divine plans (cf. *H* 32.105-109). This results in the keeping of Christ's commandments which in turn leads to our union with him and our partnership in his glory (cf. *H* 32.110-113). Here we see the reciprocal nature of Jn. 14:21 played out – we show our love for Christ by keeping his commandments and he loves us in return and reveals himself to us. Yet here Symeon takes this revelation to mean union with Christ and a share in his glory.

Yet, the keeping of Christ's commandments is not an easy task. We must struggle in continual repentance and weeping; we must deny ourselves and submit our will totally to Christ; we must become a stranger to the world and an enemy of our own desires (cf. *H* 48. 90ff.). For Symeon, this is what constitutes eternal wealth – not the riches of this world, but love for Christ and following in his footsteps. And when Christ sees us struggling continually in repentance and sorrow, an amazing thing happens: "again of a sudden He shall appear, and again He shall illuminate you, / again He shall give you a glimpse of inexhaustible wealth to you, / the imperishable glory of his paternal face" (*H* 48.108-110). This is the eternal wealth – the joy of being in Christ's presence. Yet, without continual repentance and the conscious awareness and knowledge of that repentance, this joy cannot be experienced. In one of his final hymns, Symeon, speaking in the voice of Christ, poses a question both to himself and to all of us: "Therefore how

[72] Italics are in the original translation and are not mine.

shall [the light] exist in a soul not totally purified, / in a soul that has never come to the conscious feeling of repentance?" (*H* 55.130-31).[73] Indeed, how could the light exist and be revealed to one who has not come to Christ in continual, conscious repentance? Symeon wrestled with this question his whole life; but he knew the answer through his own experience of God – the light of Christ, his manifestation to us, and the joy of our union with him is only possible through the hard struggle of continual repentance.[74]

5.9: Conclusion

In the third methodological principle, it was stated that the theology of a Father becomes clear from an examination of all his works, and not just from one of his texts. In this chapter, all of Symeon's works have been considered, and I believe a definite claim can be made that there is a clearly defined theology of continual repentance which unites the various elements of his theology. This also accords well with the fifth methodological principle[75] which presupposes that it is possible to study the theology of a given father as a congruent "system" in which all elements are interrelated. In the case of Symeon's theology, it is clear that indeed all the various elements

[73] In the Greek text of Symeon's works, the last line (131) reads: "μὴ εἶς συναίσθησίν ποτε ἐλθουςῆ μετανοίας" (see *Hymn* 55.131 in *SC* 196: 265). The key word here is συναίσθησίν, which can be translated as 'joint-perception' or joint-sensation'; which means to perceive something simultaneously (see the entry for συναίσθησίν in Liddell and Scott, 1693). In his translation of Symeon's hymns, George Maloney translates συναίσθησίν as "conscious awareness," which I believe is a more accurate translation than "conscious feeling"; see St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymns of Divine Love*, 282. In both cases, neither Griggs nor Maloney manage to capture the sense of perceiving something simultaneously. Alas, this seems to be an instance of something getting 'lost in translation'. The word συναίσθησίς was also used in patristic texts prior to Symeon (see Lampe, 1298), but Symeon seems to be using it here in a singularly unique way, which has no antecedents in prior Patristic literature. What Symeon is saying here is that all at once, or simultaneously, the soul perceives the divine light the moment it has come to a conscious perception/awareness of its own repentance. In other words, Symeon is telling us that repentance *is* the soul's illumination. Though he does not cite this particular text, McGuckin also makes the same point, namely that for Symeon, "This gift of unitive vision *was* the soul's repentance" (see "Repentance as Divine Communion in St. Symeon the New Theologian's *Hymns* of Divine Love," 20). Loudovikos makes a similar point in *Analogical Identities*, 101. Symeon may also be following Paul. See Appendix 1, for a discussion of this.

[74] For further references in Symeon's *Hymns* linking repentance to the vision of God, see *H* 4.83-90; *H* 8.41-43, 60-66; *H* 13.1-2; *H* 15.16 ff; *H* 17.369-75; *H* 24.230-47; *H* 25.20,40; *H* 27.143-49; *H* 32.80-84; all of *H* 49; *H* 50.94-103; *H* 53.1-10, 26-27*;* and *H* 55.20-25, 33-35.

[75] See section 1.5 in chapter one above for a detailed outline of both these principles.

of his "system" have continual repentance as a common denominator, which suggests that it plays a key role in Symeon's life and theology and provides a common ground for integrating the various elements of his "system".[76] Both of these principles presuppose a knowledge of the wider theological, historical, and social context in which those works were written. That context was examined in chapter two.

In addition to this, chapter three examined the possibility of reading Symeon's theology using Torrance's language of continual repentance. Based on the texts that he examined, Torrance himself posited that continual repentance could be seen as the framework for the living the totality of the Christian life. He posited two questions. Firstly, he asked if continual repentance could be found in texts outside the range of his study (namely the fifth through the first half of the seventh century) and can it be used to examine those texts. As seen in this chapter, this indeed can be done (as Symeon's texts fall outside this range). The examination of Symeon's texts as thoroughly as space has permitted, has led to the conclusion that continual repentance forms the backbone of his theology. In fact, it is the singular thread which holds all the varying aspects of Symeon's theology together. From the keeping of the commandments, to spiritual fatherhood, spiritual authority, holiness and witness, asceticism, the spiritual senses, knowledge of God and self, and finally to the vision of God, continual repentance is what they all have in common and what binds them together. It can be concluded that for Symeon, continual repentance was indeed the framework for living out the Christian life, and it can also be concluded that Torrance's language of continual repentance can be applied to texts beyond the seventh century and (at least in Symeon's case) it does possess an integrative potential as a hermeneutical key to Symeon's theology.

[76] I should note here that I am using the word "system" very loosely, as Symeon was no "systematic" theologian.

The second question that Torrance posited was what does this language of continual repentance say about texts that have been traditionally labelled as "mystical"; and by proxy, what does continual repentance tell us about "mysticism"? As Symeon's texts have definitely been labelled as "mystical" and his theology as "mysticism", what then does the study of continual repentance in Symeon's theology, say about these things? It says a few things, some that are quite radical. Symeon's experience of God comes from his complete self-emptying, his total submission of his will to Christ. For Symeon, continual repentance was indeed the only framework for living the totality of the Christian life. In Symeon's hymns, continual repentance *is* the soul's illumination and this is what constituted the experience of God for Symeon. This is a radical understanding of what is today often called "spirituality" or what has traditionally been defined as the "mystical" experience of God. Symeon is saying something which has profound consequences on both how his theology has been traditionally read as well as for the traditional and contemporary understanding of what constitutes "spirituality" and "mysticism". Symeon's experience of God may very well lead to a fundamental questioning of accepted premises and force a re-evaluation of preconceived notions. This is, I think, a welcome thing – and one that is perhaps long overdue.

So, what conclusions can be drawn from this chapter's study of continual repentance in Symeon's theology? I believe the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. That the vision and experience of God is *not* the result of intellectual contemplation alone.
2. That the vision and experience of God is *not* the result of the subjective ego which seeks to possess God in the utmost limits of consciousness; nor is it an altered "state of consciousness".
3. That the vision and experience of God is *not* pious narcissism.

4. That the vision and experience of God is *not* the soul's ecstatic flight of the alone to the alone, or any other such manifestations Platonic spiritism.

Rather, the vision and experience of God is a free gift or grace of God granted to those who, out of love for Christ and the desire to keep his commandments, have voluntarily submitted their free will in humble, self-emptying repentance. It is a repentance which is actualized in the believer, in cooperation (*synergia*) with God. It is a repentance in which one is, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, consciously aware; and it continues until death. This constitutes the framework for living the totality of the Christian life. It is the gate to the light. It is the soul's illumination and purification. Without it there is no entry into the kingdom of heaven; there is no relationship between spiritual father and disciple; there is no way to achieve holiness or witness to Christ; there is no ascetism; there is no way to purify the soul or unite the spiritual senses into a single perception; there is no way to practise the virtues; there is no way to come to the knowledge of God, one's self or others; and there is no vision of God. If this is the case, and I believe that Symeon is making this case, then this defies any definition of what currently constitutes "spirituality" and/or "mysticism".

Yet, it also points to something far deeper, profound, and more nuanced than the current understanding of "mysticism" and "spirituality" allows for. It points to continual repentance as being the fundamental ontological condition for living out the totality of the Christian life.[77] This also suggests that there is an anthropological dimension to continual repentance – that the human self is a repentant self. The final chapter will thus examine just what this means for Symeon as well as how it is linked to the final problem concerning his fragmented image and ambiguous place in Orthodox theology.

[77] McGuckin makes a similar point when he states: "Since it is the human *telos*: the goal and entire point of human existence on earth; the experience of the divine light cannot be relegated to being some exotic experience of a few random saints. It has to be posited as the fundamental reason human beings exist." See "Divine Light and Salvific Illumination in St. Symeon the New Theologian's *Hymns* of Divine Love," 166.

Chapter 6

The Repentant Self: Anthropology as the Key to Solving the Riddle of Symeon's Ambiguous Place in Orthodox Theology

6.1: Introduction

At the end of the last chapter, I noted that Symeon's fragmented image has still not been pieced together, nor has the riddle of his ambiguous place been answered. In this final chapter, I will argue the case that the key to piecing together Symeon's fragmented image and solving the riddle of his ambiguous place, lies in his anthropology; that is, his understanding of the nature of the human person and the crucial role played by continual repentance and the human will. For Symeon, repentance is a gift of God, but it must be appropriated and this can only be done through a psychosomatic act of the free will. Repentance is also dynamic and active. As part of our being, it activates the will in cooperation with our two-fold nature of body and soul, toward Christ. It is always moving one's being toward a becoming in communion, which is both interpersonal and eschatological. As such, our analogical identity and consubstantiality with Christ is never static. It is never static because the human will, activated by repentance, works in cooperation with God's divine will.[1] The importance of this will become clear below when the connection between Maximos the Confessor, Symeon, and Gregory Palamas, is explored. I will also argue the case

[1] In Orthodox theology, this is called "synergy" (συνεργία). Kallistos Ware sums up the Orthodox teaching on synergy as follows: "To describe the relation between the grace of God and human freedom, Orthodoxy uses the term cooperation or synergy (*synergeia*); in Paul's words: 'We are fellow-workers (*synergoi*) with God' (I Corinthians iii, 9). If we are to achieve full fellowship with God, we cannot do so without God's help, yet we must also play our own part: we humans as well as God must make our contribution to the common work, although what God does is of immeasurably greater importance than what we do." Ware quotes a prominent eastern monk as saying, "The incorporation of humans into Christ and our union with God require the cooperation of two unequal, but equally necessary forces: divine grace and human will." See Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity*, Third edition (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 215. As will be seen, repentance is what activates the human will in Symeon's theology. For Ware the ultimate example of synergy between divine grace and human will is the Theotokos.

that a deeper understanding of Symeon's anthropology can help ascertain and assess Symeon's theological contributions as well as assess what his significance is for today.

With those thoughts in mind, this chapter will proceed as follows. In the first part of this chapter, I will provide a brief summary of Biblical and Patristic anthropology in order to show that Christian teaching has always placed equal emphasis upon man as a twofold being composed of both body and soul. Especially important is Irenaeus' contention that the image of God in man is not, as Augustine maintained, exclusively in the soul, but is also in man's physical body as well. Also important for the discussion is Makarios' teaching that the centre of the human person is in the heart. This is also biblical and reflected in the teachings of the Fathers before Symeon. It will be seen that Symeon taught this as well.

The second part will examine the anthropological "axis" between Maximos the Confessor, Symeon, and Gregory Palamas. Firstly, Maximos' teaching on the human will, will be examined within the context of the Monothelite heresy and I will underscore its supreme anthropological value as a corrective to Neo-Platonic forms of spirituality. Next, Gregory Palamas and his conflict with Barlaam in what is called the "hesychast" controversy of the fourteenth century, will be examined. A key point which I will focus on is Palamas' insistence on the full participation of man's physical body in the process of prayer and his insistence that man's complete psychosomatic being is illuminated by divine light. Finally, I will then backtrack and consider Symeon's anthropology in light of the other two. I will argue that Symeon's two most significant theological contributions, which link him to Maximos and Palamas, are his making repentance a fundamental condition of Being and his insistence on the total participation of the body and its illumination in the divine light. By considering Symeon last, I hope to show that when he is configured between

Maximos and Palamas, his pivotal position in the continuum of experience in the tradition becomes clear.[2]

In the final part, I will argue that the Platonic reading of Symeon's theology is anthropologically problematic because it does not consider that repentance activates the human will in a motion toward our eschatological completion and perfection in Christ (Being as becoming in communion). These Platonic forms of spirituality are static in that they always posit a lack or deficiency in human nature because they see man's materiality as a falling away from divine perfection. In contrast, authentic biblical and Patristic anthropology sees man as a complete being, even though fallen, and that it is through repentance that the human will is activated toward an eschatological becoming in communion with Christ. The upshot of the Platonic readings of Symeon, is that his complete person is never seen, because the "spirituality" and "mysticism" in which he is read, is unable to see the whole human person. All that is left is a fragmented image of Symeon, which is evident from the diverging interpretations of his life and works, which this reading fosters. I will conclude with making the case that it is only by moving beyond these forms and categories of spirituality and mysticism – forms and categories that are rendered questionable in light of repentance – that Symeon's image will be pieced together and his place assessed. Not only should scholars move beyond these forms in their interpretation of Symeon, but it is time that they be abandoned altogether. This is implied in Symeon's absolute insistence on the all-embracing responsibility of repentance. This is Symeon's legacy and challenge to us. Yet before this, it is

[2] This adheres to the fifth of my methodological principles, which is "Interrelatedness and Interconnectedness in Time"; outlined in the first chapter. The fifth principle allows for the comparative analysis of the works of several Fathers who are connected in a certain way, provided that one does not artificially draw together two or more Fathers who have lived in totally different contexts. Rather, the fifth principle states that one must look for real connections between them, which may be of various kinds. Therefore, one must precisely define their contextual interconnectedness; which will hopefully be apparent by the end of the second part.

necessary to go back and take a look at what Scripture, the Fathers, and Church tradition say about the nature of the human person.

6.2: Biblical and Patristic Anthropology – A Brief Summary

6.2.1: Biblical and Patristic Anthropology (1): Irenaeus vs Augustine on the Image of God in Man

The very first chapter of Genesis states that man was created in the image and likeness of God (1:26-27). In the more detailed account of man's creation, it is further stated that "God formed man of the dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (2:7). Man is therefore not only made twofold, consisting of both soul and body, but he is also made from the material elements of creation. This was of great significance for the Fathers. For Gregory the Theologian this meant that man is created out of both "invisible and visible natures," meaning man "is a kind of second world…placed on earth, another angel…a beholder of the visible creation, an initiate into the intelligible…earthy and heavenly, transitory and immortal…a mean between greatness and lowliness. He is at once spirit and flesh."[3] Being formed from the dust of the ground also means that man is intimately connected to material creation. Not only is man's soul sacred, but also his body; and by extension the created world is also sacred because it is created by God.[4] It also means that when man fell, so did all of creation.

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[3] See *Or.* 38.11 in St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Festal Orations*, trans. Verna E. F. Harrison, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 68. Several centuries later, John of Damascus repeats this passage of Gregory almost word for word. See *On the Orthodox Faith* 2.12 in St. John of Damascus, *Writings*, trans. Frederic H. Chase, The Fathers of the Church 37 (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 235.

[4] This is why John of Damascus defended the *materiality* of the icon. I have already quoted from this famous passage (see chapter two above), but it is worth reiterating that for John it is crucial to venerate Christ who fashioned matter, dwelt in a material body and who used matter to affect our salvation. In this famous passage, John is not only upholding the Incarnation and the human nature of Christ, but is also defending the sacredness of the created, material world and the fact that God uses parts of that material creation as agents in man's salvation. So, in a sense, the iconoclast controversy not only contained a Christological element, but was also a profound assertion and defense on the part of the Fathers, of the sacredness of creation and the material world. Matter was not the lowest form of emanation or something from which to escape, as the Platonists argued, but contained in itself an intrinsic value and holiness precisely because it was made by God.

In so short a space, I do not have the luxury of investigating all the subtle nuances in which this has been expressed in Patristic anthropology. For this reason, I have chosen Irenaeus as an example because in his writings is found the foundations of a robust Patristic anthropology already laid out, but also because with few exceptions (as will be seen below) all subsequent Patristic anthropology is a variation and working out, in one form or another, of Irenaeus' work. He also provides an excellent corrective to a spirituality which is disembodied and favours what is spiritual over what is not.

Crucial to Irenaeus' anthropology is the idea that the image of God in man is found in both man's soul *and* body. Irenaeus states that God fashioned man out of the delicate elements of the earth and sketched his own form into it, which included his breath "so that both according to the inspiration and according to the formation, man was like God."[5] As John Behr notes, Irenaeus strongly rejected the idea of locating the image of God in man exclusively in his soul or in the immaterial part of man.[6] If Irenaeus' context is considered, it is not difficult to see why. Irenaeus was writing against a number of Gnostic heresies which were heavily influenced by Neo-Platonism, which as we have amply seen, rejected matter and extoled the spiritual over the material. This is why Irenaeus was at pains to argue that an image must have a form, and that form only exists in matter.[7] This is why Irenaeus also insisted that the image of God in man is concretely described in the flesh.[8] This was important to Irenaeus because for him an image also reveals something: it reveals the archetype of which it is the image – therefore if the image of God is also found in the flesh of man, then the flesh of man was capable of revealing God.[9] It is at this point

[5] That is, the image of God in man is soul and body. See *On the Apostolic Preaching* 1.11, in St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 46–47.
[6] John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 89.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

that Irenaeus could have run into a problem. God is immaterial and thus formless, so how can man's flesh reveal God? Of which archetype is fleshly man the image? For Irenaeus, the archetype of the image of God in man could be none other than the incarnate Son of God.[10] The Son of God, in the flesh is the image according to which man is made: "For I made man in the image of God and the image of God is the Son, according to whose image man was made; and for this reason, he appeared in the last times, to render the image like himself."[11] Thus for Irenaeus, it is the incarnate Son who reveals our true human form in the Incarnation, which also demonstrates that man is made in the image of God.[12]

Providing a stark contrast to Irenaeus, however, is Augustine's understanding of the soul and its relation to the body. In an early commentary on the book of Genesis, Augustine rightly asserts that God cannot be circumscribed in a bodily shape; but unlike Irenaeus who points to the Incarnation as evidence that the image of God in man is twofold, Augustine asserts that "when man is said to have been made to the image of God, it is said with reference to the interior man, where reason is to be found and intelligence…"[13] This reason and intelligence makes us superior to the animals, so that when we are told that man is made in God's image and that he has authority over the animals it is "precisely to make us understand that it was with reference, *not to the body*

[10] Ibid.
[11] *On the Apostolic Preaching* 1.22 in op. cit., 53-54.
[12] Behr *Asceticism and Anthropology*, 90. Just to be sure that we don't think Irenaeus was some sort of materialist, he also said the image of God in man is also found in his possession of a free will and, of course, in his soul. For a discussion of this see Behr, 90-100.
[13] See *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees* 1.17.28 in St. Augustine, *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine, Series 1, Volume 13 (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2002), 57. This early work of exegesis on Genesis was written about 388 in the context of Augustine's dispute with the Manichees, who taught that all created matter was evil. To be fair to Augustine, he did not believe or teach that God's creation was evil or that matter itself was evil; yet it is clear from the work that he assigned created matter a lower place in the order of things vis-à-vis the immaterial soul. It is also worth noting that for Augustine the interior man, or what is today often called man's "interiority", is assigned a supreme place. This should be familiar to anyone who has even a casual knowledge of what is called "spirituality" today, which is almost exclusively focused on developing "interiority" at the expense of the body. For a good discussion of Augustine's teaching on the soul in this early work and in others, see R.J. O'Connell, "The *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos* and the Origin of the Soul," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 39 (1993): 129–41.

that man was made in God's image, but to the power by which he surpasses all cattle, all animals," and by referring to the fact that man walks upright in contrast to animals is, for Augustine, a reminder "that it is above all as regards the spirit that man was made to the image and likeness of God."[14] Further on, Augustine asserts that the soul lords itself over the body because the body's status is that of a slave in which the soul must order the body about.[15]

In his later, more mature *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Augustine continues to claim that the image of God in man is rightly to be understood in the soul only.[16] Yet Augustine goes even further and considers the possibility that Adam's soul was created *before* his body was created; on the first day of creation. Augustine thinks this for two reasons: 1) because he thinks that being made in God's image refers exclusively to the soul and that being made male and female refers only to the body (7.24.35); and 2) it follows from this that the superior part of man should be created first because matter (which is inferior) had not yet been created on the first day, so there was nothing from which to form man's body (7.24.35). This leads Augustine to conclude that "the soul itself was created just as the original day was established, and once created was stored away among the works of God until in due time he chose to insert it by puffing, that is by breathing it into the body formed out of mud" (7.24.35). Why this should be so is not explained by Augustine. It also poses a huge problem which Augustine does not satisfactorily solve.

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[14] *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees*, 1.17.28, in Hill, 57. Words in italics are mine.

[15] Ibid., 2.11.15, in Hill, 81. In the thirteenth book of his *Confessions*, Augustine seems to assert that man's soul fell into darkness (13.8) and that "We bear the remnants of our darkness in our bodies…" (13.14). See St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London & New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 316, 321. Whether this "fall" refers to an event before creation, which would uphold the idea of the pre-existence of souls, or if it refers to man's fall into sin *after* his creation (the account in Genesis 3) is a little hard to determine. On the whole, Augustine cannot be accused of teaching the idea of the pre-existence of souls. Or can he? As will be seen, Augustine did seem to make an exception for Adam's soul.

[16] See *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 6.7.12 in Hill, op. cit., 307. See also 7.22.32 in the same work (p.339) for a similar statement. *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* was written between AD 401-416.

The problem it poses is that in fine Platonic fashion, Augustine asks for what good reason would the soul *want* "to be inserted into the life of this flesh" when we all know that it is better off subsisting on its own (7.25.36). Now that the soul exists before the body, it really has no reason to inhabit a body because for Augustine "It positively defies belief to suppose that it [the soul] could of its own free will have had an inclination to the life of the body" (7.26.37).[17] So what is the solution? Does God force the soul into Adam's body, even if it is unwilling (7.27.38)? Augustine seemingly solves this dilemma by speculating that "it is better to suppose that it wills this by nature, that is to say that it is created with a nature to will this just as we have a natural will to live" (7.27.38). In other words, the soul really does not want to go into the body but it willingly does so because God created it with a natural propensity to want to be in a body! At this point Augustine has written himself into a corner into which he cannot easily extricate himself. Yet he maintains that it is a better explanation to assume that the soul was not created the moment God breathed into Adam (7.28.40). He must do so because for him, the soul, being immaterial, had to have been created along with all the other immaterial elements in the universe before the material elements were created because, like a good Platonist, Augustine assigns greater value to what is spiritual and immaterial over what is material.[18] This view is neither biblical nor is it Patristic, and the potential danger of it is evident. Yet, Augustine is hamstrung by the Platonic metaphysics within which he has chosen to exegete Genesis. As Edmund Hill admits:

> On the other hand, we may not overlook the fact that Augustine's recourse to philosophy was at the cost of the biblical and salvation-historical conception of creation. The idea of a plan of salvation that began with the very act of creation made way for a metaphysical meditation on the being and order of creation. Because the Neoplatonic system was used as a help and a technique in gaining knowledge of the biblical message, the knowledge obtained was seen primarily in a metaphysical perspective. The basic aim of Augustine's

[17] Words in square brackets are mine.
[18] See Augustine's whole argument in 7.27.39-7.28.43.

> interpretation…was to grasp the being and structure of creation and not its role in the divine economy of salvation.[19]

This is precisely why Augustine's speculation and deviation from biblical and Patristic tradition is so dangerous. The divine economy of salvation has always included material creation and man's body. It is expressed in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and glorious of return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in which our souls will be reunited to our perfected bodies and all of creation will be restored. Augustine has unfortunately reduced such a wondrous mystery to nothing more than an intellectual exercise.

And this is why Irenaeus' insistence on the importance of man's body being also made in the image of God is important. It is important for two reasons. The first is that in his own time he was fighting against Platonic and Gnostic tendencies which had crept into the Church and which Irenaeus clearly felt was a distortion of true biblical anthropology. The second is that his insistence on the image of God in man being located in both body and soul is a sober corrective to the same temptation and tendencies which have lingered on in the Church – especially in the understanding of spirituality and the spiritual life – which is to view the locus of man's spiritual life exclusively in the soul or in his interiority, to the utter neglect of the body's role in glorifying God. The spiritual/immaterial is favoured over the material. This is what is clearly evident in Augustine and this is the type of spirituality which I have been critiquing throughout this thesis. It is through this "spirituality" in which Symeon has been read. It is also a distortion of true biblical and Patristic anthropology which has had dangerous consequences for not only how Symeon is read, but for "spirituality" in general. In the end, for Irenaeus, the perfect man, or the complete man, was a union of soul and body:

> Now the soul and the Spirit can be a part of man, but by no means a man; the perfect man is the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the Spirit

[19] See Hill's *General Introduction* to the volume already cited, p. 20.

> of the Father and joined to the flesh which was moulded after the image of God…For neither is the handiwork of the flesh itself, by itself, a perfect man, but the body of the man and a part of a man; nor is the soul itself, by itself, a man, but the soul of a man and a part of a man; nor is the Spirit a man, for it is called Spirit and not man. But the commingling and union of all these constitutes the perfect man.[20]

For Irenaeus then, if the image of God in man is located exclusively in the soul, like in Augustine, man is incomplete; and if the image of God in man is located only in the body, man is likewise incomplete. If the spiritual is favoured over the material, what remains is a fragmented and static image of man – he is incomplete and thus his place in the order of creation is rendered ambiguous. Does this sound familiar? If Symeon is read in this way, is it any wonder why his image is fragmented and his place is ambiguous?

6.2.2: Biblical and Patristic Anthropology (2): Makarios and the Heart as the Centre of Man

Irenaeus contended that the image of God in man is found in both soul and body. If that is the case, where is man's centre to be found? The answer to this question can be found in the anthropology of Makarios.[21] As Marcus Plested notes, Makarios' anthropology "is marked by the location of the intellect in the heart."[22] This is seen in one of Makarios' homilies where he states:

> For the heart directs and governs all the other organs of the body. And when grace pastures the heart, it rules over all the members and the thoughts. For there, in the heart, the mind abides as well as all the thoughts of the soul and all its hopes. This is how grace penetrates throughout all parts of the body.[23]

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[20] *Against the Heresies* 5.6.1, quoted from Behr, op. cit., 99-100.

[21] Makarios' anthropology had a huge influence on the subsequent Patristic tradition. For an excellent study of the influence of Makarios' writings in the continuum of experience in the tradition up to the time of Maximos, see Plested, *The Macarian Legacy: The Place of Macarius-Symeon in the Eastern Christian Tradition*. For insights into Makarios' influence on the tradition as a whole, see Alexander Golitzin, "A Testimony to Christianity as Transfiguration: The Macarian Homilies and Orthodox Spirituality," in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. S.T. Kimbrough (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 129–56.

[22] Plested, *The Macarian Legacy*, 33.

[23] *Homily* 15.20 in *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies*, op. cit., 116. Further citations will be in-line.

The heart, then, is the centre of the human person. It is the focal point of meeting between the soul and the body because as a physical organ, it maintains links to all the parts of the body; and as the spiritual centre of man, it is connected with the faculties of the soul.[24]

Makarios also says that there are "infinite depths to the human heart" (*Homily* 15.32), and although the heart is "a small vessel" it contains dragons, lions, poisonous beasts, and "all the treasures of evil," alongside God, the angels, life and the kingdom, light and the apostles, treasures of grace; in short, in the heart "there are all things" (*Homily* 43.7). In this, Makarios is drawing deeply and directly from Scripture.[25]

Perhaps Makarios' singular anthropological contribution, and one which would be of the utmost importance for Maximos, Symeon, and Palamas, is that in placing the heart at the centre of the human person, Makarios is able "to affirm the unity of the human person and the participation of the body in the spiritual life."[26] In order to affirm this anthropological truth, Makarios points to the Transfiguration:

> For as the body of the Lord was glorified when he climbed the mount and was transfigured into the divine glory and into infinite light, so also the bodies of the saints are glorified and shine like lightening. Just as the interior glory of Christ covered his body and shone completely, in the same way also in the saints the interior power of Christ in them in that day will be poured out exteriorly upon their bodies…Similarly, as many lamps are lighted from the one, same fire, so also it is necessary that the bodies of the saints which are members of Christ, become the same which Christ himself is (*Homily* 15.38).

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[24] Plested, *The Macarian Legacy*, 33.

[25] One would need a concordance to list all the instances in Scripture where this anthropological truth is affirmed. To list but a few, Deuteronomy 6:5 states: "and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." Christ repeats this same verse in Mt. 22:37 and says that it is the greatest commandment. In this verse it is seen that one is to love God with one's soul and body. Deuteronomy 15:9 says to "take heed lest there be a base thought in your heart…." The idea that the heart is the centre of the human person is reflected no less than at least 250 times in the Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Mt. 15:18-19 says that "what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander." This is why the heart must be constantly guarded, and as will be seen below when Palamas is considered, the whole purpose of the writings of the *Philokalia* is to instruct a person on how to do just that. This is also where the Orthodox derive the term "Prayer of the Heart." The point being here, and one which is crucial to keep in mind, is that in placing the heart as the centre of the human person, Makarios is drawing upon the totality of Scripture.

[26] Plested, *The Macarian Legacy*, 33.

Makarios is here asserting that both body and soul are glorified and shine. This is possible because Christ possessed a human body and glorified it; which points back to the importance of the Incarnation in Irenaeus' thought. For those who are members of Christ, it is only natural that they become that which he is. Not only that, Makarios is also pointing toward the eschatological truth that not only do the saints' bodies shine in this life, they will do so in the age to come. [27]

The importance of the above passage cannot be underestimated. It is this anthropological and eschatological reality of the full participation and illumination of the soul and body in man's spiritual life – founded upon God's image and likeness in man and with the heart at it centre – which, as will be seen below, is what Maximos, Symeon, and Palamas defended. Maximos defended it in his battle with the Monothelites; Symeon defended it in his battle with the ecclesiastical authorities over the holiness of his spiritual father; and Palamas defended it in his battle with Barlaam. It is this reality that Platonic forms of "spirituality" deny; for they prioritize and extol the soul at the expense of the body; which needs to be discarded in favour of intellectual contemplation. In this scheme, human nature is fragmented and cannot realize its eschatological perfection and completeness in Christ. This is why Maximos, Symeon, and Palamas were so vociferous in their defense against these tendencies.

6.2.3: Conclusion

In looking at Irenaeus and Makarios, it has been seen that anthropology determines "spirituality". It is crucial to understand that man's body, in addition to his soul, plays a role in the spiritual life. If the nature of the human person is misconstrued or distorted, then his spiritual life

[27] Makarios also pointed to the shining of Moses' face (Ex. 34:29ff) as a type which "anticipates how in the resurrection of the just the bodies of the saints will be glorified with a glory which even now the souls of the saintly and faithful people are deemed worthy to possess within, in the indwelling of the inner man" (*Homily* 5.10).

is askew. The fundamental importance of Irenaeus is that, in contrast to Augustine, he posited the that the image of God is reflected in man's physical body in addition to his soul. For Makarios this meant that the centre of the human person is in the heart and not in the intellect. Makarios' teaching is reflected in Scripture and it influenced the subsequent Patristic tradition. This is important for Symeon because, as will be seen, his is a balanced anthropology which gives due weight to both Scripture and Patristic tradition – for, like Irenaeus and Makarios, it gives due importance to man's twofold nature of soul and body. Anthropology is therefore crucial in placing Symeon in relation to Maximos the Confessor and Gregory Palamas.

6.3: The Anthropological Axis of Maximos the Confessor, Symeon, and Gregory Palamas

It has just been seen that both biblical and Patristic anthropology uphold and defend the twofold nature of man as a composite of soul and body. Any attempt to deny, diminish, or extol one at the expense of the other, reduces man to an incomplete being, and thus the human person is fragmented. The human person was created in the image and likeness of God in both soul and body and this was most fully realized in the Incarnation where Christ assumed a human body. Yet he was also divine. Thus, Christ possesses a twofold, composite nature – divine and human. Any attempt to deny, diminish, or extol one at the expense of the other, reduces Christ to an incomplete person, and thus his humanity is fragmented. Monothelitism, by denying a human will to Christ, attempted to do just that. This is why the introduction of the will into ontology was a major anthropological contribution by Maximos, who, by positing the will as a component of being, was able in one stroke to defend the twofold nature of Christ, and by extension, man; along with the possibility of his restoration, salvation, and deification.

6.3.1: Maximos the Confessor's Anthropology – The Twofold Nature of Christ and Man and the Will as a Component of Being

Before looking at the significance of Maximos' contention that the will is a part of Being, it is worthwhile to see how he viewed the human person.[28] For Maximos, like Irenaeus before him, the human person was a composite of soul and body: "…and if a body equipped with organs united to a soul with intellect constitutes a complete human being, then whoever says that the soul or the body is a member or part of the human being does not sin against the truth."[29] Thus, for Maximos, a complete human being is one who possess a soul and a body.[30] Even death does not dissolve this union because they have a reciprocal relationship to each other.[31]

This reciprocal relationship means that for Maximos it was impossible that souls pre-existed bodies, or "that souls fell from a higher form of life and were punished by being placed in bodies for the evils they had previously committed…," and he was quite vociferous in his opposition to what he called "their delusions" (*Amb.* 7.29). For Maximos, "insofar as soul and body are parts of man, it is not possible for either the soul or the body to exist before the other, or indeed to exist after the other in time, otherwise what is known as the principle of reciprocal

[28] For a good, brief introduction to this see the Polycarp Sherwood's *Introduction* (especially pages 45-55), in St. Maximus the Confessor, *The Ascetic Life, The Four Centuries on Charity*, 3–102. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco [Calif.]: Ignatius Press, 2003); Lars Thunberg and A.M. Allchin, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 2nd Edition (Chicago: Open Court, 1995).

[29] See *Ambiguum* 7.39 in Maximos the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, trans. Nicholas Constas, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2014), 135. All further citations from this text will be in-line using *Amb.*, followed by the number and then the paragraph number found in the margins of the translation.

[30] This also means that both the soul and body also possess distinct virtues. See Question I.1 in St. Maximus the Confessor, *Questions and Doubts*, trans. Despina D. Prassas (DeKalb, Ill: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 141. Hereafter referred to as *QD*.

[31] "For after the death of the body, the soul is not called 'soul' in an unqualified way, but the soul of a man, indeed the soul of a particular human being, for even after the body, it possesses, as its own form, the whole human being…The same holds in the case of the body, which is corruptible by nature, but has a particular relation on account of its origin. For the body, after its separation from the soul, is not simply called 'body,' even though it will decompose and be dissolved into the elements from which it was constituted, but the body of a man, indeed of a particular man" (*Amb.* 7.42).

relation would be destroyed" (*Amb.* 7.40).[32] If that reciprocal relationship between soul and body is destroyed or compromised, it jeopardizes the future possibility for deification, in which the complete man, consisting of soul and body is deified: "In this way, man as whole will be divinized, being made God by the grace of God who became man. Man will remain wholly man in soul and body…but will become wholly God in soul and body owing to the grace and the splendor of the blessed glory of God…" (*Amb.* 7.26).[33]

The possibility of the whole man "being made God by the grace of God who became man," is crucial for Maximos because like ourselves, Christ is a composite – in his case a composite of divine and human, possessing a body and soul as well: "This is why the Word of God, who is perfect God by nature, became perfect man, being composed just like us by nature of an intellectual soul and a passible body, except without sin."[34] In the Incarnation, Christ assumes and glorifies the whole of humanity and restores our nature because it is by this that he can fully save and deify us: "For in this way he glorified the assumed humanity because just as he was seen transfigured on the mountain in the body that is subject to suffering, so also we shall be in the resurrection when we receive an incorruptible body" (*QD* 190).[35] The fact that Christ is both perfect God and perfect

[32] See also *Amb*. 7.43: "Thus the relation of the two, by which I mean soul and body, as the whole human form whose parts can be separated only in thought, reveals that both come into being simultaneously, and demonstrates their essential difference from each other, without violating in any way whatsoever the principles of their respective substances. For this reason it is inconceivable to speak of (and impossible to find) the soul and body except in relation to each other, since each one introduces together with itself the idea of the other to which it belongs. Thus, if either were to exist before the other, it would have to be understood as the soul or the body of the other to which it belongs, for the relation between them is immutable." If this passage is compared to what was found in Augustine above, it is difficult to reconcile the two, as they are poles apart. This is also a solid rebuttal of Augustine's position.

[33] See also *Amb*. 7.31. That the whole man will be deified, also becomes central to Symeon and to Palamas; as we will see.

[34] See *The Responses to Thalassios*, 61.5 in St. Maximos the Confessor, *On Difficulties in Sacred Scripture: The Responses to Thalassios*, trans. Maximos Constas, The Fathers of the Church 136 (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 436. Hereafter referred to as *Thal.* See also *Thal*. 21.2: "When the Divine Word clothed Himself in human nature without undergoing any change, and became perfect man like us in every way but without sin, He manifested the first Adam…." See also the rest of *Thal*. 21 and 22.

[35] See also *Thal*. 61.6: "For by giving our nature impassibility through His Passion, relief through His sufferings, and eternal life through His death, He restored our nature, renewing its capacities by means of what was negated in His own flesh, and through His own Incarnation granting it that grace which transcends nature, by which I mean divinization." See also *Thal*. 61.7ff.

man – a composite of divine and human natures in a body that possess a soul – is what enables him to restore our fallen nature and save and deify us. If any part of Christ's humanity is compromised or denied, in any way whatsoever, all of this is in danger of falling apart.

Maximos' battle with the Monothelites is a complex story which involves thorny philosophical as well as theological issues.[36] For my purpose here, I would like to distill this issue down to its basic fundamentals by asking a question: Why did Maximos consider the Monothelite position to be such a threat? The answer to this question gets to the very root of the debate. It also has consequences for Palamas as well as for Symeon, especially vis-a-vis his fragmented image and ambiguous place. The answer is quite simply that when the Monothelites denied a human will to Christ, Maximos saw this as a threat not only to Christ's perfect humanity, but to ours as well, including the possibility of our salvation.

For Maximos, part of what it means that man is made in the image and likeness of God, is that man is endowed with a free will. Just as God possesses a free will and creates, not out of necessity, but from his free will; man, also possess a free will and cannot be forced out of necessity to do anything, including loving God. Therefore, the will is an essential component of Being because it holds the person together and as such, the person exists, lives, and moves.[37] According to Loudovikos, it is through his will that "the being seeks the full entity of its nature, the complete 'according to nature' realization of all its essential component parts"; that is soul and body.[38] More importantly, there is an eschatological horizon since the will "introduces into the Being the process of becoming an entity entire," and it does so by "directing action, which every being has, naturally and by reason of its nature, towards the eschatological realization of its complete Being, which

[36] For an in-depth discussion of these issues, see Part 2, Chapter 1 of Loudovikos' *Analogical Identities*, 65-88.
[37] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 70. It is also part of the image of God in us.
[38] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 70.

begins from now."[39] The problem is that after the fall, man's will went from being what Maximos called a "natural will"; that is, totally aligned to that of God's will, to being what he called a "gnomic will"; that is, deliberative because it is susceptible to corruption and is darkened by the passions. Man's fallen will needs to be healed and only Christ can do this.[40]

The main problem here is that if Christ, as the Monothelites claimed, did not possess a natural human will, then he is not perfect man and therefore he cannot heal man's fallen will; which means his salvation and the eschatological completion of his being is impossible. It also means that if the will is not a component of Being, then man himself is also incomplete. And this is where the core of the problem lies, for as Loudovikos points out, "an absence of the natural will means a 'defective human being' – the absence of humanity," and because of this lack "the very principle of its nature does not exist."[41] Therefore, any removal of the natural will means a removal of the human self, which nullifies nature because the being is "totally incapable of ontological expression."[42]

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[39] Ibid. This what allows for our eschatological being as becoming in communion, which we discussed in chapter 3.2.6. For Loudovikos, the anthropological significance of this is enormous because it overturns the Platonic duality and division of soul and body and posits man as a complete unity of body and soul which is directed by the free will which was given to man as part of his being made in God's image. Thus, if man does not possess a free will as part of his Being, then he is not a complete being. Therefore, the will contributes to the full constitution of man's being; see *Analogical Identities*, 72.

[40] I should point out here that after the Fall, man does not lose his natural will. The natural will remains, but because it is corruptible and susceptible to being darkened by the passions, it becomes "gnomic"; that is, subject to passibility and deliberation. Before the Fall, man's will was naturally aligned to God's will in what Loudovikos calls "an association of the wills" and not a confusion of them (*Analogical Identities*, 77). That is, man's will and God's will worked in cooperation (synergy). Maximos' use of the word "gnome" refers to "the mode of use of the natural will," which refers to the person (*Analogical Identities*, 71). After the Fall, man's use of his natural will became subject to deliberation and thus he struggles to align his will with that of God's. In his humanity (in which neither the divine will or the natural human will was confused), Christ also possessed a natural will, but one that, because of his perfect, divine nature, was the perfect natural will which Adam possessed before the Fall. Thus, Christ did not possess a "gnomic" will because his will was in perfect association with that of the Father. This also means that Christ can heal man's gnomic will. If Christ does not possess a natural human will, as the Monothelites claimed, then he is not only not a perfect man, but he cannot heal man's will. The end result is that man's salvation is impossible. So, when in humble repentance, man surrenders his gnomic will to Christ, he does not abolish his free, natural will; but through an ultimate act of free will he re-establishes "a personal conjunction of God and Man in worship" (*Analogical Identities*, 77).

[41] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 75.

[42] Ibid.

As the work of Loudovikos has shown, a good deal of what currently passes for spirituality and mysticism is Platonic in that it privileges what is spiritual over what is not – that is, it denies man's complete psychosomatic unity of body and soul because it posits the image of God in man exclusively in the soul. The result is that, anthropologically speaking, man is an incomplete being and thus he is fragmented. By depriving Christ of a natural human will, Monothelitism did exactly the same because it exulted the spiritual over the material – that is, Christ's divine will over his human will. If the will is not a component of Being, then both man's humanity and Christ's humanity is compromised. Christ's nature is twofold – divine and human. Man's nature is twofold – soul and body. Man's humanity and Christ's humanity is a composite of the immaterial and material. If the will is not part of Being, there is a fundamental lack and incompleteness to man's being. If Christ does not possess a natural will, there is a fundamental lack and incompleteness to his being. The result is that man's salvation and eschatological completion in Christ is negated.

In the end, what is really going on here is that Monothelitism (being just another expression Platonism), privileges what is spiritual over what is material. This is a problem because, "complete being is not the transcendence of the non-spiritual by what is supposedly the spiritual, but the eschatological, modal opening up of the natural to the real Being in Christ."[43] It is the will, as a component of Being, which makes possible the eschatological completion of man's Being in Christ. If man does not possess a will as part of his Being, then he cannot move towards his eschatological completion in Christ. If Christ in his humanity, does not possess a human will, then he is an imperfect, incomplete man and thus he cannot heal man's will, nor can be saved, and the result is that any movement towards him is impossible. The anthropological significance of Maximos' theology is that the will, as part of Being, is what moves man towards his eschatological

[43] Ibid., 77.

completion in Christ. If the natural will is not a fundamental condition of Being, then man is an incomplete being – as is Christ in his humanity. If man is incomplete, he is fragmented; and his salvation is impossible. When what is spiritual is extolled over what is material, the full psychosomatic reality of man's nature is denied. It is thus posited that the body has little or no role to play in the working out of our salvation. Another anthropological contribution of Maximos is that in positing the will as a condition of Being, he is upholding and defending, against the Monothelites, the biblical and Patristic teaching that man and Christ as man, is a unity of body and soul and that the image of God in created man is to be found in both soul and body. Moreover, Maximos upholds the biblical and Patristic teaching that man participates fully in the divine nature and that, beginning in this life, our salvation and deification – which is our eschatological completion in Christ – is reflected in soul and body. This had profound significance for Symeon and Palamas; for both were faced, in different ways and in different contexts, with those who challenged and denied this reality. Both Symeon and Palamas upheld the biblical and Patristic teaching in the continuum of experience in the tradition. How this played out in the context of Palamas' conflict with Barlaam will be explored, before we finally examine Symeon's theological contribution as a pivotal point between them.

6.3.2: Gregory Palamas' Anthropology: The Twofold Nature of Man and his Bodily Participation and Illumination in the Light of Tabor

In his confrontation with Barlaam, Gregory Palamas was forced to defend the teachings of Scripture and the Fathers concerning the twofold image of God in man as well as the body's participation in deification. In doing so, Palamas went back to Scripture and the continuum of experience in the tradition, and he also made special reference to Symeon in this regard.

Concerning man's twofold nature, Palamas, like Maximos before him, defended the sanctity of the body against those who saw it as evil: "How can it be that God at the beginning caused the mind to inhabit the body? Did even He do ill? Rather, brother, such views befit the heretics, who claim that the body is an evil thing, a fabrication of the Wicked One. As for us, we think the mind becomes evil through dwelling on fleshly thoughts, but that there is nothing bad in the body, since the body is not evil in itself."[44] Furthermore, like Maximos, Palamas was clear that both the soul and body are created at the same time: "On the other hand the noetic and intelligent nature of the human soul has received a life-generating spirit from God since the soul is created together with an earthly body, and so by means of the spirit it sustains and quickens the body conjoined to it."[45]

As for the image of God in man, Palamas does not dispute that the soul is made in God's image (*TNTS* 61), but by a curious analogy, he also (like Irenaeus) says the same for the body. For Palamas, man is created "more perfectly in God's image than the angels" because "angels do not have a body joined to them and subject to their intellect" (*TNTS* 62).[46] For Palamas, man's twofold nature of soul and body allows him to participate in both the spiritual and earthy realms. Man has both a faculty of reason and of sense perception which allows him to invent arts and sciences and to create objects from material creation, as well as to invent language. These capacities which "the angels have no share whatsoever" (*TNTS* 63) is proof for Palamas that the image of God in man is to be found in both the soul and the body. As a consequence, Palamas sees man as a unity of soul and body which work in tandem (along with God's divine grace and will) in all matters pertaining

[44] See *Triads* 1.2.1 in Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1983), 41. See also 1.2.2. All further citations to the *Triads* will be inline.
[45] See *Topics of Natural and Theological Science* 38 in St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia, Volume 4*, 363. Hereafter referred to as *TNTS* and cited in-line. It is for this reason that both the soul and the body participate in the resurrection and eternal glory; see *TNTS* 39.
[46] Symeon also makes the same claim in *H* 53. 127-31. Is this an instance of Gregory silently borrowing from Symeon?

to our salvation.[47] Concerning Christ, Palamas is clear that through the Incarnation, Christ's twofold nature of divine and human, is what makes Christ the perfect mediator who can affect man's salvation: "The Son of God became man to show to what heights He would lead us…Being twofold in nature, He could truly be a mediator, joining each of the two to the other. He loosed the bond of sin and cleansed the stain that comes of being joined with flesh" (*Homily* 16-19).[48]

In seeing man as a psychosomatic unity, Palamas' anthropology is thus biblical and Patristic. His anthropology is also similar to that of Makarios, in that for Palamas, the heart was the centre of the person: "Where but in the heart, the controlling organ, the throne of grace, where the mind and all the thoughts of the soul are to be found?" (*Triads* 1.2.3). Thus, it was essential for Palamas that we "should gather together the mind and enclose it in the body, and especially in that 'body' most interior to the body, which we call the heart?" (*Triads* 1.2.3).[49]

This was why for Palamas, any Platonic claim for the need of the soul to go out of or transcend the body was the height of error: "…to make the mind 'go out,' not only from fleshly thoughts, but out of the body itself, with the aim of contemplating intellectual visions – that is the greatest of Hellenic errors, the root and source of all heresies…a doctrine which engenders folly…" (*Triads* 1.2.4). For Palamas it is clear that "for us, we recollect the mind not only within

[47] See *Triads* 2.2.6-9 and 2.2.14. In his thirty-eighth *Homily*, Palamas says that both soul and body possess "the fount of eternal life"; see *Homily* 38.10 in Palamas, *Palamas: Homilies,* 303. In his letter to the nun Xenia, Palamas tells her that both soul and body share in God's glory since they "will share not only in the resurrection, but also in the Lord's ascension and in all divine life"; see *To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia* 15 in *Philokalia* 4:298. Hereafter referred to as *Xenia*. Further in his letter, Palamas tells her that the intellect "that has been accounted worthy" of the divine light, transmits it to the body which confers on it "the power to do what lies beyond its power" (*Xenia* 62). Further citations to both the homilies and the letter will be in-line.

[48] See also 16.9 and *Triads* 2.2.12.

[49] In this Palamas was also following John Klimakos who said: "A hesychast is he who strives to confine his incorporeal being within his bodily house, paradoxical as this is" (*Ladder* 27.6). In fact, Palamas quotes this exact passage from Klimakos in *Triads* 1.2.6. In doing so, Palamas makes an appeal to the continuum of experience in the tradition: "This is exactly the tradition, and our spiritual Fathers have also handed it down to us, and rightly so." It goes without saying that this is where the Orthodox Tradition gets the expression "Prayer of the mind in the heart" or "Prayer of the Heart", which most often refers to the Jesus Prayer. Symeon's anthropology is also centered in the heart, as will be seen below.

the body and heart, but also within itself" (*Triads* 1.2.4). That was why it was essential for Palamas that the soul and body be continually guarded, "…in other words, never leave any part of your soul or any member of your body without surveillance" (*Triads* 1.2.9).[50] It is these anthropological truths, based on both the Scriptures and the Fathers, which came under attack by Barlaam. In defending these truths, Palamas was battling these "Hellenic errors."

That the conflict between Barlaam and Palamas was a clash between a biblical and Patristic anthropology against a dualistic, Platonic conception of man, the scholarship leaves no doubt.[51] As Norman Russel points out, the fundamental issue was about the very nature of divine-human communion.[52] Concerning the hesychast method of prayer, what Barlaam strongly objected to; what in fact disgusted him, was the physicality of it. In one of his letters to Palamas, Barlaam told him that he regarded the conception of the participation in the divine light as far too physical.[53] As Meyendorff observes, Barlaam's criticism of hesychast prayer stems from his Platonic

[50] The idea that one needs to continually guard the heart and mind has a long pedigree in Orthodox Tradition. No doubt Palamas was also influenced by his immediate predecessor, Nikiphoros, a monk on Mount Athos who lived in the second half of the thirteenth century. His memory would have still been fresh when Palamas went to Athos. Palamas in fact refers to Nikiphoros by name, saying that through his life and writings, he passed along the tradition of guarding the mind and body; see *Triads* 1.2.12 in *Philokalia* 4:341. See also Nikiphoros' own work *On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart* in *Philokalia* 4:194-206. The entire purpose of the texts gathered in the *Philokalia* is to pass along the tradition of νῆψις (nepsis) or watchfulness. It is well known that the Greek title of the *Philokalia* is "The Philokalia of the Neptic Fathers."

[51] For a good summary of this conflict see Norman Russell, "The Hesychast Controversy," in *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, ed. Anthony Kaldellis and Niketas Siniossoglou (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 494–508. See also Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*; John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, trans. Adele Fiske (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998). For a good study of the reception of Palamas in the modern age, see Norman Russell, *Gregory Palamas and the Making of Palamism in the Modern Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). For a good general background to the rise of humanism and the clash between philosophy and theology in the century leading up to Palamas, see chapter six of Anthony Kaldellis' *Hellenism in Byzantium*.

[52] Russell, "The Hesychast Controversy," 494. At the risk of gross oversimplification, one could say that the issue of divine-human communion is both epistemological and anthropological. The first asks: how do we know God? Out of this question arose the debate over the essence and energies of God. But it is also linked to anthropological questions. If man is able, by grace, to participate in God through his uncreated energies, does the whole man, soul and body participate, or is it only some kind of disincarnated, intellectual participation through contemplation only?

[53] Russell, "The Hesychast Controversy," 497. Meyendorff also makes the same observation: "Barlaam's proud temperament and also his spiritualizing convictions, inspired by Platonic philosophy, roused him to the greatest indignation, when he was told that the human body could itself participate in prayer and feel the action of divine grace" (*A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 46).

presupposition that favours the spiritual and immaterial over the physical and material; so, for Barlaam, to even posit the notion that the human body could be a receptacle of God's grace "seemed an intolerable outrage."[54] Against this, Palamas rejected Barlaam's Platonic anthropology and justified a biblical and Patristic conception of man' nature: that is, the body is not a prison for the soul because it can participate in the divine energies and receive the grace of the sacraments and the pledge for the future resurrection.[55] In using the Transfiguration as a reference, Palamas argued that in the Incarnation, Christ assumed and glorified the human body and at the Transfiguration, the divine uncreated light shone in his body. Therefore, the body can be a source of light and grace, not only in Christ's human body, but in man's as well, since he is united to Christ's body through the grace of the sacraments.[56]

Ultimately then, it is once again seen in this debate, the age-old confrontation of Christian theology with Platonic philosophy.[57] Barlaam possessed a dualistic conception of man in which the spiritual life is disincarnated and is reduced to intellectual contemplation; and that was what Palamas fought against.[58] In a truly biblical and Patristic spirituality, which is incarnational, the body is never regarded as a stranger or hinderance to the soul in its spiritual progress. It is the whole man – his soul and body – which is transformed and deified. This process begins in this life and is realized more fully and completely in the age to come. This is a testament to the fact that

[54] Meyendorff, *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, 105.
[55] Ibid., 103.
[56] Ibid., 107. There is, of course, a huge sacramental element to the debate, which I cannot go into here. Suffice to say that Palamas is ultimately upholding the dignity of matter against which Platonic spirituality always denied. John of Damascus did it before him. The fundamental truth here is that a healthy "spirituality" does not oppose spirit to matter, but sees both as essential to man's deification because God's grace saves the whole man, soul and body. See Meyendorff's discussion of this in op. cit., 108.
[57] Meyendorff summed it up thus: "The whole controversy between Barlaam and Palamas turns chiefly on this point: the opposition between Scripture and Hellenism, Jerusalem and Athens, the apostles and the philosophers, the religion of the Incarnation and of bodily resurrection and the religion of disembodiment and of immortality of the soul" (*St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, 106).
[58] Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 139; 143.

man's body and soul share a conjoint existence. This is also the Christian corrective to the dualism of Platonism.[59]

There is one more brief, but important observation, which I would like to make before moving on to discuss Symeon's anthropology. It has been seen above that Palamas makes an appeal to Tradition in his debate with Barlaam. He points to Klimakos and to his near contemporary, Nikiphoros, as evidence for the body's participation in prayer. In the same text which Palamas mentions Nikiphoros, he also mentions Symeon: "You know the life of Symeon the New Theologian, and how it was all virtually a miracle, glorified by God through supernatural miracles. You know also his writings, which without exaggeration one can call writings of life."[60] What is crucial here is that Palamas sees in Symeon's life and writings a strong and palpable witness to the truth of what he was trying to defend; that is, the twofold nature of man and his full, bodily participation and illumination in the divine light.[61] This is important because, as will be seen below,

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[59] This fundamental truth was expressed by Palamas and the monks of Mount Athos in *The Declaration of the Holy Mountain in Defense of Those who Devoutly Practise a Life of Stillness*, or what is commonly referred to as the "The Hagioritic Tome": "For if in the age to come the body is to share with the soul in ineffable blessings, then it is evident that in this world as well it will also share according to its capacity in the grace mystically and ineffably bestowed by God upon the purified intellect, and it will experience the divine in conformity with its nature. For once the soul's passible aspect is transformed and sanctified – but not reduced to a deathlike condition – through it the dispositions and activities of the body are also sanctified, since body and soul share a conjoint existence." See paragraph six in *Philokalia* 4:423.

[60] *Triads* 1.2.12, quoted in *Philokalia* 4:341. Palamas here is referring to Symeon's biography as well as his writings, which he does not directly quote from.

[61] This may also give us a clue to the nature of Palamas' debt to Symeon. That Palamas was indebted to Symeon, there can be no doubt, as Meyendorff has observed (see *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 155). Yet the exact nature of this debt has not been fully explored. There are some possible avenues. In one of his homilies Palamas says: "You will find that the earnest of this perfection [that is, perfection in Christ] of those who live according to Christ is openly given here and now to God's saints" (*Homily* 16.40). Square brackets are mine. It has already been noted that Symeon was adamant to the point of utter frustration, that the evidence of Christ's transformative power was seen in the lives of his contemporaries, especially in that of his spiritual father. Symeon's belief in the universal evidence of holiness (described in his idea of the "golden chain of witnesses") seems to be at play here in Palamas' homily. Yet Palamas' debt to Symeon may lie elsewhere; namely in his stress on the importance of repentance. A close reading of Palamas' homilies reveals that they are saturated with references to the need for all of us to be in a continual state of repentance. The following homilies have repentance as their main theme: 24, 29, 30, 33, 38, 56, 59, & 63; especially *Homily* 59.1, 2, 8, 9, 11, & 17. Also note *Homily* 40.9 & 21-26, where Palamas has a lengthy discussion on John the Baptist as a preacher and example of repentance. See also the following homilies and sections where repentance is mentioned: 2.15; 3.19, 25; 5.3; 10.2, 13, 14; 19.2; 22.5, 6; 25.14; 26.10, 12; 27.11; 28.5, 6, 11-13 (see also note 430); 31.6, 7; 32.14, 15; 39.11; 41.9, 10; 42.7, 9; 43.13; 46.6; 47. 11, 13, 14, 16-18; 48.15; 54.1, 2; 55.4; 57.18 (see also note 1040); 60.2, 18; 63.4,7, 14-15. Repentance thus forms a major theme in many of Gregory's homilies. This is not surprising

it is in this very anthropological truth where Symeon's place in the axis between Maximos and Palamas can be found. Palamas, like Maximos, sought to defend the biblical and Patristic witness of the twofold nature of man and his full participation in the divine light of deification. Both asserted, against a Platonizing spirituality, that man was a composite of soul and body and if the soul is favoured over the body, man is fragmented and cannot participate fully in the deifying life of Christ. Maximos did so by inserting the will into Being, and Palamas did so by defending the hesychastic form of prayer, which involved both soul and body and rendered them able to experience the light of the Transfiguration. What was Symeon's contribution?

6.3.3: Symeon's Anthropology: The Twofold Nature of Man, The Repentant Will, and Full Participation and Illumination in the Divine Light

There is, as of yet, no full-length study on the full nature of Symeon's anthropology.[62] However, it is clear, from what has been discussed in the scholarship to date, that Symeon's anthropology is entirely in the biblical and Patristic tradition.[63] As such, I will not reiterate these points here. But for our purposes, I shall briefly outline Symeon's teaching on the twofold nature of man and Christ, as well as what Symeon taught regarding the image of God in man, with his

in that Gregory was first and foremost a monk who practised rigorous ascetism throughout his whole life. His message of repentance is aimed at both monastics and laymen. Palamas, like Symeon before him, believed that continual repentance was for all Christians, regardless of their state in life. His homilies are a deep call to repentance which is characteristic of monastic-ascetic literature. Could this be evidence of Symeon's influence on Palamas? I think there is a strong case to be made for it, but so far, this has not been fully explored.

[62] Alfeyev notes (*St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 174, n.1) that there is a comprehensive account of Symeon's anthropology on pgs. 47-118 of a doctoral thesis written at Oxford in 1969 by D. Lascaris, entitled "The Liberation of Man in Symeon the New Theologian." After conducting a search, I discovered that the thesis was never published and there is no electronic or PDF copy available. I contacted the Bodleian Library and was informed that they could scan the document and email it to me. For that, I needed to obtain permission from the author. Unfortunately, the author passed away in 2017. Suffice to say, I have not been able to make use of the contents of that thesis. Perhaps one day, I will be able to make it to Oxford and examine the physical copy.

[63] For a summary of Symeon's anthropology and its biblical and Patristic roots, see Alfeyev's *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 175-90; Golitzin's *Life, Times, and Theology*, 147-56; and Keselopoulos' *Man and the Environment*, 43-58. All agree that Symeon's anthropology is deeply biblical and Patristic.

centre in the heart, as it is relevant to positioning Symeon anthropologically between Maximos and Palamas.

As Keselopoulos notes, unlike Platonic thought, which posits a dualism between body and soul, Symeon's writings "evince a marked anti-dualistic character," wherein Symeon stresses "that the body and its needs should not be belittled because they are material; there needs to be a proper attitude towards its materiality, as there should be a corresponding attitude towards the needs of the soul."[64] We find Symeon's teaching on the twofold nature of man summed up in his *Practical and Theological Chapters*:

> Unique among all visible and intelligible things, man has been made two-fold by God. He has a body formed of the four elements with sensibility and breath and by these he communicates with the elements and lives within them. He also has a soul endowed with an immaterial, incorporeal rationality which is united with them in an inexpressible and indetectable way, and blended with them without mixture or confusion. This is what constitutes an individual man, an animal who is mortal and immortal, visible yet invisible, sensible and intelligible, and capable of seeing visible creation as well as of comprehending the intelligible (*PTC* 2.23).[65]

Clearly for Symeon then, man possess a dual nature of soul and body wherein both have an equal value and where both cooperate in man's spiritual and physical struggle.

As for the image of God in man, Symeon is clear that it is to be found in both soul and body. In *Hymn* 44, where Symeon explores what it means to be created according to the divine image, he states that "Truly the soul of every human being, / according to his image, / is a rational

[64] Keselopoulos, *Man and the Environment*, 48. In *CD* 26.6, Symeon makes this point: "Since you are a twofold being, that is, composed of soul and body, you just likewise have twofold nourishment and a twofold table; having a physical and earthly body you must be fed with physical food from the earth, and having an intellectual and divine soul, you must be fed with intellectual and divine food of words." See also the whole of *CD* 25, where Symeon discourses about the interaction of the body and the soul.

[65] See also *PTC* 3.62, where Symeon reiterates this point: "Man is two-fold, composed of soul and body, and like him the world has been made visible and invisible." See also *H* 13.24-25 and *H* 53.102-111. Like the Fathers before him, Symeon sees man's dual nature as giving him the ability to act as a mediator between the invisible and visible worlds; see *H* 53.112-119.

image of the Logos…And so truly my soul is also / according to his image…" (35-37; 43-44).[66] In his sixth *Ethical Discourse*, Symeon is also clear that the body is also made in the image of God: "Body, soul, and God are the man who is created according to the image of God and made worthy of becoming god" (*ED* 6; 2:70).

For Symeon, the image of God and man is found in both soul and body. Yet, what about man's centre? Like Makarios before him, Symeon is clear that the heart is the centre of the human being and it is there that Christ is formed within him: "Now then, where or in what place or part of our body does he say that Christ takes form? Do you think he means on the brow, or in the face, or in the breast? Assuredly not! It is rather inside, in our hearts" (*ED* 10; 1:169).[67] It is also in the heart that we receive the Holy Spirit (*H* 44.202-203), and feel the exultation of God's grace (*H* 46.11-26). Of course, for Symeon, a pure heart is the end goal of all ascetic struggle and when it is really and truly pure, the heart "is then consecrated and united with God," and "rises on contemplation as if into the third heaven" (*PTC* 3.35).[68]

In addition to man's twofold nature of soul and body with the centre in the heart, Symeon also stresses Christ's twofold nature of God and man and his ability, through the human body he assumed in the Incarnation, to make us what he is – divine and human – through grace:

The Logos, remaining immutable by his divinity,
became human by taking on flesh,
and maintaining the human being immutable in flesh and soul,
He made the whole of me God.
He assumed my condemned flesh,
and dressed me in full divinity,
for having been baptized I put on Christ…

[66] Cf. *H* 53.107-109.
[67] The "he" Symeon is referring to is Paul and the reference is from Gal. 4:19: "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" That Symeon either read or was influenced by Makarios, both Golitzin and Alfeyev are certain; see Golitzin, *Life, Times, and Theology*, 71-75; 100-101 and Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, 130-131; 229-230. For a comparison of Symeon and Makarios' theology, see Hatzopoulos, *Two Outstanding Cases in Byzantine Spirituality: The Macarian Homilies and Symeon the New Theologian*.
[68] Cf. also *PTC* 3.29, 31-32.

And how is one not God by grace, and adoption…
when one puts on the Son of God? (*H* 50.184-190; 192; 194)[69]

It is thus evident that, contrary to Platonic thought, the basis of Symeon's anthropology is founded on the twofold nature of man as a being composed of soul and body – both created in God's image – with the heart at its centre. As well, Christ's twofold nature of God and man is what allows for his deification by grace. Keselopoulos sums up Symeon's anthropology thus:

> Characteristic is the fact that while St Symeon the New Theologian comes from the ranks of monastic Fathers of the Church and speaks for the Christian tradition in its monastic form, he is clearly opposed to the idea that the body is by nature evil or unrelated to the unfolding of man's life in Christ. And something more: he refuses to accept the devaluing of the body relative to the spirit, or of the senses relative to the intellect, but accepts a relationship of reciprocity and respect between these two elements in man. Man's task is to harmonize and unite these two worlds so as to able to give them expression in a movement of worship and love for God.[70]

This anthropological basis will be crucial when considering Symeon's contribution to Maximos' theology of the will, as well as Symeon's insistence, in the face of his detractors, upon the full participation and illumination of the soul and body, which looks forward to Palamas.

6.3.4: The Repentant Will as a Condition of Being

As was explained above, the anthropological significance of Maximos' theology is that the will, as a part of Being, is what moves man towards his eschatological completion and perfection in Christ. If the natural will is not a fundamental condition of Being, then man is an incomplete being. The problem is that after the fall, the mode of use of man's natural will became gnomic.[71] It now needs to be healed along with the rest of our fragmented nature. The significance of

[69] See also *H* 17.249-262; *ED* 6; 2:68-69; and *CD* 13.2-3 for other similar passages.
[70] Keselopoulos, *Man and the Environment*, 50. For Symeon's refusal to devalue the senses relative to the intellect, see *PTC* 3.34.
[71] See note 40 above for a discussion of this.

Maximos' contribution is that if Christ does not possess a natural human will, as the Monothelites claimed, then he is not only not a perfect man, but he cannot heal the human will. The end result is that man's salvation and deification is impossible.[72]

What does Symeon say about the will? Symeon is clear that compunction and repentance "springs from the will" (*CD* 4.2), and that "it is by the free choice of the will that every person either attains compunction and humility, or else becomes hardhearted and proud" (*CD* 4.3). Moreover, it is not by nature that this is attained, "but by will that every man becomes humble and apt for compunction, or hard-hearted, hardened, and insensitive" (*CD* 4.4). Yet, as Symeon knows, man's will is fallen and gnomic, therefore he must become "alien to self-will" by becoming "dead to the world and the things in the world" (*CD* 6.8). For Symeon, all human beings have the ability to become detached from the things of the world and to keep Christ's commandments, but what often hinders them is the lack of will. Therefore, man must submit his will to Christ in repentance (*CD* 7.7), and "There is nothing that prevents us, if only we desire it!" (*CD* 9.10). Man must do so because "He who pursues his own will, however slightly, will never be able to observe the precept of Christ the Savior" – thus man must engage in the "complete mortification of self-will" (*CD* 20.1).[73] This mortification of the will must be voluntary because God will not force man against his will to see the light which is always present before him (*H* 34.116). It is man's stubborn will

[72] Symeon points this out when speaking of Christ in *Hymn* 17.254-258:
He mysteriously became created
and He deified the human nature He assumed,
He showed to me a double marvel
by his two energies
and likewise by his two wills…

[73] See also *H* 50.95-100:
But therefore I know, the God Who knows all things,
the faith, the humility toward your father,
the total renunciation of your own will
that is and is reckoned a testimony to Me.
For one who does not have their own will certainly dies,
but one who is found in my will also live.

which prevents him from seeing God's light (*H* 34.117). As a result, God allows man's free will in the world, but it is that which will judge him in the end (*H* 34.122-23). This is a crucial point because man's natural will as a component of Being is part of what it means to be made in God's image. As already noted, God acts out of his free will which cannot be forced or coerced. The same goes for man. Symeon is clear that God will not coerce man's will because he wants "those who obey Me to do service, / to be moved by fear, and to show love / by their own power and free choice" (*H* 43.32-35).[74]

That God will not coerce or force man's will, but rather prefers that he move toward him in fear and love through the use of his free will, is an important point. In this, Symeon is quite traditional. What then is Symeon's contribution? The will is what moves man toward his eschatological completion and perfection in Christ, but it is fallen and gnomic and needs to be healed.[75] So, what motivates man's will to move toward Christ? Is it a "natural" movement; that is, left to its own devices, will man's will gravitate toward Christ? It will not because the natural will is gnomic because of its fallen condition. So, to put it another way, what *activates* the will in a movement towards Christ? For Symeon, it is repentance, as a condition of Being, which activates the will in its movement toward Christ:

From this, all sympathy and mercy
is poured out, flowing from the soul to everyone,
most of all to those who wish to repent and to be saved.
For He has mercy on all, but with the latter He concurs,
and co-operates with, and unifies, and suffers with them in all things,
being united in their soul by free will,
and He judges, by the mind, the beauty of their repentance (*H* 22.190-196).

[74] We also get a hint of this in the writings of Isaac the Syrian: "No kind of repentance that takes place after the removal of our free will will be a well-spring of joy, nor will it be reckoned for the reward of those who possess it"; see *Homily* 2 in *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 122.
[75] Asceticism and ascetic practise are huge parts of the process of healing the will. Yet as seen in chapter five above, for Symeon there is no entry into the ascetic life without repentance.

This passage shows that God's mercy and love is extended to all; but especially to those who wish to repent. Thus, it is the *repentant will* which moves man toward God. Moreover, it also involves a co-operation between our will and God's will.[76] This co-operation, activated by the repentant free will, results in man being united to God (i.e., deification). Most importantly of all, man is judged by the measure of his repentance – which is a free, volitional act of his will.

By introducing repentance into ontology, Symeon is not only following Maximos' teaching on the will, but now introduces "the personal, loving activity of repentance as a personal, eschatological activation of the natural human will."[77] Repentance comes from the will as one has to want, to desire to repent. This is motivated by compunction, fear, and love; which reiterates the importance of John 14:21, wherein if a person loves Christ, he keeps his commandments. Therefore, repentance is a free volitional act of Christ-like self-emptying and humility (Phil. 2:7-8) which, as seen in the previous chapter, makes possible man's initiation into "the eschatological ontology of becoming in communion."[78] By not only introducing repentance into Being, but attaching it to the will, Symeon is also confirming that it is a continual state of being.[79] This is important because if a person stops repenting at any time, the movement of his will towards eschatological perfection and completion in Christ is arrested. In other words, his movement becomes static. It is therefore the repentant will which activates a person's movement towards Christ and it is kept in motion by the aid of the dynamic force of continual repentance.

For Maximos, the natural human will is a universal fact of Being. It is part of what makes a complete person. This was a huge anthropological correction to Platonic spiritualizing, which

[76] For this notion of "synergy", see note 1 above.
[77] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 101. Consequently, for Symeon, the more a person repents on a daily basis and keeps the commandments, the more his humility increases as does his knowledge, which in turn increases his perfection in Christ; see *ED* 9; 2:127-28.
[78] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 106.
[79] The idea of repentance as a state of being or the framework for living the Christian life was discussed in chapter three above.

saw the will as outside of being and thus ecstatic and transcendent. Symeon's seminal contribution to Maximos' theology is that in attaching repentance to the will, Symeon is saying that the natural human will is a *repentant* will and this is a universal fact of Being. Without repentance, man is not complete. Moreover, repentance is also universal in that it involves the "material-spiritual totality of our nature"[80] as twofold beings composed of soul and body. Repentance then, is not only something done continually in the heart and mind, but it is also physical.[81] It is this twofold nature of repentance which allows for the whole person to participate in the divine nature and be illuminated, soul and body, by the divine light.

6.3.5: The Scandal of Hymn 15 and its Implications for the Total Participation of the Body and its Illumination in Light

In his sixth *Ethical Discourse*, Symeon says that when man is deified, he "becomes in his soul wholly a flame"; yet his soul

> also shares this radiance with his body, in the way that visible fire shares its own nature with molten iron, and…the soul becomes for the body what God has become for the soul. For as the soul is unable to live without being illumined

[80] Loudovikos, *Analogical Identities*, 102.

[81] The very fact of the overtly physical nature of repentance is borne out in the monastic understanding of the word. In the monastic tradition, *Metanoia* not only means repentance, but is also the word used for "prostration". This suggests that *metanoia* not only means a change of the *nous*; that is, of the spiritual faculties, but also suggests a corresponding change in one's body posture. To repent is to humble the *nous*, but it also means to humble the body as well. When we are proud, we look up, but when we are humble, we look down. Our descent into humility leads towards our ascent to Christ. We see this for instance in *Hymn* 17, where Symeon says that it was his repentance and humility which drew Christ to him and glorified him because he saw the sincerity of Symeon's repentance (l.726-734). This leads Christ to say that "And so it is, if each one would approach Me, / and sincerely prostrate… / I shall immediately receive them" (l.735-36; 38). In *Hymn* 25, Symeon tells us that when Christ appeared to him while he was reading, he fell to the ground begging for mercy, and prostrating himself in worship, he gave thanks to Christ for considering him worthy to see him (l.1-40). In l.79, he also prostrates himself before Christ again, thanking him for his mercy. In the accounts of Symeon's visions, we also see him prostrating himself. In recounting how "George" (which is Symeon himself), prayed before he entered the monastery, he tells us that George "prostrated himself with his face to the ground," and "asked for mercy" (*CD* 22.3). This physical act of humility eventually leads to a vision of light (*CD* 22.4). In another account, Symeon tells us that when one sees Christ revealed in light, "He is unable even to lift up his eyes and look at that grandeur. With fear and trembling he looks instead, as it were, at his own feet…" (*ED* 5; 2:53). In fact, when one looks closely at *all* of Symeon's accounts of his visions, they have a decidedly *physical* aspect to them. At the time that Symeon sees Christ, he is repenting in both his *nous* and his body. This glaring fact has been completely overlooked and deserves more attention.

> by the Creator, neither does the body live without being empowered by the soul (*ED* 6; 2:68).[82]

It is evident then, that when deified, man's soul and body cooperate in unison and are both illuminated and participate in the divine nature through grace. There are no shortages of instances in Symeon's writings where he makes this abundantly clear. Yet I would like to focus on a specific passage in in *Hymn* 15, where is found a description of this which is so startling, and its implications so scandalous (not only for his contemporaries, but for many of us as well), that Symeon's eighteenth century editor, Dionysios Zagoraios, thought it prudent to omit this hymn in its entirety from his collection.[83]

While I cannot reproduce the entire hymn here, the following passage deserves to be quoted in full, as it will be crucial for the discussion:

We are made members of Christ, and Christ becomes our members,
and Christ becomes my hand and the foot of all-wretched me,
and wretched I become the hand of Christ and the foot of Christ.
I move my hand and my hand is Christ entire.
For, understand me, the divine divinity is indivisible!
I put my foot in motion and behold, it flashes as Himself.
Do not say that I blaspheme, but accept these things
and fall down and worship Christ Who makes you like this!
For if you also wish, you shall become his member,
and thus every member of each one of us
shall become a member of Christ, and Christ our members,
and He shall make all shameful things decent
by the beauty of his divinity and by his glory He shall adorn them,
and when we are united to God we shall at the same time become gods,

[82] Further on Symeon states: "We have thus demonstrated that, just as God is unconfusedly and indivisibly worshipped in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so in turn does man, without confusion or division, become in God a god by grace in both his soul and body. The body is not changed into soul, nor the soul transformed into divinity, nor is God confused with the soul, but God remains what He is as God, and the soul what it is by nature, and the body such as it was fashioned, of clay. He who has paradoxically bound all these together, Who has mingled what is both intelligible and immaterial with clay, unites Himself unconfusedly with both of these, and I myself am in His image and likeness, as this discourse has proven" (*ED* 6; 2:69-70).

[83] Ware, "Deification in St. Symeon the New Theologian," 16. Zagoraios' edition of Symeon's hymns was printed in Venice in 1790, with a second edition printed in 1886. He was largely dependent upon manuscripts of Symeon's works located on Mount Athos. For a discussion of this see Basil Krivocheine, "The Writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, no. 20 (1954): 302, note 2. For a discussion of the omission of *Hymn* 15 from Zagoraios' edition, see Johannes Koder's introduction to the first volume of Symeon's hymns in *SC* 156: 19-21.

not looking upon the indignity of the body at all,
but completely made like Christ in the whole body,
and each of our members shall be the whole Christ.
For while we become many members He remains one and indivisible,
and each part is the whole Christ himself.
And so thus you well know that both my finger and my penis are Christ.
Do you tremble or feel ashamed?
But God was not ashamed to become like you,
yet you are ashamed to become like Him? (*H* 15.141-163)

This passage is remarkable for a number of reasons,[84] but why was it seen as scandalous to Symeon's contemporaries as well as to later generations? Granted, Symeon uses very graphic imagery, as is his usual wont when making bold statements, but the surprising thing is that what Symeon describes here is not original to him.

Symeon has both biblical and Patristic precedents for making such a bold statement. In I Cor. 12:12-26, Paul speaks of the Church as being one body with many members, all of which are important for the health of the body. Paul extends this to include "those parts of the body which we think less honorable," which are invested "with the greater honour, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require" (v.23-24). Symeon alludes to this in l. 152, when he says that Christ makes "all shameful things decent." This also accords with Paul's teaching that we are to put on Christ (Rom. 13:12-14) and that when we are baptized, we have indeed "put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27).[85] If we have put on Christ and are clothed in Christ, Symeon reasons, then we "are made members of Christ and Christ becomes our members" (l.141). Symeon's "originality" lies only in the very graphic way he describes it. But he was also not the first in the Patristic tradition to do so.

[84] Especially in Symeon's use of "I" and "my", which tells us that he is emphasizing that this, in fact, happened to him and thus he is a witness to the truth of this mystery. Also, Symeon's use of the word "penis" may be the only instance of its use in the entire corpus of Eastern Patristic writings.
[85] Cf. also Eph. 4:22-24 and Col. 3:9-12.

In his fortieth *Oration* (On Baptism), Gregory the Theologian speaks of the entire body being illuminated through baptism.[86] In chapters 38-39 Gregory describes almost every part of the body and when he gets to chapter 40, he says: "And do not marvel if indeed I give more abundant honor to our unseemly parts, mortifying and making them chaste." And why not, asks Gregory, why should we honour only the presentable parts and "dishonor the rest?" For Gregory, we give all of ourselves to God as an offering, and not just those parts which are seemlier. Thus, for Gregory, all of the body is holy and all of it is illuminated in baptism, which reconfirms Paul's teaching that in baptism we have put on Christ and have become his members. Both Gregory and Symeon see deification as being the result of the Incarnation. Both Gregory and Symeon affirm the teaching of Athanasios and Irenaeus that God became man so that we may become god. For Gregory, Christ assumes all of our nature, for "what is not assumed is not healed." This has serious consequences for the understanding of deification which was not lost on Symeon, writing some six centuries later. For both Gregory and Symeon, deification entails the whole of human nature, both soul and body. In regards to the second point, both argued that the whole of the body is deified, not just the intellect, but the body and all of its members – without question. In this regard both Gregory and Symeon share similarities in the graphic nature of their descriptions. In *Or*. 40.38-40, Gregory lists almost all the members of the body which are illuminated by the divine light. This list includes the most unseemly and private parts of our body.

In *Hymn* 15, Symeon stated the same, but was a bit less reserved than Gregory. This has caused no small embarrassment to readers and translators of Symeon over the years, but one wonders why this should be so. Gregory did it before him and both were following Paul (1 Cor. 12:12-26, esp. v. 23-24) where he makes it clear that all of our members become members of Christ

[86] See *Oration* 40.38-40 in St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Festal Orations*, 133–36.

when we put on Christ in baptism. So, there is biblical and Patristic precedents for Symeon' graphic imagery – although in typical fashion, Symeon feels the need to state things quite bluntly. As Symeon pointed out, one should not be scandalized by this as "God was not ashamed to become like you, / yet you are ashamed to become like him?" (l.162-63). As far as I am aware, no scholar has pointed out Symeon's obvious almost word-for-word borrowing from Gregory, nor have they linked both to Paul. [87]

So, while Symeon was not saying anything particularly new, why was his depiction of man's deification in *Hymn* 15 so scandalous and jarring to his contemporaries and to later generations? It was scandalous for two reasons. Firstly, as shown in chapter two, Symeon's contemporaries had lost sight of this fundamental theological truth because they had fallen prey to an intellectualizing, academic theology which denied that such things were even possible in their times. Symeon saw this as a mediocre form of Christianity, and as a rebuttal, later in *Hymn* 15 (l.205-219), he offers his spiritual father as an example of a person who had reached such a level of dispassion that "he possessed the whole Christ, he was the whole Christ himself, / and all his

[87] Both Torrance (*Human Perfection*, 137-38) and Ware ("Deification in St. Symeon the New Theologian," 16-17) discuss this passage from Symeon's fifteenth hymn. Neither point to the connection between Symeon's hymn and the passage in I Cor. 12 and Gregory's fortieth *Oration*. When it comes to the similarities between Gregory and Symeon, they are too close to be mere coincidence. As I mentioned above, Symeon's originality lies in the graphic language he uses and the way in which he spells out with unmistakable clarity, the implication of the incarnation for our deification. But he is not original. He only takes the prior teaching of Paul and Gregory and expands it. This should come as no surprise as Symeon quoted from Paul often and was fond of using Pauline language and imagery in his writings. It is also no secret that Gregory is the one Father whom Symeon quotes the most in his writings. There may also be other patristic influences behind both Gregory and Symeon. Gregory speaks of all the body being illuminated and Symeon notes that his foot "flashes" as Christ (*H* 50.146). Symeon also states that all members of the body will be adorned with the beauty of Christ's divinity and his glory (*H* 50.153). Both Gregory and Symeon no doubt had in mind accounts from the sayings of the Desert Fathers concerning the body's illumination. For some of these accounts see Joseph of Panepho 7 (whose fingers became like ten lamps of fire), Pambo 12 and Silvanus 12 (where both men's faces are described as shining like lightening), and Sisoes 14 (where his face is said to have shone excessively). These can be found in Wortley, *Alphabetical Sayings*. For some excellent papers which connect illimitation/deification to Christology as well as Old Testament theophanies, see Nichifor Tanase, "The Splendour of the Deified Flesh: Glorification (Δεδοξασμένη) and Deifictaion (Θέωσις) into a Continuum of Theophanies," *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai - Theologia Orthodoxa* 61, no. 2 (December 2016): 105–42; Nichifor Tanase, "'Shining Face' as Hidden and Revealed Christology," *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai - Theologia Orthodoxa* 62, no. 1 (January 2017): 187–216.

members and the members of every other / he always saw one and all as Christ" (l.209-211). As such he was able to look dispassionately upon naked people and was not embarrassed to be naked before others. This level of holiness was unacceptable to Symeon's contemporaries, so they not only denied it but accused his spiritual father of being a quack, if not a holy fool of the worst variety. This led Symeon to castigate his contemporaries: "so how dare you calumniate the saint, / and why do you blaspheme against Christ Who is united to us, / and who has given dispassion to his saints?" (l.217-19). Symeon also castigated those who thought he was blaspheming Christ: "Do not say that I blaspheme, but accept these things / and fall down and worship Christ Who makes you like this!" (l.147-48). Symeon speaks so strongly because he believes that denying the incarnational aspect of man's deification is to "ultimately deny the humanity of Christ (and the redemption of our bodies)."[88]

And this is precisely what leads to the second reason why Symeon's words were so scandalous to his contemporaries and to later generations. Symeon states that when we become members of Christ and Christ is our members "He shall make all shameful things decent" (l.152) and that "when we are united to God we shall at the same time become gods, / not looking upon the indignity of the body at all…" (l.154-55). The key words here are "shameful" and "indignity". This is precisely how many of Symeon's contemporaries and many today view the body. As pointed out in chapter three, the contemporary understanding of "spirituality" and "mysticism" downgrades the body and accords it little to no role in the spiritual life. In its place is a detached, intellectual contemplation or a "mysticism" which seeks to possess God at the utmost limits of consciousness. This notion of "spirituality" and "mysticism" is borderline monophysite. The hallmark of any Platonic "spirituality" is a view of the body which sees it as shameful and

[88] Torrance, *Human Perfection,* 138.

indignant (remember that Plotinus was ashamed to be in a body). In chapter three it was seen that this type of spirituality entered the East through Origen and the West through Augustine and has ever been a temptation for both. It was a temptation to which Symeon's contemporaries succumbed, as well as one in which succeeding generations have largely fallen prey.

This ultimate importance of this passage, however, is that it provides a crucial link between Symeon and Gregory Palamas. As shown above, Palamas pointed back to Symeon's life and writings as an example of and a witness to the truth he was defending against Barlaam. When Palamas defended the body's participation in hesychastic prayer and when, in the *Hagioritic Tome*, Palamas and the Athonite monks declared that the soul and body shared a conjoint existence, they were only defending a truth that had been expressed very graphically by Symeon three centuries earlier. Symeon thus stands in a pivotal place. In his insistence on the repentant will, Symeon looks back to the teaching of Maximos and makes a profound contribution to the understanding, not only of the function of the natural human will as a component of Being, but to the fundamental importance of continual repentance as well. In his insistence on the body's participation in deification (so starkly described in *Hymn* 15), and in his insistence that this was a reality which he himself experienced, Symeon provided Palamas with a concrete example within the continuum of experience in the tradition, that the theological and anthropological truth which he and the Athonite monks were defending was a reality; and moreover, it could be experienced here and now. As well, it pointed to the anthropological truth of the conjoint existence of the soul and body and that they both are illuminated by the divine, uncreated light of Tabor in this life.

6.3.6: Conclusion

This section has shown that Symeon's anthropology is biblically and Patristically based. Like the Fathers before him he upholds the twofold nature of man composed of soul and body, with the image of God reflected in both parts. Like Makarios, Symeon also sees the heart as the centre of the human person. In his teaching on the repentant will, Symeon builds upon Maximos and provides a seminal contribution to the understanding of the natural human will. In his insistence on the full participation and illumination of the body, Symeon leaves a credible witness to this anthropological truth for which Palamas would make full use of in the context of his debate with Barlaam.

Deification includes the soul and all members of the body, even the "unseemly" parts. There are no exceptions. For as Christ assumed a human body in the Incarnation, this means that the entire body becomes holy and illumined when it becomes a member of Christ and has put on Christ in baptism. What Symeon describes in *Hymn* 15 was nothing, if not scandalous to his contemporaries; or at least an impossibility. It was scandalous because their intellectual and academic theology could not accord a place for the deification of the body. It remains scandalous for many today for similar reasons – because what is currently understood to be "spirituality" and "mysticism", with its focus on intellectual contemplation, interiority, and mystical "consciousness", has difficulty according any dignity or place to the body in the spiritual life. I have argued consistently in this thesis that Symeon's life and theology have predominately been read through such a lens – and this has had, and continues to have consequences for how it is read and interpreted. I hope it has become clear by this point that Symeon cannot and should not be read this way. Why this is so, is the focus of the final section of this chapter and of this thesis.

6.4: Fragmented and Ambiguous "Spirituality" and "Mysticism" Leads to Symeon's Fragmented Image and Ambiguous Place

The fatal flaw in Platonic "spirituality" is that it is static. In this scheme, Being is always deficient – there is always a lack of personhood because it sees history and man's materiality as a falling away from the divine. Man's soul, which is the image of the divine, has fallen into materiality and needs to free itself of it. The problem with consigning the image of God in man exclusively to the soul is that if the soul has fallen, then man's materiality is a hinderance to his eventual return to the divine. There can never be a Being in becoming in communion and man can never fully participate in the divine nature.

Regarding eschatology, the result is that it simply collapses because there is nothing to look forward to. Once the soul has been divested of its material body, it returns to the divine and is absorbed into it. Personhood, in this case, is eradicated, not perfected and completed. The danger lurking in this type of anthropology is that it could lead to an undermining of the necessity of the resurrection because in this scheme, the soul has returned to its divine source and no longer needs the body because it can subsist on its own.

Anthropologically speaking, this type of spirituality fragments the human person because it posits a fundamental dualism at the heart of man's nature. By placing the image of God in man exclusively in the soul, it effectively denies and denigrates the other half of man's nature because the body is seen as something base and material. Authentic biblical and Patristic anthropology posits man as created in God's image, endowed with a rational soul, and given a material body through which he interreacts with the world and with other persons. Man is a psychosomatic being and his soul and body are conjointly related. The human person is not just a soul or a body alone, but rather a composite of the two, which makes him complete. This means that both soul and body will be glorified, deified, and participate in the divine nature. Salvation entails that the human

person is healed, perfected, and completed in the *totality* of his being. This is absent from Platonic spirituality. It thus fragments the human person and renders ambiguous his place in creation because, from the standpoint of eschatology, history and material creation is a falling away and man must be liberated from it; thus, eschatology collapses because there is no future hope or possibility of full participation, deification, and perfection.

6.4.1: Restoring Symeon's Fragmented Image

What has all of this to do with Symeon's fragmented image and ambiguous place? I hope it has become clear by now that it has everything to do with it. In the introduction to this thesis, it was seen that in the century of scholarship on Symeon, he has been described in a number of contradictory ways.[89] I thus suggested that perhaps it is possible that the problem lies not with the man himself, nor in the specifics of his theology, but is fundamentally a matter of how both his life and theology have been read and interpreted over the last century.

In the first chapter of this thesis, the review of the literature indicated that Symeon's life and theology have been read and interpreted almost exclusively from the lens of "mysticism". In chapter three it was shown that this "mysticism", through which Symeon is read and interpreted, is not only methodologically problematic, but it derives from Platonism, which has infiltrated the East through Origen and the West through Augustine. I have also noted that this type of reading presents real dangers, chief among them being eschatological and anthropological. Those eschatological and anthropological dangers were examined in this chapter.

What conclusions emerge from this? I think it can be safely concluded that the reading and interpretation of Symeon's life and theology in such a manner, is the reason why his image remains

[89] See p. 1-2 above.

fragmented and static. It is thus and will remain thus unless a way is found to move beyond the fragmented and static forms within which Symeon is read. That is why I posited continual repentance as an integrative hermeneutical lens through which to read Symeon. Chapter five explored the integrative potential of continual repentance and how it unites all the elements of Symeon's theology. The problem is that Platonic anthropology, in which Origenistic-Augustinian forms of mysticism and spirituality are based, is a faulty anthropology which is neither biblical nor Patristic. In placing the image of God in man exclusively in the soul, it favours what is spiritual over what is not; i.e., the body. It posits a duality and conflict between them. The result is that it fragments the human person. In regards to Symeon, the consequence of this type of reading is that only a part of his life and theology is glimpsed, and not very clearly at that; which results in the varying and often contradictory labels which have been attached to him over the last century.

How can Symeon's fragmented image be restored? Part of the restoration may occur if an effort is taken to understand Symeon's time and place and what he has to say within his own context. That was the goal of chapter two, wherein I argued that a careful and thorough examination of Symeon's context reveals how his theology of continual repentance emerged out of specific historical, social, intellectual and theological forces. In chapter four I argued that Symeon's theology of continual repentance also emerged out of his monastic context and was shaped in response to certain theological problems. That is why I have argued for a contextual reading of Symeon, because the current reading decontextualizes him, which leads to fragmentation. I believe that a contextual reading of Symeon is a good first start to restoring his fragmented image.

6.4.2: Finding Symeon's Place and Assessing his Theological Contributions

It is clear that Symeon's fragmented image is the result of the past and current reading of him, which is based upon a questionable understanding of "mysticism" and "spirituality". It follows from this that if Symeon's image remains fragmented and static, then it is difficult to position him within the broader context of the continuum of experience in the tradition, with the result being that the value of his theological contributions to his contemporaries, let alone for us, cannot be adequately assessed. The current reading of Symeon gives the impression that his understanding of the experience of God, which is the vision of him in light, is somehow "unique" or the product of a heightened "mystical consciousness", or solely the result of intellectual contemplation. Symeon's "spirituality" becomes individualistic, charismatic, or enthusiastic and he is portrayed as an outlier operating outside of and/or in conflict with Church doctrine and authority, instead of being seen as an integral part of the continuum of experience in the tradition. Such a perception of Symeon is deceptive because it presents a false image of him and distorts the content of his theology.

So, what is Symeon's place? Symeon occupies a key position between Maximos the Confessor in the seventh century and Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth. While this answer might seem rather benign to some or anathema to others who look to "mysticism" for the source of Symeon's greatness; it is perfectly aligned with a contextual reading. I have argued in this chapter that a key element of Maximos' theology was his teaching on the natural human will. Maximos taught that the will is a component of Being (ontology) and is what enables man to move toward his eschatological completeness and perfection in Christ. Without the will as a component of Being, the human person is incomplete and fragmented. If Christ also did not possess a natural

human will, then Christ, as a man, was incomplete and fragmented. The result is that man's salvation and deification is threatened. Monothelitism also denied the anthropological reality of man's full participation in the divine nature. Therefore, it was fundamental that Maximos defend the two wills and two natures in Christ. In doing do, Maximos defended the twofold nature of both Christ and man, as well as defended the anthropological truth of man's full deification and participation in the divine nature.

It is the natural human will which enables us to move toward our eschatological completeness and perfection in Christ. Yet what activates the will? One of Symeon's fundamental contributions was attaching repentance to ontology. It is the repentant will which activates the desire to move toward our eschatological completeness and perfection in Christ. Moreover, it is continual repentance which keeps the will in motion toward Christ and helps to reunify man's fragmented nature. Without continual repentance, personhood remains static and cannot move toward its Being in becoming in communion. The result is that one can easily fall prey to Platonic and monophysite forms of mysticism and spirituality, which are narcissistic and work against a person's Being as becoming in communion. There are two consequences resulting from Symeon's insistence on continual repentance and humility. The first is that it provided a corrective to the intellectualizing theology of his contemporaries, which arose within the first wave of Byzantine humanism. The second is that Symeon defended, against the "iconoclasts" of his time, the anthropological truth that the totality of man's psychosomatic nature is illuminated by the divine light and participates in the divine nature. This was a sign of holiness which Symeon insisted was available to everyone now, in this life, provided they sincerely repented. Furthermore, this holiness was seen in the past and could still be seen in the lives of his contemporaries, especially in that of

his spiritual father. Symeon's hymns are a witness to this truth and thus Symeon's life became a witness for future generations.

By the time that Palamas confronted Barlaam, he not only had Maximos' theology of the natural human will, but also the witness of Symeon's life and writings. It has been shown that the witness of Symeon's life and writings provided Palamas with a crucial piece of ammunition in his struggle with Barlaam over the body's full participation and illumination in the uncreated light of the Transfiguration. It was also seen that Barlaam's protest against the Athonite monk's claim to bodily illumination and their insistence of enclosing the intellect within the body, was influenced by his Platonic theology which could not accept the role of the body in the act of prayer. In fact, it not only could not accept it, but was abhorred by any such notion of the body having anything to do with man's salvation or illumination. In his defense of biblical and anthropological truth against this Platonic metaphysics, Palamas pointed to Symeon's life and writings as a witness to the truth he was defending. Thus, Symeon occupies a key position in the anthropological axis between Maximos and Palamas.

So, how can Symeon's fragmented image be pieced together? How can the riddle of his ambiguous place be solved? How can his theological contributions be properly assessed? The answer is relatively simple, but perhaps quite radical, considering how Symeon's life and theology have been read and interpreted over the course of the last century and a quarter. The answer is that we should seriously reconsider reading and interpreting Symeon's life and theology through the lens of a questionable articulation of "mysticism" and "spirituality". It is quite clear that in speaking about Symeon's experience of God, such words are inadequate because their meanings are questionable, if not blatantly false.[90] In fact, they have been transcended. A serious

[90] I would go even further in this regard and offer the suggestion that perhaps it is time to place a moratorium on the use of these words; at least until theologians and scholars can come to a consensus on what they actually mean; if that

reconsideration (and perhaps even an abandonment) of this reading and the jettisoning of these words entails nothing less than a radical paradigm shift in the scholarship on Symeon. I am suggesting nothing less. It has been the purpose of this thesis to offer in its place at least one possible alternative. I do not claim it is the only one, or the best one; but it is a start.

In the final evaluation, Symeon is not "Un grand mystique Byzantin"; nor is he "a mystic of fire and light" or "one of the leading charismatic mystics the Church of Christ has produced." He is neither "the greatest of the Byzantine mystical writers"; nor is he a "mystical anarchist" or "a bundle of paradoxes." Symeon simply isn't a "mystic", nor is his theology "mysticism". Only someone unfamiliar with Symeon's context can call him "one of the most controversial writers of the entire Christian tradition." If Symeon is "the most easily misunderstood" of the Greek Fathers, it is not due to any fault of his own, but is due to a misreading and misinterpretation of him which is largely the product of questionable and vague notions of "mysticism" and "spirituality" through which he has been mostly read. Symeon is not some gifted "mystical" outlier operating beyond the confines of or in opposition to Church doctrine and authority, but is rather a key Father between Maximos and Palamas – and more importantly, Symeon's life is a crucial link in the golden chain of holiness and witness in the continuum of experience in the tradition. Any reading of Symeon which fragments him or attempts to read him apart or outside of that continuum, is one that will inevitably do his life and theology a profound injustice.

is indeed possible. In regards to words such as "mystic" and "mysticism", theologians, at least, should be aware that their use comes with a history which is not so innocent and often unknown to the scholar. Moreover, the use of these words by scholars is more often than not, driven by certain preconceived paradigms of thought and interpretation, whether innocent or malicious. See the discussion of this in chapter three above.

6.5: Conclusion

In the first part of this final chapter, it was seen that authentic biblical and Patristic anthropology posits that man is a twofold being who is a composite of soul and body. Using Irenaeus' theology as our benchmark, it was shown that the image of God in man is to be found in both his soul and body, and that contrary to Augustine's Platonism, this has ever been the teaching of the Fathers. It was also seen that it was Makarios who posited, based on ample biblical and Patristic tradition, that man's centre was located in the heart.

The second part of this chapter, examined Maximos' teaching on the natural human will in the context of his battle with Monothelitism. Maximos' crucial contribution was his insistence that the natural will was a component of Being, in which it is the will which moves man toward his eschatological completion and perfection in Christ. In his defense of the two wills in Christ, Maximos defended the anthropological truth of Scripture and Tradition: that man is twofold and participates fully in the divine nature. It was also seen that within the context of his debate with Barlaam, Palamas upheld and defended these truths and that the witness of Symeon's life and writings were crucial in this regard. Symeon's anthropology was then examined and it was discovered through the evidence found in his writings, that not only was his anthropology that of his forebearers in the tradition, but that Symeon was a crucial link in the anthropological axis between Maximos and Palamas, because he added continual repentance to Maximos' ontology of the will. It is thus the repentant will which moves man toward and keeps him on the road to his eventual eschatological completeness and perfection in Christ. Symeon's insistence upon full participation in the divine nature and bodily illumination in the divine light, provided Palamas with the evidence of the truth he was defending against Barlaam.

In the final part of this chapter, I argued that Symeon's fragmented image and ambiguous place is the direct result of the questionable understanding of "mysticism" and "spirituality" through which the scholarship has traditionally read him. Symeon's fragmented image can be restored and the riddle of his ambiguous place be solved, only if this type of reading is discarded. Yet, this entails a complete paradigm shift, and my suggestion of a contextual reading with continual repentance as the hermeneutical key is, I think, at least one valid place to start. Perhaps this is long overdue. If the misreading and misinterpretation of Symeon's life and theology cannot be overcome, then the value of his theological contributions – on of which was to claim that it is only through continual repentance and the keeping of the commandments that we will see Christ – cannot be adequately assessed. To see Christ is to experience him with the totality of our twofold nature. This is what constitutes the experience of God for Symeon and this experience of God is impossible without continual repentance:

Do not say: "It is impossible to receive the Holy Spirit."
Do not say: "Without him it is possible to be saved."
And so do not say that one can possess him without knowing!
Do not say that God is not seen by humans.
Do not say: "Human beings do not see the divine light,"
or that it is impossible in the present times!
This is never impossible, friends,
but it is very possible for those who wish it….
so also everyone who repents and everyone who serves God
ought to hasten and always be anxious,
thus one's repentance shall be acceptable,
and one's well-pleasing service become perfect,
and then having been made wholly a friend of God by these virtues,
the whole person is united and sees him face to face (*H* 27.125-132; 158-163).

Conclusion

"The All-Embracing Responsibility of Repentance": Symeon's Place in Orthodox Theology and his Challenge for Us Today

General Summary

In the first chapter of this thesis, the last century and a quarter of academic scholarship on Symeon, was examined. This review of the literature yielded several observations. The first was that Symeon's life and theology has been overwhelmingly read and interpreted through the lens of "mysticism". In this reading, Symeon is cast as a representative type of Byzantine "mystic" and his theology as a representative type of "mysticism". There are two problems with this reading. The first is that there is no justification as to why this reading should be so predominant; the second is that this reading is methodologically questionable in that it attributes certain characteristic elements of mysticism to Symeon without providing a sound methodological rationale for why this should be so. It was also observed that this type of reading ignores Symeon's historical and theological contexts which results in the fragmentation of his image and renders his place in Orthodox theology rather ambiguous. In short, this reductive method cannot help to assess his theological contributions. I therefore asked whether or not another, more productive reading could be employed, which would take into consideration Symeon's historical and theological contexts, while at the same time providing an integrative hermeneutical tool which would enable the piecing together of his fragmented image, which would help to solve the riddle of his ambiguous place, as well as assess his theological contributions. To that end I proposed a contextual reading of Symeon with continual repentance as an integrative hermeneutical key, and then outlined this methodology.

The second chapter examined the contextual problem. I asked what the value was in studying Symeon's context. I concluded that Symeon's context was important because, according

to the third methodological principle, a given Father's theology emerges from the problem he is called to solve within his time and place. Thus, an accurate knowledge as possible of Symeon's context is needed, if his theological contributions are to be accurately assessed. Symeon's life was also briefly examined as well as three misreadings of Symeon's context. The second and third section looked closely at Symeon's context. I argued that Symeon's theology was shaped within the context of post-iconoclasm and the rise of Byzantine humanism. In the last section I argued that Symeon proposed a theology of repentance as a corrective to the intellectualizing theology of his time which claimed the communion of saints was closed and denied that ordinary Christians were capable of the kind of holiness exhibited by the saints of old.

The third chapter looked at the origin and problem of the "mysticist" reading of Symeon. I argued in that chapter that this type of reading was methodologically problematic and reductive because it attributed to Symeon certain categories of "mysticism", without providing the circumstances upon which those attributes were based. I then argued that this was because the mysticist reading of Symeon is based on a dubious understanding of mysticism which has its roots in the misunderstanding of the Greek *mysticos.* The problem is that mysticism is never defined and that such a reading is largely based on preconceived categories of thought and interpretation. The second part of the chapter looked at the alternative concept of continual repentance as it was defined by Alexis Torrance, and it was found that, contrary to the idea of mysticism, this concept has a solid definition and can be traced throughout Orthodox theology.

Chapter four was devoted to tracing that concept in Symeon's sources. It was found that continual repentance can be adequately traced in the Patristic and monastic sources prior to Symeon and it was also seen that Symeon was heavily influenced by those sources. The concept of continual repentance in hymnography and liturgy was also explored, and I argued that as a

monastic, Symeon spent much of his time in liturgical worship, and thus would have known and been influenced by these texts' insistence on continual repentance.

The fifth chapter was concerned with exploring the integrative potential of a theology of continual repentance as a hermeneutical key in Symeon's writings. This entailed a close examination of the whole of Symeon's writings. In order to facilitate the discussion, I divided Symeon's theology into a number of constituent elements, such as the keeping of the commandments, spiritual fatherhood and spiritual authority, holiness and witness, asceticism, the spiritual senses, knowledge of God, self, and others, and finally the vision and experience of God. In doing so, it was found that continual repentance indeed acted as the binding agent which held all the various elements of Symeon's "system" together. I also demonstrated that the theology of continual repentance could help to integrate these various elements into a coherent whole.

In the final chapter I argued that anthropology was the key to piecing together Symeon's fragmented image as well as determining his place in Orthodox theology. I posited that Symeon occupies a key place in an anthropological axis between Maximos the Confessor and Gregory Palamas, and it is only when Symeon's theological contributions are understood, that the riddle of his ambiguous place can be solved. In order to do so, I first summarized biblical and Patristic anthropology, and using Irenaeus and Makarios as examples, argued that biblical and Patristic anthropology taught that the image of God in man was found in both his soul and body and that man's centre was the heart. This was contrasted with Augustine's anthropology which was influenced by Platonism, which led him to regard the image of God in man as exclusively in the soul, with the result being a downgrading of the value of the body in the spiritual life. I noted that this view was contrary to Scripture and the Fathers, and moreover, it results in an anthropology which fragments the human person.

I then examined the anthropological contribution of Maximos' claim that the natural human will was a part of being, as well as Palamas' anthropological claim that the whole person, soul and body, is illuminated by and participates in God's uncreated light. I then placed Symeon between them and it was seen that Symeon's seminal contribution was that he added repentance to Maximos' ontology of the will. Thus, it is the repentant will which moves man toward and keeps him on the path toward his eschatological perfection and completeness in Christ. In regards to Palamas, Symeon's life and writings provided Palamas with an authentic witness in his battle with Barlaam over the body's illumination and participation in God's uncreated light. Thus, Symeon emerges as a key figure between Maximos and Palamas and it is his theology of continual repentance which is Symeon's crucial theological contribution. In the final part, I argued that Symeon's fragmented image and his ambiguous place are the direct result of the way his life has been read and interpreted, which is through an understanding of mysticism and spirituality which is based upon a faulty anthropology. I argued that the only way this can be overcome is to abandon this reading altogether, and that it was the purpose of this thesis to offer at least one alternative reading. Now it is time to evaluate some of the claims I have made over the course of this thesis.

Assessing the Value of Continual Repentance as an Integrative Hermeneutical Key

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, my research hypothesis is that the theology of continual repentance offers a valuable, integrative hermeneutical key that could provide new insights into important facets of Symeon's context and theology. I also stated that the deliberate focus on continual repentance as an exploratory lens was driven by its integrative potential, i.e., its ability to relate to and include other relevant aspects of Symeon's theology. My thesis has thus

explored the integrative potential of continual repentance in approaching key aspects of Symeon's theology. What has been learned from this exercise? Does it have any value?

I believe that continual repentance does indeed offer a valuable integrative hermeneutical key which has provided new insights into Symeon's context and theology, because it allows us to appreciate Symeon's theology as a congruent "system" in which all elements are interrelated. As the literature review made clear, other scholars have employed different aspects of Symeon's theology or used different approaches. For instance, Turner has studied Symeon through the lens of spiritual fatherhood; Alfeyev has studied Symeon in relation to Orthodox tradition; and Keselopoulos has studied Symeon through the lens of environmental questions. All these studies are valid and offer valuable insights into Symeon's theology; however, they are not as all-embracing as repentance. Turner, for instance, is silent on how spiritual fatherhood is linked to other aspects of Symeon's theology, and both Alfeyev and Keselopoulos' studies offer very little in the way of elucidating how Symeon's historical and social context play a factor in the development of his thought. Continual repentance, on the other hand, offers us a valuable tool with which we can integrate Symeon's context with his theology in order to see how it forms a cohesive whole. We are thus in a better position to assess and evaluate his theological contributions. There may be other approaches. In the final part of chapter three, I noted that Symeon's relation to the liturgy has been virtually ignored in the scholarship. I believe it is possible to read and interpret Symeon's life and theology liturgically. Only further scholarship, however, can reveal whether it has the same integrative potential as continual repentance.

Concerning continual repentance, we saw in chapter three that one of the questions which Torrance's study left unanswered was its relation to mysticism; that is, what does continual repentance tell us about the nature and supposed content of mysticism. I think it tells us a few

things. On account of the fact that continual repentance can be solidly defined and thoroughly traced in the continuum of experience in the tradition, it offers a more comprehensive and productive lens through which to read the Fathers, and Symeon in particular. On the other hand, mysticism, with its questionable definition, its use of attributive labels, and its lack of an interpretive method, is anything but comprehensive or productive. It relies on preconceived strategies of thought and interpretation as well as a "methodology" which decontextualizes, manipulates, and distorts its sources. For these reasons, I have come to the conclusion that we would do ourselves a service as theologians if we began to question this approach as well as look for alternative ways in which to read and interpret Patristic literature. If it has done anything, it has told us that Patristic literature is better served if we reject a method of interpretation which is based upon vague language and faulty methodology.

Yet, can we apply the integrative potential of continual repentance to the whole of Patristic literature? This is a more difficult question to answer. In his study, Torrance applied it to the writings of Mark the Monk, Barsanuphios and John, and John Klimakos. It worked very well in Torrance's study. Torrance also noted that he had not applied it to Patristic texts beyond the seventh century. In this thesis I have done so, and I believe it worked well in Symeon's case. But what if it is applied to the writings of Isaac the Syrian or John of Damascus or Gregory Palamas? Will it be as fruitful? Will it yield the same results? That depends on context. In other words, one would have to thoroughly study the context of that particular Father in order to determine if continual repentance can be used as an integrative hermeneutical key. As we saw in chapters two through four, a thorough study of Symeon's historical and theological context did indeed reveal that continual repentance emerged from his particular context. That may not be the case for Palamas, for instance. It may turn out that the context may suggest another aspect of his theology which

may be more useful as an integrative hermeneutical tool. And herein, I believe, lies the value of a contextual reading of Fathers.

The Value and Challenges of the Methodology of a Contextual Reading of the Fathers

In the first chapter I outlined five key principles of a methodology for a contextual reading of Patristic literature and employed those principles throughout this thesis. It is now time to ask what we have learned from this methodology. What are its advantages and disadvantages? What are its challenges? Does it have any value for Patristic studies?

My research on this thesis has convinced me that although a contextual reading of the Fathers is one among many, it is perhaps the most comprehensive because it possesses the following advantages. The first is that a contextual reading makes us sensitive to the fact that the Fathers of the Church lived and wrote in different ecclesial, theological, cultural, historical, temporal and linguistic contexts and related their writings to distinct contexts. It allows us to appreciate that the same truth may be expressed differently by different Fathers, in different times, in different languages, and in different contexts, without denying the fact that they shared the common context of the one universal Christian tradition. In short, this method allows us to get a comprehensive picture, as far as that is possible, of a particular Father in his time and place.

On account of the fact that the contextual method does not divide the Patristic Tradition chronologically, or qualitatively, or evaluatively, into earlier and later, but considers it unified, we are able to see how the work of a particular Father reflects the *continuum of experience within the Tradition*. It allows us to place the doctrine or a text of a Father within the more widely accepted doctrine of all the Fathers. It also allows us to appreciate that the Fathers are not merely relics from the past, but are living witnesses and contemporaries.

By showing proportionate care to the context within which something is written, the contextual method shows us that the theology of a Father becomes clear from *all* his works, and not just from one of his texts, which allows us to see that the content of the writings of a Father is in direct coherence with the problem that he is called to solve, and with the error which he attempts to fix in the life of believers. It also provides a broader knowledge of the wider theological and historical context within which the writer expressed himself, the purpose for which he wrote, as well as the challenges which he was called to face.

A contextual reading does not sever the texts of a Father from the wider theological and historical context that produced it, which gives us a better understanding of the purpose for which the text was composed, of the historical circumstances within which it was written, as well as the cause which brought it out. It also forces an awareness that Patristic texts are interpreted correctly only when they are integrated within the historical and theological conditions that produced them. It also makes the interpreter aware of the fact that they should also keep intact the theological principles which its creator acknowledges, because any approach to the text with premises unknown to the author results in misinterpretation.

And finally, the contextual method, in prohibiting pulling words or thoughts of the Holy Fathers out of the overall context of their theological system, and drawing whatever desired conclusions from such thoughts, allows the scholar to appreciate a given Father's theology as a congruent system in which all elements are interrelated. The contextual method also allows for comparative analysis of the works of several Fathers, under the condition that one does not artificially draw together two or more Fathers who have lived in totally different contexts; rather, one should look for real connections between them. In other words, before comparing two or more Fathers, one must define precisely their contextual interconnectedness.

There is, however, a major challenge attendant upon this method. As the contextual method presupposes a wider knowledge of the historical, social, linguistic, political, theological, etc., circumstances of a particular Father, the biggest challenge facing any scholar employing this method is that he must familiarize himself with, and work within, multiple disciplines. Many scholars are either uncomfortable or unfamiliar with those disciplines, and thus they may see the multi-disciplinary approach of the contextual method as a formidable obstacle and thus avoid it. This is understandable as this multi-disciplinary approach can be daunting. Yet, as it is a multi-disciplinary approach, the contextual method is perhaps the most comprehensive method available, and with time and patience, it can yield some fruitful results. I hope the usefulness of this method has been demonstrated in this thesis, and I firmly believe that this method should be employed by scholars going forward, not only in the study of Symeon in particular, but also in the wider context of Patristic studies.

There is also one major disadvantage to this method, especially to theologians. As the contextual method is a multi-disciplinary approach, there is a danger that the *theological message* of a particular Father can get buried under the weight of the other disciplines. It is the ultimate task of a theologian to extract the theological message of a particular Father, as well as to elucidate its meaning and relevance for that Father's particular time and place, as well as its relevance and meaning for that theologian's time. A theologian must bear in mind that no matter how useful the other disciplines are in his study of the Fathers, the theological message and its meaning and relevance take precedence. Therefore, another challenge of the contextual method is that the scholar must maintain a careful balance between theology and the other disciplines. I believe that I have done so in this thesis and its result has yielded a more comprehensive approach to Symeon's

life and theology and has provided us with a clearer image of him, as well as providing a useful tool in which to assess his theological contributions and his place in Orthodox theology.

Key Contributions of This Thesis

In the end, how has this thesis contributed to the scholarship on Symeon in particular and to Patristic studies in general? I believe that this thesis contains five important contributions.

The first is that it adopts the key principles of Patristic hermeneutics and contributes to the development of a better understanding of Symeon's historical, social, and theological contexts, and how they are related to his theology, which results in the emergence of a more coherent image of Symeon in the wider context of the continuum of experience in the Christian tradition. In particular, the thesis makes a clear difference between attribute-based and circumstance/context-based characterizations to enhance the explanatory power of its analytical approach.

Secondly, it contributes to a better understanding of the importance of repentance in Symeon's context and how it could be used as a valuable integrative hermeneutical key for interpreting Symeon's life and works, leading to a better assessment of the value of his theological contributions. To the best of our knowledge, this is one of the first studies that adopts a contextual examination of the explanatory potential of repentance as an existential factor in St Symeon's life and works in such depth and detail.

Thirdly, a contextually-based reading of Symeon's works not only helps in contributing to a better understanding of his theology and theological contributions, but in the wider scope of Patristic studies in general, it provides a methodological signpost that could inspire future similar studies and enable a better understanding of the writings of the Fathers, as well as underscores the

importance of and the need for scholars to employ a contextually-based approach when interpreting the life and works of the Church Fathers.

Fourthly, it builds on the latest scholarly work in contributing to a better understanding of how to situate and integrate Symeon's theological contributions within the continuum of experience in the tradition, which leads to a better understanding of Symeon's place in Orthodox theology.

Finally, it provides a conceptual clarification and contributes to a better understanding of what constitutes "mysticism" and "spirituality'; what these terms mean or do not mean – and in light of Symeon's theological contributions – the challenges they pose for us today. Thus, the discussion provided in this thesis may be of interest to an audience that goes beyond the topical academic circles.

The Significance of Symeon's Theology and its Challenge for us Today

As we come to a close, it is time to ask what is the significance of Symeon's theology and what challenges does it pose for us today. I began the first chapter with a quote from Basil Krivocheine's *In the Light of Christ*. It is worth repeating here: "Having reached the end of our study, we are still faced with the same difficult questions: who is Symeon? Exactly what does his name 'The New Theologian' mean? How could such a figure arise in the Byzantine world? Where does he come from; what place does he occupy in Orthodox spirituality and in Orthodoxy in general?" These questions are just as valid for this study, yet in order to answer them, a brief observation is in order.

Jean-Claude Larchet has observed that the widespread adoption (whether conscious or not) of Platonic forms of spirituality in Western Christianity (and to a certain extent in Eastern

Christianity as well) and its attendant distorted forms of asceticism and moralism, has had a tendency to create a historical and cultural situation where the depreciation and even rejection of the body has permeated Western culture. Conversely, as if by the swing of a pendulum, this has given rise to a backlash which manifests itself in the obsessive glorification and objectification of the body. It is seen as nothing more than an object and/or instrument of pleasure which is a commodity that can be bought and sold or used to sell any manner of consumer goods – from toothpaste to real estate to family vacations. We speak of the human person as a "brand" which must be aggressively marketed and objectified on social media. The offshoot of this is that the neglect of the body has been replaced by a neglect of the soul.[1]

The irony here is that, as Larchet also points out, true, authentic Christianity "is, by its very nature, the one religion that values the body most of all."[2] We see this in the idea that the body is created in God's image and will also participate in the eschatological age to come; we see it in the idea that the human person is a psychosomatic unity composed of body and soul – that is, man does not simply *have* a body, but in part *is* a body, endowed with spiritual qualities.[3] Moreover, the value and significance accorded our bodies is bound to the very basis of Christianity – the Incarnation, wherein the second person of the Holy Trinity assumed not only a human soul but a human body in which he experienced everything that we experienced (save for sin); and it is through this body that he delivered our bodies from their weakness, making our bodies incorruptible and able to partake in his divinity.[4] This is the message of the Scriptures and has ever been the teaching of the Church and her Holy Fathers.

[1] Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Donley (Yonkers, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2017), 10–11.
[2] Ibid., 11.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

A further irony exists in that while Western culture by and large extols the body at the expense of the soul, modern notions and practices of spirituality and mysticism in the West, extol the soul at the expense of the body. The temptation of Platonic forms of spirituality are ever present in the spiritual landscape of the West. In either situation, what we are faced with, anthropologically speaking, is an incomplete human person, whose psychosomatic unity is compromised.

One of Symeon's fundamental theological contributions is his balanced anthropology. He never favours the soul over the body or the body over the soul, but gives them due attention and importance in our spiritual life. Symeon's anthropology upholds and defends the twofold nature of the human person, his psychosomatic unity, in which soul and body – created in the image of God – participate fully in the spiritual life and are illuminated, completed and perfected together, beginning in this life and more fully in the eschatological age to come. In short, Symeon's balanced anthropology acts as a much needed and timely corrective to both tendencies in the West. It also provides us with a powerful alternative to static and disincarnated forms of spirituality and mysticism, which have dire anthropological consequences, in that the human person's ability to fully participate in the divine nature is compromised. These forms of spirituality, based as they are, on intellectual contemplation and ecstatic transcendence of the body, have ever been and remain still, a temptation. Who is Symeon? Symeon is a powerful witness against this temptation, for in his life and writings we find a man totally given to humble repentance, and whose body and soul participated in and was illuminated by the uncreated divine light. Symeon is a link in the "golden chain of witnesses" in the continuum of experience in the tradition, whose life is a testimony to the fact that the purpose of the human being is to see Christ in this life. No intellectual contemplation or ecstatic transcendence of the body is needed: for when we love Christ and keep his commandments, he will manifest himself to us and the Holy Trinity will come and make its

home within us and we will perceive this in the eye of our soul and it will be reflected in the illumination of our bodies.

Symeon's theology arose within the particular historical, social, theological, and philosophical conditions of the tenth-eleventh century Byzantine world. Symeon's theology arose in response to his contemporaries' arrogant, intellectualizing theology which had lost sight of the message of the gospel – that all are called to repent and see Christ and that all are called to holiness. Still troubled by unresolved issues and unanswered questions arising from iconoclasm, and coming under the influence the first wave of Byzantine humanism, Symeon's contemporaries took refuge in abstract forms of theological speculation. They extolled the wisdom of the new humanism and its search for the self, couched in Platonic forms of thought, over the humble message of the gospel. If Symeon's message was "new" to his contemporaries, and if it earned him the moniker "New Theologian," it wasn't because his message was new, it was because his contemporaries had forgotten it. As such, Symeon's message of humility and continual repentance grated on the ears of his contemporaries. If Symeon found himself in trouble with the ecclesiastical authorities, it wasn't because of his individualistic "mysticism" – it was because he was bold enough to challenge his contemporaries to live a humble life of continual repentance.

What place does Symeon occupy in Orthodox spirituality and in Orthodoxy in general? In my estimation, these two questions are essentially the same, as there is no compelling reason why we should separate Orthodox spirituality from Orthodoxy in general. Krivocheine called Symeon "a great penitential pedagogue,"[5] and recently McGuckin has called him "the rhapsodist of radical repentance."[6] There is some truth in these statements, but the truth goes beyond the mere labelling of Symeon – of which there is plenty in the scholarship. Symeon himself said that "according to

[5] Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ*, 78.
[6] McGuckin, "Repentance as Divine Communion," 9.

the degree of his repentance, every man will find a corresponding boldness and familiarity with God, and will find this happening consciously and visibly, and as one friend to another friend will converse with Him face to face, and will see him plainly with the eyes of the intellect" (*ED* 13; 2:171). Symeon here confirms the psychosomatic reality of our union with God, but also that this is the goal of "every man." Symeon's place is that he occupies a pivotal position between Maximos and Palamas. By adding the ontological condition of repentance to Maximos' theology of the natural will and upholding, but more importantly, experiencing in himself the full psychosomatic reality of our union with God, Symeon confirmed and built upon the theology of his predecessors and himself provided a powerful witness to holiness for succeeding generations.

It is this call to continual repentance where Symeon's value lies, not only for his contemporaries, but for us today. Symeon's insistence on continual repentance as the ontological condition of our Being, helps us to avoid the temptation of Platonic forms of spirituality and mysticism which are self-enclosed and static. Without the all-embracing responsibility of repentance and without the repentant will, we are unable to move toward our eschatological completeness and perfection in Christ; that is, there is no Being as becoming in communion. For when one embraces continual repentance in the humble self-emptying of the natural human will and submits it to Christ in love, then one has embraced the very life of Christ and has the Holy Trinity dwelling within. This is an ever moving Being as becoming in communion which is lived in the Church and is nourished in turn by the holy mysteries. Moreover, continual repentance realizes the psychosomatic totality of the human person which is ultimately completed and perfected eschatologically. It is at this point that one has moved beyond any and all stunted notions of "spirituality" and "mysticism". In fact, we can no longer use these words to describe what this

looks like as we have moved beyond representation because we have embraced the apophatic – that is, we have embraced what is beyond affirmation or negation.

In his fourth *Catechetical Discourse*, we find a perfect summary of Symeon's teaching on continual repentance:

> When, as we have said, this penitence, this unceasing penitence, is pursued with pain and tribulation until death, it gradually causes us to shed bitter tears and by these wipes away and cleanses the filth and defilement of the soul. Afterwards, it produces in us pure penitence and turns the bitter tears into sweet ones. It engenders increasing joy in our hearts and enables us to see the radiance that never sets. Unless we strive with all zeal to attain it, spiritual fathers and brethren, we shall not be perfectly healed of all the passions. We shall not acquire all virtues, nor shall we ever be able daily to receive the divine Mysteries worthily or with tears that please God, or to contemplate the divine light that accompanies them. Nor yet will we have a "pure heart," nor be conscious of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, nor will we be found worthy, as the saints, to see God either in this life or in the next, since, in my opinion, we shall depart hence when we are still blind (*CD* 4.16).

Everything in Symeon's theology of continual repentance is present here. Symeon calls upon us to be like the saints: that is, to have a pure heart which enables us to see God in this life. It is available to everyone without exception. This is Symeon's message and challenge for us today: to put away our static and disincarnated forms of "spirituality" and "mysticism", which compromise the psychosomatic nature of the human person and leave us unable "to see God either in this life or in the next." Symeon encourages us to strive with all zeal to keep Christ's commandments with pain and tribulation until death. For indeed, if we love Christ, we will keep his commandments and he will manifest himself to us. In doing so we will experience joy in our hearts, be conscious of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, and we will be united to and perfected in Christ's divine, uncreated light; both in this life and more fully in the age to come. For Symeon, this is what constitutes the experience of God. And it is impossible without the all-embracing responsibility of repentance.

Appendix 1: Συναίσθησίν and its Antecedents in Paul's Epistles

As I pointed out in chapter five (note 73), Symeon uses a unique word, συναίσθησίν, when describing the soul's repentance. The word συναίσθησίν can be translated as "joint-perception" or "joint-sensation"; which means to perceive something simultaneously. It was noted that this word has antecedents in Greek philosophy and in patristic texts prior to Symeon. It was also noted that Symeon seems to be using it in a singularly unique way. What Symeon is saying is that all at once, or simultaneously, the soul perceives the divine light the moment it has come to a conscious perception/awareness (αίσθησίς) of its own repentance. In other words, Symeon is telling us that repentance *is* the soul's illumination. While there is ample evidence for the use of this word and its cognates in Greek philosophy and in patristic literature, there is evidence to suggest that Symeon may have had another source for inspiration – primarily Paul's epistles.

There are a number of words in Paul's epistles where he uses the prefix "συν" before a verb to indicate that two things are happening simultaneously. For instance, in Romans 6:4, Paul writes: "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." The word 'buried' in this verse is not simply ετάφημεν, as we would expect. The verb Paul uses here is συνετάφημεν, which gives the connotation that in baptism, we are buried simultaneously with Christ when he was buried – that is, our burial and Christ's take place at exactly the same time and is a shared experience. Another example is Romans 6:8 "But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." Again, the verb "live" is not simply ζήσομεν, but συζήσομεν, which indicates that when we die with Christ, we live with him simultaneously – that is, both events occur at the same time.

What is unique in Paul's use of these verbs is that they have no antecedents in Greek philosophy. Paul is literally inventing these words because, working back from the resurrection, he must now describe a new reality and a new life in Christ, which prior to this was impossible. Paul cannot borrow words from the existing Greek vocabulary which would adequately describe this new reality in Christ. I think that Symeon is doing the same. He wants to describe the simultaneous perception of the divine light in the soul at the moment in which the soul perceives its own repentance – that is, repentance *is* the soul's illumination. But how does one describe this unique reality? In my research, I have been able to find only four instances where Symeon uses the verb συναίσθησίν and its cognates.[1] In all four cases Symeon uses it to describe a simultaneous perception of something. Its rarity and the singularly unique use Symeon makes of it, suggests that when looking for a word to describe this new reality of the soul's illumination by repentance, Paul's use of "συν" words provided Symeon with a rich sematic field from which to draw upon. It also shows us Symeon's creativity, as he would no doubt have been aware of the use of συναίσθησίν in the Patristic tradition; and as such, he would have been conscious that he was giving it a new meaning in order to describe a new reality. In the list below, I have provided all the instances in Paul's epistles where he uses these unique "συν" words.[2]

Συν-words in Pauline literature

Romans 6:4 **συνετάφημεν** οὖν αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τὸν θάνατον, ἵνα ὥσπερ ἠγέρθη Χριστὸς ἐκ νεκρῶν διὰ τῆς δόξης τοῦ πατρός, οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν**.**

[1] See *ED* 4, *H* 55.131 and twice in *Ep*.4. In *ED* 4 (Golitzin, 2.21 & *SC* 129, p.28, l.297) and *Ep*. 4 (Turner, 146-47, l.103 in Greek and l.115 in English) Symeon uses συναίσθησίν/συναίσθησεί to describe a simultaneous awareness of one's sin and the need for repentance. As noted already, in H 55.131 (Griggs, 393 & *SC* 195, p.264, l.131) συναίσθησίν is used to describe a simultaneous awareness of repentance and divine light in the soul. In the first three instances, there is a direct connection to repentance. The second use in *Ep*. 4 (Turner, 159-59, l.250 in Greek and l.284 in English) συναίσθησίν is used by Symeon to make the point that without humility, one cannot come to a simultaneous awareness of one's sins and the evil spirit which is in one's heart.

[2] I am deeply indebted to Dr. Normand Bonneau, former Dean and professor (now retired) in the Faculty of Theology at Saint Paul University, for this list. He gave generously of his time in explaining the background of these words and their importance in Paul's epistles, as well as helping me understand how and why Symeon is using them.

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:5 εἰ γὰρ **σύμφυτοι** γεγόναμεν τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἐσόμεθα·

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Romans 6:8 εἰ δὲ ἀπεθάνομεν σὺν Χριστῷ, πιστεύομεν ὅτι καὶ **συζήσομεν** αὐτῷ,

But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.

Romans 8:16 αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα **συμμαρτυρεῖ** τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν ὅτι ἐσμὲν τέκνα θεοῦ.

it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

Romans 8:17 εἰ δὲ τέκνα, καὶ κληρονόμοι· κληρονόμοι μὲν θεοῦ, **συγκληρονόμοι** δὲ Χριστοῦ, εἴπερ **συμπάσχομεν** ἵνα καὶ **συνδοξασθῶμεν**.

and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:22 οἴδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις **συστενάζει** καὶ **συνωδίνει** ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now;

Romans 8:26 Ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα **συναντιλαμβάνεται** τῇ ἀσθενείᾳ ἡμῶν· τὸ γὰρ τί προσευξώμεθα καθὸ δεῖ οὐκ οἴδαμεν, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα ὑπερεντυγχάνει στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις·

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.

Romans 8:28 Οἴδαμεν δὲ ὅτι τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν τὸν θεὸν πάντα **συνεργεῖ** εἰς ἀγαθόν, τοῖς κατὰ πρόθεσιν κλητοῖς οὖσιν.

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

Romans 11:17 Εἰ δέ τινες τῶν κλάδων ἐξεκλάσθησαν, σὺ δὲ ἀγριέλαιος ὢν ἐνεκεντρίσθης ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ **συγκοινωνὸς** τῆς ῥίζης τῆς πιότητος τῆς ἐλαίας ἐγένου,

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree,

1 Corinthians 12:26 καὶ εἴτε πάσχει ἓν μέλος, **συμπάσχει** πάντα τὰ μέλη· εἴτε δοξάζεται [ἓν] μέλος**, συγχαίρει** πάντα τὰ μέλη.

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

1 Corinthians 13:6 οὐ χαίρει ἐπὶ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ, **συγχαίρει** δὲ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ·

it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.

2 Corinthians 7:3 πρὸς κατάκρισιν οὐ λέγω· προείρηκα γὰρ ὅτι ἐν ταῖς καρδίας ἡμῶν ἐστε εἰς τὸ **συναποθανεῖν** καὶ **συζῆν**.

I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.

Ephesians 2:5-6 καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν **συνεζωοποίησεν** τῷ Χριστῷ, — χάριτί ἐστε σεσῳσμένοι — καὶ **συνήγειρεν** καὶ **συνεκάθισεν** ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,

even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Ephesians 3:6 εἶναι τὰ ἔθνη **συγκληρονόμα** καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ **συμμέτοχα** τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου

that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Philippians 1:7 Καθώς ἐστιν δίκαιον ἐμοὶ τοῦτο φρονεῖν ὑπὲρ πάντων ὑμῶν διὰ τὸ ἔχειν με ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμᾶς, ἔν τε τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀπολογίᾳ καὶ βεβαιώσει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου **συγκοινωνούς** μου τῆς χάριτος πάντας ὑμᾶς ὄντας.

It is right for me to feel thus about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

Philippians 2:17 Ἀλλὰ εἰ καὶ σπένδομαι ἐπὶ τῇ θυσίᾳ καὶ λειτουργίᾳ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν, χαίρω καὶ **συγχαίρω** πᾶσιν ὑμῖν·

Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

Philippians 3:10 τοῦ γνῶναι αὐτὸν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ καὶ [τὴν] κοινωνίαν 1[τῶν] παθημάτων αὐτοῦ, **συμμορφιζόμενος** τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ,

that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Philippians 3:17 Συμμιμηταί μου γίνεσθε, ἀδελφοί, καὶ σκοπεῖτε τοὺς οὕτω περιπατοῦντας καθὼς ἔχετε τύπον ἡμᾶς.

Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us.

Philippians 3:21 ὃς μετασχηματίσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν **σύμμορφον** τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτὸν καὶ ὑποτάξαι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα.

who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Colossians 2:12 συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ **συνηγέρθητε** διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν·

and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Colossians 2:13 καὶ ὑμᾶς νεκροὺς ὄντας [ἐν] τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν, **συνεζωοποίησεν** ὑμᾶς **σὺν** αὐτῷ, χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα.

And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

Colossians 3:1 Εἰ οὖν **συνηγέρθητε** τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε, οὗ ὁ Χριστός ἐστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος·

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

2 Timothy 2:11-12 πιστὸς ὁ λόγος·
εἰ γὰρ **συναπεθάνομεν**, καὶ **συζήσομεν**·
εἰ ὑπομένομεν, καὶ **συμβασιλεύσομεν**·
εἰ ἀρνησόμεθα, κἀκεῖνος ἀρνήσεται ἡμᾶς·

The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we shall also live with him;
if we endure, we shall also reign with him;
if we deny him, he also will deny us;

Appendix 2: A Note on Consubstantiality

In his fist letter to the Corinthian church, Paul speaks of the resurrection of the dead: "For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied" (I Cor. 15:16-19). The message of the gospel and the hope of our faith has always been eschatologically oriented. If our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are worse off than unbelievers. The eschatological hope of the resurrection is unique to Christianity. Our ultimate hope lies in the future age where we will share in Christ' glory in our resurrected bodies. Symeon's theology is also eschatologically oriented. Symeon taught that our deification begins in this life, provided we remain in a state of continual repentance. Yet, we only get a foretaste of it in this life – it is experienced more fully in the age to come.[1] This suggests that continual repentance opens up the possibility of the eschatological completeness of our being in Christ, of our eschatological consubstantiality with him.

In his book *Analogical Identities*, Nikolaos Loudovikos has argued that one of the prime functions of continual repentance in Symeon's theology is that it indeed opens up the possibility of our eschatological co-being (or consubstantiality) in Christ.[2] Yet, what does this

[1] In his *Practical and Theological Chapters*, Symeon says that when a man participates in the light of the Holy Trinity, "though he is still on earth, he has a taste of the glory to come, at least in so far as he can, for although he is moved by heaven's grace he is still wrapped in the veil of the flesh" (*PTC* 1.2). In the following chapter, Symeon reiterates his point: "If, when all visible reality has passed away, nothing shall exist but God, who is and ever shall be, then those who share in the riches of his grace within this world are already enjoying their riches in the age to come, even though they are still on earth" (*PTC* 1.3). Symeon also says that through repentance, we also participate in the resurrection which gets repeated in us: "So, likewise, as we have now come out of the world and entered into the tomb of repentance and humiliation by being assimilated into the sufferings of the Lord, He Himself comes down from heaven and enters into our boy as into a tomb. He unties Himself to our souls and raises them up…and then grants to him who has thus been raised with Christ that he may see the glory of His mystical resurrection" (*CD* 13.2).
[2] See *Analogical Identities*, 99-107.

"consubstantiality" mean? Can we use it to describe our life in Christ? Does Symeon say as much? In order to answer these questions, let us take a look at what "consubstantiality" means, and then examine a key passage in one of Symeon's hymns where he describes this eschatological consubstantiality.

What is "Consubstantiality"?

In the text of the Nicene Creed formulated at Constantinople in 325, we read that Christ is "begotten not made, of one substance with the Father" (γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα, ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρί). That is, Christ, being of the same essence or substance of the Father, is also divine in nature.[3] This holds true for the Holy Spirit. Therefore, all three persons of the Trinity share the same essence and are thus divine. This is how we can say that we worship one God in three persons. Yet, how is it possible that in our union with Christ, we also become consubstantial with him? Human beings are created, not uncreated. How could something created become equal to something uncreated? Symeon asks these questions as well and concludes that this is not possible: "For it is not possible for another / to be created God by nature, / equal in power to the creator, / and of the same nature as Him, / for it is not at all possible / for something created / to become the same essence as the creator" (*H* 35.82-88).

It is not possible, however, without the action of grace and the workings of the Holy Spirit. In the incarnation, the second person of the Holy Trinity assumes human flesh and becomes of the same essence (*ὁμοούσιον*) with man in his humanity – that is; Christ becomes consubstantial with

[3] It should be kept in mind that even though Christ is of one essence with the Father, he also remains himself as hypostasis; that is, he retains his personhood as the second person of the Trinity. His divine and human nature exist in a single hypostasis, without division or confusion. The same holds true for us. When we are deified, we partake of the divine nature by grace, yet retain our human hypostasis, without division or confusion. This is the essence of what it means to become consubstantial with Christ.

man. Yet he is also perfect God, who, through his divinity is able to deify the whole man – body and soul – through grace. It is through grace and the workings of the Holy Spirit that we partake of the divine nature and become consubstantial with Christ. In *Hymn* 44, Symeon explains what this "consubstantiality" is and how it is affected in us.

The last hundred or so lines of *Hymn* 44, contains a masterful account of being made consubstantial with Christ. Symeon begins by saying that when we partake of Christ's flesh and blood, we become heavenly and put on incorruption (l.327-330). Symeon states that this was not possible prior to the incarnation (l.336-341). He then reinforces the importance of the incarnation when he says that when Christ descended from heaven, he "…received our flesh / and gave the divine Spirit / as we have often said, / and this Spirit, as God, / provides all things for us" (l.342-46). What does the Spirit provide for us and how can Symeon describe it? (cf. l.353-54). Here beings a long passage to the end of the hymn, in which our consubstantiality is outlined in detail.[4]

He begins by saying that the Holy Spirit "reforms" all who are in Christ, and that "He renews them, / and paradoxically makes them something new" (l.359-61). What is this new thing that we become and how is it done? Symeon explains that just as fire does not absorb the properties of iron, but "gives to iron / a share of all its properties" (l.367-68), so too the Holy Spirit "being incorruptible, gives incorruptibility, / and being immortal, / He gives immortality, / and being never-setting light, / He turns everyone into light" (l.370-74). The new thing we become is light which is immortal and incorrupt. It is important to note that just as fire does not absorb the property of iron, but rather gives it its own property of heat, so too in our deification, we are not absorbed into God, but retain our personhood, which is only refined and perfected by the fire of the Holy

[4] I cannot, of course, go through every line of this passage; but will only highlight the most important details.

Spirit.[5] But how is this possible? It is possible because the Holy Spirit, who is consubstantial with the Father and the Son, gives us a share in this property:

> And as He is the same nature as Christ,
> likewise the same essence,
> and being the same glory,
> and being united [with Christ],
> He renders them absolutely
> like Christ himself (l.378-83).[6]

Several things are worth noting here. Just as the Spirit is consubstantial with Christ and is united to Christ, we are also rendered like Christ himself – that is, we become not only consubstantial with Christ – but by extension we become so with the Father and the Holy Spirit.[7] We thus share in the glory of the Holy Trinity; which is light, immortality, and incorruptibility, in which our mode of being or existence, is transformed. How is our mode of being transformed but not absorbed into God, and thus retain our personhood? It is only through divine grace (cf. l.386). And here is the key. When we become consubstantial with Christ we are "…transformed from human beings / into such divine beings / according to grace, just like He / is and was by nature" (l.390-93). Therefore, if we do not share in Christ's exact likeness, we cannot be united to him and we cannot remain in him; and thus, he cannot remain in us if we are unlike him (cf. l. 397-404).

Yet it doesn't end there. When we become like Christ or consubstantial with him, we become "both heavenly and divine" (l.410), and more substantially we "also become heirs / of the Kingdom of Heaven / for all ages" (l.412-14). Thus, our transformation into a new heavenly and divine being, who possess the properties of light, immortality, and incorruption, is eschatologically oriented. It begins in this life, for "if you do not become / heavenly here below like I said, / how

[5] This is a profound statement; that our deification and perfection in Christ does not consist in us losing our personhood by being absorbed into God. God remains what he is and we remain what we are in our created personhood. The new thing which is made is a perfected human being who has been given the properties of the divine nature through grace.
[6] Square brackets are in translated text.
[7] In l.379, Symeon make this clear when he uses the word "ὁμοούσιον". See the Greek text in *SC* 196:96.

do you suppose you will / dwell with him in heaven?" (l.416-19). Yet it will be perfected in the age to come when we will live and reign with Christ (cf. l.420-24). The eschaton has thus already made its appearance in this life.[8] In the closing lines of the hymn, Symeon exhorts us to run with all haste, so that "we may be deemed worthy / to be in the / Kingdom of Heaven / and to reign with Christ" (l.425-29). And how are we deemed worthy to be in the kingdom of heaven? Earlier in the hymn, Symeon tells us that our transformation into a new being is a great mystery. Moreover, this mystery remains unknown to those who neglect, among other things, "hourly repentance" (l.185).

Thus, it is through "hourly repentance" and the partaking of the divine mysteries, that we become consubstantial (*ὁμοούσιον*) with Christ in his deified humanity and through grace become consubstantial not only with Christ but also with the Holy Trinity. We do not assume divinity, nor do we participate in the divine essence, as that is impossible for created beings. Nor for that matter do we see the essence of God in the vision of him. Just as fire does not absorb the properties of iron, but refines and perfects it, we too are refined and perfected in the fire of the Holy Spirit. We partake of the divine nature through grace, but we are not absorbed into the divine nature: I remain who I am as a created person; yet my whole self (body and soul) is deified, perfected, and transformed (*not* transcended) through grace. This enables us to be both heavenly and divine (which begins in this life) and to reign with him in the age to come. We must run on the path of "hourly repentance" if we are to be found worthy of such a life. Repentance thus opens up for us the possibility of our eschatological completeness and consubstantiality in Christ.

[8] In his tenth ethical discourse, Symeon makes it very clear that those who participate in Christ already experience the Day of the Lord: "As many therefore as are children of the light also become sons of the Day which is to come, and are enabled to walk decently as in the day. The Day of the Lord will never come upon them, because they are already in it forever and continually" (*ED* 10; 1:146).

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