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Mystical Theology in the Vision of Saint Symeon the New Theologian  
(Abstract)

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## INTRODUCTION

The present work resulted from the interest I showed in the mystical experience of Saint Symeon the New Theologian, who, throughout his entire life, constantly confessed in this way that experience and love are divine-human manifestations intended to prove and confess that feeling and seeing God are real events that occur because of meeting Him in the divine Light.

His preoccupation with the manifestation of divine light permanently motivated him to dedicate himself to this spiritual dimension which he founded theologically not only from its theoretical perspective, but especially through his own experience, living and personal, fulfilled in the context of direct relationship with God through repentance and prayer, asceticism and study, under the guidance of his spiritual father, known today as St. Symeon the Studite, the Reverend or the Pious.

The life, work and disciples of Saint Symeon the New Theologian are the main arguments with which he proposes to the eleventh century the perspective of spiritual renewal and redefining some fundamental biblical themes, as well as a new approach to patristic terms with dogmatic value, in the horizon of an effervescent light whose purpose is to awaken the spirit of his age to the awareness of man's experience and relationship with God.

In this sense, St. Symeon the New Theologian is perhaps the most important representative of the Church Fathers who identifies himself with his own mystical, ascetic and spiritual experience during his efforts to ascend to deification. It is a distinct process from the affective model proposed, for example, by Saint Macarius the Egyptian, and at the same time a model that cannot be associated with the speculative way of intellectual character that Evagrius's mysticism also offers in this sense. The spirituality of Saint Symeon is articulated to his personal, direct experience, in which he finds all the motivations of his writings and beliefs.

### Rationale for the topic

The 11<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine society did not realize the remarkable complexity or major spiritual contribution that the author of *Discourses, Catechetical, Hymns, Epistles* and *Chapters*, generously proposed them to a culture and civilization in a deep and systematic dissolution to which the sphere of the religious daily no longer offered viable horizons in the torn context of the unity of the Christian Church.

It can be stated, from this perspective, that Saint Symeon the New Theologian represented for the life of the Church the resuscitative process of ossified monasticism and lacking the depth of an authentic spiritual life. Therefore, the unique Symeonian spiritual dimension was constituted as a reaction to the formalism of Chionism developed by the inhabitants of the Studion Monastery and their descendants, after Symeon the Pious passed to the eternal ones.<sup>1</sup>

The reputation of St. Symeon's "New Theologian" is the result of the strength with which he assumes his surprisingly new message, characterized not so much by the doctrinal or moral content he conveys, but by the intensity with which he lives, preaches, but also the way he writes it, based on his own theological and spiritual experience, a true and authentic "epiphany", unique in the landscape of the Christian life between the end of the first Christian millennium and the

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<sup>1</sup> Ph. D. student Ioan I. Ică, "Theology and spirituality at St. Symeon the New Theologian", in *Mitropolia Ardealului*, 32 (1987), no. 3, pp.35.

beginning of the second. However, although we could say that it is considered outdated, the message of Symeon's work transmits the same strong impression today to the critical spirit of the contemporary intellectual, marked by consumerism and caught in the paradigm of the relationship between the object that prevails over the subject, at the same time. unresponsive and very similar to the one in which Saint Symeon the New Theologian unfolded his life and message.

St. Symeon the New Theologian was not a theologian concerned with the systematization of his teachings, in the sense that, for example, it was St. Gregory Palamas, which is why he should be seen especially as a prophet, because in all his life and work clearly penetrates the intention to revive, to return to the perennial values of the Church, in the sense of sounding the alarm against the signs of secularization that were becoming more and more evident in the behaviour of the church hierarchy of its time<sup>2</sup>.

The main message of Symeonean spirituality is therefore centred on the overwhelming role of winning, through personal effort, the virtuous state and, with the help of divine grace, divine light. It is the grounded thesis and the highest spiritual value of St. Symeon the New Theologian.

Father J. McGuckin noted that the theological work of St. Symeon, through the energy it emanates, the naturalness that characterizes it, the sincerity it entails and the natural and natural warmth it generates, redefines religious experience and man's ability to see divine glory. These spiritual values, in the view of the holy father, must not be constituted as a result of the study of ascetic manuals or of hermeneutic regulations, rules and methods, nor be conditioned by a certain duration or itinerary whose indications and ways to draw and indicate the steps to be taken or the values that need to be achieved, because: "For him the sight does not necessarily take place "after" the necessary steps of repentance, as a scheme of asceticism and classical Christian mysticism of purification, enlightenment and union. Rather, it is the undeserved visit of light that arouses repentance and achieves purification through its very coming."<sup>3</sup>.

## Purpose of processing

In this paper I set out to highlight how the spiritual experience of St. Symeon the New Theologian, whose main source of resistance is the Lord Jesus Christ God, the Light of the world (John 8:12), is the foundation of his mystical theology, as well as the fact that this Light, which characterizes the mystical dimension of Symeon's theology, can be seen from earthly life and continues after the separation of the body from the soul, according to the words: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5, 8). It is, in fact, a truth for all who have been baptized in the name of Christ. However, it is also necessary to confess and follow the teachings of the Holy Fathers, which are the most valuable guarantees of the authentic Christ life<sup>4</sup> and permanent support in continuous preparation, more and more intense, in order to acquire these spiritual gifts.

In the research process, I initially specified the aspects and biographical elements as well as those related to the issue of the nickname of "New Theologian", which characterizes the

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<sup>2</sup>Joost van Rossum, "Priesthood and Confession in St. Symeon the New Theologian", in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 4, Crestwood, New York, 1976, pp. 5.

<sup>3</sup>John A. McGuckin, "Symeon the New Theologian's Hymns of Divine Eros: A Neglected Masterpiece of the Christian Mystical Tradition," in *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, 5, no. 2 (2005), pp. 182-202.

<sup>4</sup>Julian Leroy, „La reforme studite, Il monachesimo orientale”, in *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 153, Rome, 1958, pp. 187.

personality of St. Symeon, and I insisted on highlighting the dispute that scholars have developed in the field of over the last century in the study of Symeon's work to present the considerations and observations that have contributed to the preservation and recognition of this high title.

At the same time, we have structured this paper in several parts in order to expose the logical thread of the demonstration used, as presented in *Catechesis* and *Discourse*. Thus, I put under the scrutiny of the study the doctrinal support through which St. Symeon developed his spiritual theology of the Light of the Holy Trinity, because the author provided, throughout his writings, generous spaces of analysis to certify all Christians who were baptized the possibility of acquiring the capacity to see the true Light, the Light that comes from the deifying Light, the mystical and personal union with the Holy Trinity which is, in fact, the purpose of the Sacrament of Baptism.

### Research stage

The controversial Symeonian work, for almost three centuries since its writing, seemed to be swallowed up irreversibly by the darkness of time, but it was brought to light by the unforgettable forever first by the hesychastic monks of the fourteenth century and then by the philokalic revival that manifested at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the prestige of the personality and work of Saint Symeon the New Theologian was defended by Nicodemus the Hagiorite who guided Dionysos Zagoraios' preoccupation to publish in Venice in 1790 the paraphrased text in neo-Greek of the Symeonian corpus.

The critical edition of the entire work of Saint Symeon the New Theologian in the collection *Sources Chrétiennes* (1957-1973), which contained the sure basis of his writings, offered the possibility of modern study of the great Byzantine mystic. At the same time, it produced a radical change of interpretation, because it accentuated the positive style of interpretation that proved to all today's scientists the full traditional character of Symeonian teaching and thought.

Summarizing the most important monographs as well as the lines in which they were interpreted, it can be seen that, in general, the research of Symeon's work is initially constructed according to the line proposed by Irénée Hausherr in his study of the method of hesychastic prayer<sup>5</sup> or in the introductory word he composed for the work on the Life of St. Symeon<sup>6</sup>, which highlights the mystical dimension of his work and its conflict with the Byzantine church hierarchy. In the same direction<sup>7</sup> are built the studies carried out by J. Gouillard and the Jesuit D. Stiernon<sup>8</sup>. We find a distinct direction in the interpretation of the Protestant Karl Holl, in which appears "Symeon - Byzantine enthusiast"<sup>9</sup> similar to that of the Lutheran K. Deppe, for whom St. Symeon is marked both by the Mesalian enthusiasm, which was condemned in the fifth century, and by the hesychastic current which was formalized in the fourteenth century<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> "La méthode d'oraison hésychaste", in *OC*, IX, no. 36, June-July 1927.

<sup>6</sup> "Vie de Syméon le Nouveau Théologien", in *OC*, XII, no. 45, July-August, Rome, 1928.

<sup>7</sup> "Syméon le Jeune, le Nouveau Théologien", *DTC*, XIV/2, 1941, col. 2941-2952.

<sup>8</sup> "Santo Simeone il Nuovo Teologo", *Biblioteca Sanctorum 11*, 1968, col. 1104-1114.

<sup>9</sup> *Enthusiasmus und Bussgewalt beim griechischen Mönchtum: eine Studie zu Symeon dem Neuen Theologen*, Leipzig, 1898.

<sup>10</sup> "Der Wahre Christ. Eine Untersuchung zum Frömmigkeit Verständnis Symeon der Neuen Theologen und zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Messalianismus und Hesychasmus", Diss. Göttingen, 1971.

The Greek Orthodox space proposes at the beginning, in the interpretation of the dogmatist P. Trembelas, a negative interpretation, which, in a study from the last part of his life, depicts the exalted to pathological and sickly image of Saint Symeon.<sup>11</sup>

In 1973, studies and publications that focused on the personality of St. Symeon, have a real positive nuance, being made from the perspective of patristic tradition and Eastern spirituality.

The themes of confession and spiritual fatherhood, whose approach we find in the controversial *Epistolă despre mărturisire*, which also talks about the confession of the sins of a non-ordained monk, have been the debate of many studies, of which I mention here: Joost van Rossum, „Priesthood and Confession in St. Symeon The New Theologian ”(SVTQ, 1976), VC Christophorides, “ He pneumatiké patrotes kata Symeon ton neon Theologon”(1977), Robert John Beeson, “St. Symeon the New Theologian on Binding and Loosing ”(SVTQ, 2013).

A vivid and objective picture, well enough made, regarding the theology of Saint Symeon, is presented by the annotated anthology made by Archbishop Vasili Krivoșein: *Dans la lumière du Christ. Saint Syméon le Nouveau Théologien. Vie – Spiritualité – Doctrine*, published in 1980 and translated into Romanian in 1997 and 2005. B. Fraigneau-Julien's dissertation: *Les sens spirituelles et la vision de Dieu selon Syméon le Nouveau Théologien*, which appeared posthumously, (1985) is an investigation of issues relating to the spiritual senses and sight of God, while including comparative analysis with texts from the Eastern spirituality of the third and seventh centuries of some well-known authors: Origen, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, the homilies of Saint Macarius, Diadoch of Photicia, Maximus the Confessor. We will discover the comprehensive analysis of spiritual paternity in a doctoral thesis, called: *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Spiritual Fatherhood (1990)*, of HJM Turner, a theologian who will also deal with the critical edition of the 4 Epistles of Saint Symeon. In the same context, we must mention the studies of Father John McGuckin conducted in 1994: “*Symeon the New Theologian and Byzantine Monasticism*” and in 1997: “*St. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022): Byzantine Spiritual Renewall in search of Precedent*”, as well as the doctoral thesis of a remarkable structure of the hieromonk who is now bishop, Ilarion Alfeyev: *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition (2000)*, which will highlight the fact that Symeon spirituality is the full result of the Orthodox Tradition. Professor Hannah Hunt, from Trinity University - Leeds, will express a sustained concern regarding the biography and work of Theophorus the Father, which will materialize in 2015 in a very penetrating and suggestive informative guide, entitled: *A Guide to St. Symeon The New Theologian (2015)*, in fact a very good introduction to the spiritual dimension of St. Symeon approached from different perspectives, in which the Constantinople historical context between the tenth and eleventh centuries is accurately captured, as well as a clear x-ray of St. Symeon's writings and genres literary in which he expressed his thought and belief, which led to a very precise specification of the place that the Holy Father occupies in the space of Eastern theology and the value of his spiritual heritage.

Regarding the preoccupation of the Romanian space with the work and personality of Saint Symeon the New Theologian, I noticed that the studies and researches that entered this space are the result of a series of translations, independent of each other, including the full version containing the Symeon corpus translated by Isaac the Teacher, which we find today in the library of the Holy Neamț Monastery (ms. No. 60-61-59). The selective translation made by Father Dumitru Stăniloae is added to these works and includes: *Cele 225 de Capitole teologice și*

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<sup>11</sup> „Mystikismos apophatismos, kataphatike theologia”, *Epistemonike epeteris Theologictou Scholes Panepistemiou Athenon* 19, 1972, pp. 5-98.

*practice în Filocalia Românească* 6 (1977) and *Cele 58 de Imne* in vol. *Studii de Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă* (1991).

During the last and first decade from the beginning of the second millennium, at Deisis Publishing House, through the dedicated preoccupation of deacon Ioan I. Ică jr. a complete translation of the work of Saint Symeon will be published in modern Romanian, which will be included in four volumes that will be included in the Philokalia series, as follows: *Discursurile teologice și etice (Scrieri I, 1998, 2001)*; *Catehezele (Scrieri II, 1999, 2003)*; *Imnele, Epistolele și Capitolele (Scrieri III, 2001)*, *Viața (Scrieri IV, 2006)*. Numerous studies, unequal in value, have since contributed to the capitalization of the work and life of Saint Symeon the New Theologian in the Romanian Orthodox theological space. In this context, we mention some representative names in this regard: John I. Bria: "*Simțirea tainică a experienței harului după Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog*" (Ortodoxia, 1956), Dan Zamfirescu: "*Probleme teologice și haghiografice legate de supranumele Sfântului Simeon Noul Teolog*" (Ortodoxia, 1958); idem, "*Manuscrise slave cu traduceri din Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog*", (Ortodoxia, 1959); Dumitru Popescu: "*Faptele bune după Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog*", (Ortodoxia, 1962); Ilie Moldovan: "*Teologia Sfântului Duh după Catehezele Sfântului Simeon Noul Teolog*", (Studii Teologice, 1952); Ioan Vârlan: "*Învățătura despre mântuire la Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog*" (Ortodoxia, 1974); Emanuel Banu: "*Lucrarea Sfântului Duh în opera Sfântului Simeon Noul Teolog*" (Studii Teologice, 1980); Liviu Stoina: "*Desăvârșirea creștină după Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog*" (Studii Teologice, 1980); Ioan I. Ică jr.: "*Teologie și spiritualitate la Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog*" (Mitropolia Banatului, 1987) to which we must add the extensive introductory studies from the beginning of the four volumes (*Scrieri I-IV*) which include the work and life of Saint Symeon in the Romanian translation; Gheorghe Sima: "*Lucrarea Sfântului Duh în Taina Pocăinței după Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog*" (Studii Teologice, 1990); Călin-Ioan Dușe: "*Vederea luminii dumnezeiești după Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog*" (Teologia, 2000); Nicolae Moșoiu: "*Botezul în Duhul Sfânt în învățătura Sfântului Simeon Noul Teolog*" (Studii Teologice, 1995); Ioan C. Teșu: "*Paternitate și filiație duhovnicească la Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog*", (Teologia, 2004); Nicolae Bolea: "*Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog, epoca și opera sa*" (Teologia, 2006).

It is necessary to mention here the works and communications made by the participants in the scientific symposium called: "*Imnele iubirii dumnezeiești ale Sfântului Simeon Noul Teolog – 1000 de ani de la compunerea lor*", which was organized in 2009 and whose studies were published in volume in 2012. We mention among the signatories on: Assoc. Professor Dan Chițoiu, Ph. D., Pr. Univ. Professor Gheorghe Petraru, Ph. D, pr. Assoc. Professor Daniel Enea, Ph. D., pr. Professor Constantin Leonte, Ph. D., pr. Research Assist, Liviu Petcu, Ph. D., pr. Liviu Popa and others.

Among the doctoral theses that dealt with the personality, life and work of Saint Symeon in the field of Romanian theology, we mention: *Spiritualitate și duhovnicie la Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog*, of Iuliu Florea (Constanța, 2007); Father Dorin-Octavian Picioruș with the thesis: *Vederea lui Dumnezeu în teologia Sfântului Simeon Noul Teolog* (Bucharest, 2009); Alexandru Roșu (Bucharest, 2013): *Experiența harului în teologia Sfântului Simeon Noul Teolog și Spiritualitatea luminii la Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog*, which was presented by pr. Toma Costel (Sibiu, 2014).

## General framework of the paper

This paper consists of six chapters preceded by a complex Introduction, in which I sought, on the one hand, to contextualize the charismatic and provocative personality of St. Symeon in the Byzantine society and within the monasticism of the tenth and eleventh centuries and, on the other hand, an articulation of the work to the main landmarks of the literary genres of Byzantine theology, such as scriptural commentaries in the form of homilies, chains, selections or collections and anthologies of the texts of the Holy Fathers, or polemical writings, apophthegms, lives of the Saints, catechesis and chapters, theological poetry, etc.), trying in this way to highlight the role, value and importance of Symeonian writings.

The paper with the title *Mystical Theology in the Vision of Saint Symeon the New Theologian*, consists of six chapters that are linked to the mystical vision that characterized the life and work of St. Symeon the New Theologian. The note of novelty that we have identified in the thought of Saint Symeon is the way in which the divine light is presented, which manifests itself in him as a living, personal reality that speaks, listens, transmits the feelings of joy and trust and thus perfects the one who experiences it.

According to the Holy Father, through ascetic effort and the gifts of the Holy Spirit that help to increase in virtue, an eye is opened in the mind of man through which he perceives the divine work and sees God. "The enlightening gifts of the Spirit are made manifest to man only by opening this eye of his, this sanctuary meant to be filled with the divine light."<sup>12</sup>

St. Symeon attaches great importance to the capacity of divine light, that is, uncreated light, to lend to man as a rational being uncreated attributes of divinity: radiance, immortality, eternal life, incorruption, so that he may attain perfection and happiness.

In the context of Orthodox spirituality, Saint Symeon asserts himself as a pinnacle of discourse on mystical experiences through the presence, work and power of the Holy Spirit<sup>13</sup>. The inner vision to which the great monk is thus entitled represents in his vision the divine gift that every spiritual father must possess. In this sense, Saint Symeon the New Theologian insists on emphasizing that: "he who seems to have in himself - if that is possible - all the virtues, but does not have in him the light of the Holy Spirit, he is not fully entrusted if they are pleasing to God, he is not worthy to receive foreign thoughts, even if he were made patriarch by men, until he has the Light shining in himself"<sup>14</sup>.

In the fourteenth century, the Orthodox world, especially the Russian world, rediscovered St. Symeon and with it his high spiritual life and deep theological work<sup>15</sup>. A few centuries later, Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938) and his disciple, Archimandrite Sofronie (1896-1993), will demonstrate that the spiritual experience preached by today's Orthodox monastic tradition is part of the Symeonish spiritual model for which to worship. God, through love, is made perfect in eternal life. But the saints experience it in an authentic and transfiguring way since living in the world<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup>Pr. Univ. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Introduction to Philokalia VI*, pp. 11.

<sup>13</sup>Kallistos of Diokleia, *Deification in St. Symeon the New Theologian*, in „Sobornost”, vol. 25: 2, Oxford, 2003, pp. 13.

<sup>14</sup>Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., *Catehezele simeoniene: problematica filologică, istorică și spirituală*, în *Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog, Cateheze, Scrieri II*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, *Studiu introductiv și traducere*: diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, pp. 339.

<sup>15</sup>Hilarion Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, Oxford University Press Inc., New York, 2000., pp. 339.

<sup>16</sup>Kallistos of Diokleia, *Deification in St. Symeon the New Theologian*, in „Sobornost”, vol. 25: 2, Oxford, 2003, pp. 24.

The ascetic journey of St. Symeon the New Theologian to deification is situated, as he himself confesses, in the context of the Orthodox tradition which understands the experience of uncreated light as a real part of the Church's experience in its mystical dimension.<sup>17</sup>

In this context, in the introductory chapter, *Saint Symeon the New Theologian in the Orthodox Tradition and Spirituality*, I will focus on deepening the biographical elements of the Holy Father. In this sense, I will describe the historical framework in the historical and ecclesiological context of his time and, at the same time, I will present the indecisions inherent in the youth that marked him in the spiritual path until he acquires the gift of the abbot of the Holy Monastery.

Next chapter, *The Church, the divine-human space of receiving saving grace through the Holy Sacraments*, we will dedicate it to St. Symeon's concerns about his teaching about the Church, hierarchy, salvation, the relationship between the Holy Sacraments and the divine light, in other words its role in the life of the Christian believer that Father Symeon understood as part of ecclesiological life.

In the third chapter, *The Vision of God in the Mystical Theology of St. Symeon the New Theologian*, we will deal with the way the holy father experienced the divine light, the importance and role of prayer and repentance in the spiritual process of deifying man and the ways in which the knowledge of God is realized in the vision of the Holy Father.

Chapter Four, *Saint Symeon - the Mystical Theologian*, will be dedicated to the presentation of the mystical stages that the Holy Father goes through in order to meet God. In this chapter we intend to capture the synthesis of the mystical life of the New Theologian and thus highlight the message of the title of this paper.

The penultimate chapter, *The Eschatological Teaching in the Theology of Saint Symeon the New Theologian*, highlights the theological teachings of St. Symeon the New Theologian in which we will highlight the importance of knowing God for the Christian life, according to the work of the Holy Father and the fact that it preserves and develops the Orthodox teaching of the Church and the Holy Fathers and Church Writers.

The last chapter will be a practical one. The title *Applying the teachings of St. Symeon the New Theologian to the Lives of Believers*, characterizes our intentions. Here we aim to highlight the importance of self-knowledge for man today, the role of the spiritual values of the Christian life for the contemporary world and the permanence of the teachings of St. Symeon the New Theologian whose moral value, beyond their invaluable theological dimension, is equally viable today as it was for the contemporary man of the great mystical living of Christianity.

The conclusions summarize what is presented in the paper and bring to light, on the one hand, the role and importance of Symeon's work in the development of Orthodox theology as one that continued the unbroken mystical tradition of the Orthodox Church and as a precursor to the inspired thinking of St. Gregory Palamas. on the other hand, the freshness that characterizes his exhortations to the Christian life that can unquestionably revive the life of the contemporary Christian ecclesiological space.

## CONCLUSIONS

In 949 the birth in Galata of Paphlagonia of the one who will be known as Saint Symeon is recorded. In a secondary imperial province, in the bosom of a family that belonged to the small nobility, the one who will receive with all consideration, from the Church, the name of

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<sup>17</sup>Hilarion Alfeyev, *Op. cit.*, pp. 270.

Theologian, a new one, according to the times he lived, will come into the world. He received and completed his education in Constantinople through the goodwill of his uncle who was a servant in the imperial administration<sup>18</sup>. For him, the encounter with God did not involve the identification of abstract ideas or the formulation of rational rules to explain this supreme process of knowledge, but, assiduously, he constantly strove to follow the voice of his conscience that addressed him throughout his arduous night vigils, nourished by the zeal of youth.

"One night he saw light from all sides ... His mind ascended to heaven and he discovered another light, clearer than the one near him."<sup>19</sup> However, initially, it did not remain in the light, but returned to the wasteful worldly life. The nets of the world, however, did not catch him, because other bright night experiences followed that motivated him to find explanations for his unique and unique feelings. Among the monks of the Studion Monastery he will meet Symeon the Pious, who will become the father and his spiritual ruler he wanted<sup>20</sup>.

At the age of 28 he will be received in the community of Mamas monastery, so that at the age of 31 he will receive the Sacrament of Ordination. During this period, between alternating moments of enlightenment and abandonment, he will become aware that Christ is the One who speaks to him not from without, but from within<sup>21</sup>, that is, from the place where he lived at Baptism. The emphasis he will place on what he feels and what he sees as deity in the light, will make the Orthodox tradition consider him the theologian of light. His direct, simple and vital theological language will give him the name of New Theologian. In his work, the apophatic mystery of divinity, emphasized by Dionysius the Areopagite, will become in St. Symeon's thought a „superluminal” light that emanates God's unspeakable love. Also, the powers of divinity are manifestations of the same loving light, love that is expressed as the life-giving energy of the human being to God.

The Discovery of God Who apophatically spreads his power and love, which man perceives as luminous manifestations, will later find his perfect theological foundation in the distinction that St. Gregory Palamas will make between being and divine uncreated energies. The mystical experience of encounter with God through prayer in which the name of Jesus is invoked, which causes the soul to return to itself through a process of circulatory movement and with the help of a unifying involution in the divine source of integral goodness, as if it would center him in the center of the sky, give him the power to express the truth and the ability to find himself in the multiplicity of external things, and supporting him to concentrate on himself, then, gathered in such unity, to unite him fully with the angelic powers which are unitarily unified. This Christian teaching begins with Dionysius the Areopagite, is developed by St. Symeon the New Theologian, Nichifor the Monk will deepen and detail parts of this spiritual development, to which Gregory of Sinai will also contribute<sup>22</sup>, to be, finally, specified and formulated all-encompassing by Saint Gregory Palamas.

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<sup>18</sup>*Philokalia*, vol. 6, 1997, pp. 5-10

<sup>19</sup>*Catechesis*, 22.

<sup>20</sup>Saint Symeon the New Theologian, „ *Metoda sfintei rugăciuni și atenții*”, in the *Philokalia*, vol. 8, 1979, pp. 528-540; Nichifor from Solitude, „*Despre trezvie, rigoare și paza inimii*” in the *Philokalia*, vol. 7, 1977, pp. 11/32

<sup>21</sup>(...) but that being divine fire is undivided / and completely inseparable and uncut /. For sharing, it does not divide but remains undivided / and is in me, / rises in me, from within my unworthy heart / (...) showing itself in the form of a sphere, in a luminous way, for it is like a flame”, Hymn 1 (27), p. 319.

<sup>22</sup>Pr. Univ. D. Stăniloae „*Viața și învățătura Sfântului Grigorie Palama*” IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, pp. 55 and N. Crainic in “*The course of Mystical theology*”, Bucharest, 1936, pp. 250-255, gives some interesting explanations on the method of Jesus' Prayer.

Man's divine vocation gives him the opportunity to unite heaven and earth in a created plan<sup>23</sup> in the same way that the Holy Liturgy intertwines heaven with earth in its sacramental dimension<sup>24</sup>. Saint Symeon will insist on emphasizing the union between the person of Christ and the human being, which he sees being realized in the participatory process of the one who through the purification of passions is incorporated in the divine light in the integrity of his phenomenological expression.<sup>25</sup> Symeon mysticism renounces speculative knowledge, but not knowledge that is perceived as consciously springing as a luminous manifestation that gives perspective to the knowledge of the divine.<sup>26</sup>

The triangular dimension of the relationship between different people and various things becomes possible, in the context of the common thinking that each person uses properly, through the light that reason projects on them and through which it is attracted and at the same time attracts the meanings of things. , illuminating at the same time both itself and all this. Thus, through utterance, the proper hypostasis of each manifestation is communicated, a hypostasis that becomes the foundation for each state of mind and makes all these states, along with all the meanings of things that are personally perceived, to intercommunicate infinitely without use the words they are always thirsty for<sup>27</sup>.

As the Evangelist John says, „In the beginning was the Word” (John 1: 1), and „the Word was the true light” (John 1: 9), which illuminated every heart and filled, through its pulsations, the whole body with light until the moment when man was overwhelmed by the passions that obscured his senses that were originally candles of material light<sup>28</sup> (Mark 15, 43-47, 16, 1-8). book *Imnele dragostei dumnezeiești*, using a special lyrical expression, expresses the spiritual teaching about the deifying light of love, which St. Symeon fully experienced according to the scriptural context: „From the fullness of His divinity we have all taken grace upon grace,” as expressing- a permanent throughout his work<sup>29</sup>. The minds of all who have fully shared in His love have been sealed<sup>30</sup> in the heart. The retreat and return of the divine light which gave birth in the heart and mind of the Holy Father to ineffable states of agony and ecstasy, constitute, in his vision, the stages of a divine pedagogy which follow one another until the moment man settles in -a continuous and concomitant waiting and reception of the divine light that requires an intense

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<sup>23</sup>The idea is central to the Stoics who saw the universe reflected in the individual man - AH Armstrong „An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy” London, 1965, pp. 142-144; Cochrame “Christianity and Classical Culture”, New York, 1957, pp. 74-98 and W. Jaeger „In Search of the Divine Center”, Oxford, 1986, pp. 347-357.

<sup>24</sup>Saint Symeon saw the glory of the deity “... The Holy Spirit as an endless and formless light descended upon him [which continued thus] ... during the forty-eight years of his priesthood to see him descending upon the sacrifice which he brought to God or how many times he celebrated the Liturgy”-“Un grand mystique byzantin. Vie de Symeon le Nouveau Théologien”- Nicéatas Stethatos - I. Hansherr - *Orientalia Christiana*, 12, no. 45, 1928, pp. 1-228.

<sup>25</sup>Everything that exists has a meaning and radiates a light (...) on different existential stages”, (...) The person always grows spiritually, assimilating more and more meanings in him, but not things, even when they receive a seal of the person in them (...) there is therefore a consciousness that begins to gather the meanings of things in it”-Pr. Univ. Acad. D. Stăniloae, Ph. D. „ *Studies of orthodox dogmatic theology*”, Mitropolia Olteniei Publishing House, 1991, pp. 307-308.

<sup>26</sup>“God being in all and everywhere / and all light, in which there is not at all / any shadow of change / nor any presence of night, and not in him at all any obstacle of darkness / but being stretched in all and shining inappropriately; / but to the worthy one is shown [light] near and perceptible” (Hymn 12, Z36).

<sup>27</sup> Pr. Professor Academician D. Stăniloae, *Studii de teologie dogmatică ortodoxă*, Mitropolia Olteniei Publishing House 1991, pp. 309-310.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 314.

<sup>29</sup>16/2, Sf. Simeon the New Theologian „Moral Speeches”, in *Philokalia*, Vol. 6, 1997, pp. 129.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 71

and endless dedication from man<sup>31</sup>. The mystery of Christ revealed in the light is the path that leads to charismatic impatience<sup>32</sup>.

In the thought of Saint Symeon, two favourite themes are constantly highlighted: the spiritual father and the mystery of the deification of man (theosis). According to tradition, the relationship between them is based on the prayer of Jesus. Both themes are original in the New Testament where the prayer is Christ himself who eventually goes through the process of deifying human nature concretely for the whole human nature (2 Peter 1: 4; John 17: 5, etc.). *Theosis* it was a central theme that was debated by the Ecumenical Councils of the Church, from 431 in Ephesus to 787 in Nicaea II, and later by many of the Holy Fathers.

What St. Symeon proposes is to share the world with his experience of mystical life. This proposal focuses on the fact that deification addresses its call personally to each individual. It is a call to a direct and living relationship, which is fulfilled personally at the moment of man's encounter with the divinity since this earthly life. A kind of „pre-taste” of the future life. Awareness of this relationship is an urgency that can be approached seriously enough only through endless tears and sincere, living and real asceticism, to reach the acquisition of sight that allows us to understand how God offers Himself as light<sup>33</sup>, cleanser and deification.

In this context, the encounter with Christ restores man in the context of the image and in the perspective of resemblance to the One who created him forever. The ascetic effort and the mystical dimension that the creature must carry out consists in the annulment of the attachment that it manifests towards the sensible things. It is a kind of cleansing of the mirror of the soul from the dust of intense pleasures and immediate desires so that it can render completely and without blemish the face of the Creator that it reflects of itself.

From the entire work of St. Symeon, the New Theologian, he reverberates the call he addresses to Christians to share in the light of the world to come, that is, the light of the uncreated world<sup>34</sup>. Personal contact, which is made in this light, is unique and indispensable to true existence<sup>35</sup>, because it deepens the human being, resizing it in the context of love and in infinite knowledge<sup>36</sup>.

The dichotomous nature of man must respond to the call to share in the divinity until the full realization of the unique and unified feeling of the Triune God-in One through “his spiritual

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<sup>31</sup> „You have filled me with your divine Spirit, my Christ / and filled me with spiritual light / Grant me, O my God, / your servant, your unfailing grace to the end (...) after you have enabled me to stand before your face among your servants? (Hymn 49, Z. 24).

<sup>32</sup> „For he who has come out of the world and these bodies / no longer has the lust for carnal passions, but a certain impatience,” not in the sense of stoic apatheia, but born of the sight of God and the filling of the Holy Spirit (Hymn 9, Z. 29) and „I see the Son standing at the right hand of the Father's glory” (Acts, 7, 56) and (Hymn 11, Z. 32).

<sup>33</sup> “What is the great mystery that I see within me, / but do not understand, but it is hidden from me? / For I see a star rising from afar / and it becomes like a great sun / that has no measure or weight or edge in size. / Its ray first appears small, then shows itself like a great flame / in the middle of my heart and in my bowels, / often revolving and lighting up all / my insides and lighting them all up.” [...] I show myself to you as a ray and I make myself seen as a light, burning, without moving you, the passions of your heart / and washing away with the dew of my sweetness and of my divine grace your filth / and extinguishing completely the fire of the body, of the pleasures of sin. And I work through my love of men, all that I have done in all the saints” (Hymn 22, Z.40).

<sup>34</sup> „Because You have taken shape in their right heart / they will dwell in Your image in You, my Christ. [...] But I truly know with all confidence / that their perfection is endless / and the advancement in glory will be eternal” (Hymn 1, Z.27).

<sup>35</sup> in which the abduction of the mind in God is only the beginning of the relationship and not the prerogative of an ardent living person of it, who would have it in permanent divine contemplation and noetic dialogue with Him.

<sup>36</sup> A marvel. I find you in me /, you spend, You move in me, you speak to me / and then you make me speechless, / Overwhelmed by Your impending Glory” (Hymn 20, Z 29).

senses”, but also in his whole body<sup>37</sup>, by virtue of free human self-determination (autexousion)<sup>38</sup>. For those who do not enjoy the direct and personal relationship with God in earthly life, a relationship that could have given them „understanding (...) and His mind.”<sup>39</sup> in the fullness of the divine light, the eternal happiness conferred by salvation<sup>40</sup>, cannot be constituted in a possible horizon, because there is no obligatory salvation<sup>41</sup>.

Holy Father Symeon firmly emphasizes the charismatic dimension and its „subjective” character from the perspective of the Christian’s personal relationship with the Triune Monad, which is restored in the light of the New Adam. It is clearly about the design of the subjective-objective and personal-divine relationship in the process of spiritualization of man articulated to the eschatological plan. *Imnele dragostei dumnezeiești* are the theological hymns in which St. Symeon the New Theologian appears as humbly sitting before the divine throne to serve the „divine mysteries” as a priest (Hymn 19, Z.38). We see him here trembling with reverence at the fact that this mystery of the transformation of the divine into the worldly so that the worldly can be deified is manifested in his heart (Hymn 8, Z.4). The heart thus becomes the place where the Eschatological Day shines fully from this life, as all the saints had already experienced<sup>42</sup>.

The Symeon text is fluid and thus manages to really communicate the living, personal experience he lives in terms of divine glory, which increases and decreases pedagogically throughout his spiritual life, through an endless experience of divine love. as a luminous manifestation (phos trishypostaton) (John 17: 5) which opens from the depths of the Scriptures and thus makes the Holy Father himself a true „scripture giving him the boldness (parrhesia) necessary to intercede for others before the Lord”<sup>43</sup>.

This „unspeakable greatness of glory” (Hymn 23, Z.41) calls to enlightenment the whole creature to enjoy the age to come, because in the heart of every man is planted a grain of mustard (Hymn 17, Z.2,) which is the ray of divinity in which the whole universe is located (Hymn 25, Z. 31), is, in fact, the most intimate and mysterious communication that man can have with the Builder of the one who built his soul (Hymn 50, Z. 46 and 27, Z. 20).

The mystical dimension of St. Symeon’s work consists, in concrete terms, in the fact that the Holy Father affirms and argues that in the conscious process of knowing God as light, man, not only in what is seen as face and face, but in the entirety of his being bodily and soul are transfigured into light, thus acquiring the transparency of light and the spiritualized view of grace<sup>44</sup>. The boldness with which St. Symeon approaches and presents the divine-human

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<sup>37</sup>Hymn 20, Z. 29.

<sup>38</sup>According to the study of S. Gaith, *La conception de la liberté chez Grigore de Nysse*, Paris, 1953, pp. 40-86.

<sup>39</sup>Hymn 39, Z. 12.

<sup>40</sup>„(...) separated by feeling and sight from these, /so is the divine light of the Trinity in all,/but sinners are shut up in the midst of darkness, /because they neither see nor hear the divine feeling at all, /because they are burned by their conscience /and condemned by it, they shall have everlasting /black sorrow and unutterable pain” (Hymn 1, Z. 27).

<sup>41</sup>„(...) Shall I save them without their will, by force?/ But it would seem to me that I am troubling them / to save them all without permission / For only the good received willingly is good, and the good done without will will not be good”(Hymn 34, Z. 17).

<sup>42</sup>„The heart of the hermit is the church, and the mind sanctuary, because the Lord likes to dwell in the heart and mind of man” - The Blessed Archimandrite Sofronie, *Viața Sfântului Siluan Athonitul*, Schitul Românesc Publishing House, Lacu, Holy Mount Athos, 2001, pp. 119.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup>The participation of the soul in deification is transmitted to the body as well./ As I groan, He is within me, / Shining within my wicked heart,/ Enveloping me on all sides with immortal radiance / And illuminating all my limbs with His rays./ Making me whole, He embraces me whole, He gives Himself to me, to the unworthy (Hymn 16, Z. 7). Saint Silouan the Athonite had a similar experience, and the temporary and pedagogical loss of His light

mystical union to which he attributes absolutely human expressions and which he calls, in this context, the “holy wedding” (hieros gamos) of the Virgin with God, reveals the mystical character of this work. he repeats in His saints. To such a mystical experience and experience every Christian must ascend in order to attain holiness and carry Christ alive and fully within his human being, in the same way that a pregnant woman feels directly and perfectly every moment she the baby is wearing<sup>45</sup>, because the glory of God<sup>46</sup> it is given to all since earthly life, provided they truly desire it.

The experience of mystical union, in the context of Symeon thought, manifests itself as fire not because it reveals a power in itself, but especially because it involves the transfiguring power that cleanses to the point of dissolution and thus metamorphoses organically. In this way, the expression of the ecstasy of mystical love confers by the force it manifests the unique and unusual beauty of the divinity<sup>47</sup>. The mystical union as the transfiguring fire represents the primordial essence and the fundamental condition of the spiritual life, because they are those dimensions that touch and frame the life to which it offers health, beauty and spiritual power particularly, individually. In fact, it is about the religious life in general, whose experience constitutes a permanence in the life of the Church and, as such, in the life of the world, of creation.

The divine glory perceived as fire and as a cloud guided the people of Israel to freedom from the Egyptian oppression.<sup>48</sup> He later descended to the top of Mount Sinai like a storm and in a flash (Exodus 19: 9-16; 24: 16-17), and then filled Solomon’s temple to be holy (3 Kings 8: 10-11). The place of divine glory in the Temple is on the throne of mercy and in the Ark of the Covenant, which through the centrality it occupies in this edifice, represents the place of the human heart. From there, the unexpected and uncreated light manifests in each person totally and especially personally<sup>49</sup>.

The synoptic gospels present the feast of the change of the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, as a statement and an acknowledgment of the fact that the theophanies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in the person of Jesus.<sup>50</sup> It is obvious, in this sense, that it is necessary for every

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led him to the divine solution „Keep your mind in hell and do not despair!”; St. John the Baptist, confesses: „When the whole man mixes with the love of God, the radiance of the soul is shown in the body as in a mirror”, ”*Scara*” XXIX, în *Philokalia*, 9, pp. 427.

<sup>45</sup>*Discursuri Teologice*, 1, 10, 11.

<sup>46</sup>„Kavod” in the Hebrew texts, reflects the self-manifestation of God - P. Deseille - „*Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*” 6 – („*Gloire*”), pp. 422-463.

<sup>47</sup>Here is how he describes a man close to contemporaneity, the encounter with a divine fellow man who can also introduce the interlocutor at his request, in His Glory: “Imagine a man who speaks to you, and his face shines like a sun at noon! You see the movement of his lips, the changing expression of his eyes; hear the sound of his voice, feel his hands clutching your shoulders, but at the same time you see neither his hands, nor his body, nor yours, and you see only a bright light that envelops everything, at a distance of several meters around, gently controlling the snow that covers the meadow, the great abbot and yourself! How can I describe what I experienced then?!” *Convorbirea cu Motovilov, Sfântul Serafim de Sarov*, Renasterea Publishing House Alba Iulia, 1994, pp. 50-56

<sup>48</sup>(Exodus 13, 21-22) Israel symbolizing the mind freed from the bondage of the passions (Egyptians).

<sup>49</sup>The Holy Apostle Paul was blinded by the unexpected sight of light (Acts 9: 3-4); the first martyr Stephen sees His glory and Christ at the moment of his death (Acts 7:55), the Holy Apostle John sees the glory of God illuminating the new Jerusalem (Rev. 15: 8 and 21:23), and all the Holy Apostle Paul calls Christ „Lord of Glory” (1. Corr. 2.8).

<sup>50</sup>Moses and Elijah appear talking to Him, as each of them spoke to God on the top of the mountain (Mk. 9, 2-4; Mt 17, 1-3, Lc. 9, 28-32). The light, the cloud, the paralyzing effect on the disciples reminds us of the „Glory of God” even if the word „glory” itself is missing, because Jesus is the „place” of the Glory he also shared with the Apostles.

Christian to meet with Christ in order to know Him from this life<sup>51</sup>. It is about a deep, intimate, ontological, personal, face to face knowledge<sup>52</sup>, according to the model proposed by Saint Symeon the New Theologian. His initiative to revive the inner spiritual experience reveals that, although the authenticity of the mystical teaching he preaches is a development of the Christian doctrine of light, his ultimate goal for spiritual ascension is not to contemplate light, but individual encounter and personal with Christ.

The prayer of the publican, which will become known as the prayer of Jesus and, better said, the prayer addressed to the Lord Jesus or the prayer of the heart, will be the basis of the hesychastic movement, which will find in the thought of St. Symeon the New Theologian a true forerunner. Mystical but also a poet at the same time, the Holy Father expresses through lived images, as he saw, the essence of the Christian experience, that is, the true communion with the Incommunicable and the deepest knowledge of the Unknowable<sup>53</sup>, living his whole earthly life with Christ and ascending through Him to the true Light. The year 2022 will mark exactly one millennium since Saint Symeon the New Theologian went to the Lord, and he is one of the greatest forerunners of the hesychastic movement. In this context, my humble study wants to be a preamble that contributes to the celebration of a thousand years of authentic spiritual experience in the context of living the patristic spirit, for all those who have dedicated their lives to Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

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<sup>51</sup>The first monks affirmed the possibility of this view, as Fr. Rousseau states in “*Ascetics an Authority*”, pp. 28.

<sup>52</sup><< This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. (...) Jacob named the place Peniel (which means “face of God”), for he said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared.”>>, Genesis 32; 24-30.

<sup>53</sup>Deacon. Ph. D. Student Liviu Petcu, *Părinții Bisericii învățătorii noștri*, vol. I, *Despre Dumnezeuul Cel Veșnic Viu*, I.B.și de Misiune Ortodoxă Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009, pp. 60.