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The Rebirth Experience,

The Awareness of Grace and

The Assurance of Salvation

In the Spirituality of

St. Symeon the New Theologian

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

## **Renewal or Rebirth**

St. Symeon the New Theologian has gained attention in the last decades, varying from interest and favor to skepticism and disapproval. Newness is part of his own name and anyone could find in his writings themes that could look comparable to a growing spirituality, that is spreading over the continent through international broadcasting TV stations diffusing a renewed western evangelization around the globe from the Far East to the Remote West not sparing Africa from its center to its edges, and talking of salvation, renewal, renovation, born again or rebirth in the Spirit, with great testimonies from different types of people from the illegible to the eligible all talking about similar spiritual experiences.

Quotes from St. Symeon the New Theologian are often found here and there for the purpose of either appropriating an Orthodox legitimacy to calls for renewal and to new forms of practices in prayer and worship, or to show that Orthodoxy is not totally exempted from such phenomenon. Most often some of those quotes are right, and serve the purpose of the call for renewal very well; however as we go on we will discover that, down the stream of those renewal teachings, conclusions and beliefs that seem to be coming in a very logical sense from St. Symeon the New Theologian, that either they have no trace in his writings or they do not have the same basis for their spirituality as the basis of the structure of the spirituality of this Orthodox holy man of God.

In order to be able to grasp and understand the ins and outs of the spirituality and of the teachings of St. Symeon the New Theologian, one ought to read all his writings and link them together in an intelligent way. In fact his writings and teachings form, all together, a theological building being a reflection of a life-long



interaction between that great man of God on one side, and the Holy Scripture from another side, highlighting a spiritual journey the experience of which are wrought by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who moves, illuminates, explains the Holy Scripture and translates it into practical and ready to grasp teachings that feed the soul and stretch it out towards the celestial heights.

### **Reticence or Openness**

Orthodox spiritual atmospheres in general are stamped with reticence when it comes to exposing one's spiritual or religious personal experiences with God as a testimony for His love and work in the church. St. Symeon breaks the reticence with regard to personal experience for which Orthodox Saints and Fathers are known for. None of the Orthodox Fathers, have ever opened their life and exposed their spiritual experience before St. Symeon the New Theologian, what makes his writings an Orthodox reference and criterion to this type of personal testimony, starting from the basic spiritual experiences and biblical interpretations till the highest levels of illumination and ecstasy. However that criterion could be, for some theologians, lacking universal authority for the same reason that not all the fathers have spoken this same type of intimate language based on personal experience.

No one else, in our tradition has ever spoken to his friends in this sweet, lovely and intimate language for the only purpose to teach how to walk as beginner, middle or advanced, in the way of the Lord: **“Behold, I have revealed to you, my friends and brethren, the mysteries that are hidden within me (Col 1:26).** Already I see my end drawing near, how near, I do not yet see. [I have told you this] in order that

you may know the ways of penitence, the ascents and the progress of the **beginning** and the **middle** and the measures of **perfection**. So may you endeavor to imitate, if not someone else, at least the one who has begotten you all and loved you with [all] his soul, who has fed you with the milk of God's word (cf 1 Pet. 2:2) and refreshed you with the life-giving bread (Jn. 6:33) and has shown you **how to walk** in the way of the saving commandments of God, to whom all glory is due, now and always, forever and ever. Amen."<sup>a</sup>

Where is the place of the Liturgy in the Christian life, where is the place of penitence and of asceticism, what about obedience and humility? What is the value of the personal experience of the Love of Christ and of the experience of His presence in one's life? What are the limits of the religious conventionalities and codes? What is the value of joy and what is the cause of the ecstatic spiritual joy? What is the extent of the mercy of God, and how quick is His answering to some, or to all, who call him whole-heartedly and out of distress? Is the Grace of God real and could be experienced? What about the indwelling of the Holy Trinity within the purified heart? Could that be explained without the aid of the apophatic language? How could one die with Christ and rise up with Christ in this world and during his lifetime? What is man's divinization? How could that be uncovered and revealed? What is the conversion into a life in Christ? Are the above questions a matter of mental concepts, or intellectual knowledge, issues of faith and hope, or true knowledge from experience? Is the indwelling of Grace or the participation in Grace done in consciousness and awareness or in unconsciousness and in unawareness? Can one be sure of his own salvation in Christ and in His Church, or everyone has to wait until

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a Discourses XVII:118-128

the Judgment Day for his finality to be determined. Where is the border to the Messalianism in all this and what is the controversy behind those issues.

## **Main Objective**

The answer to these few questions and to many others are found spread around in the writing of St. Symeon the New Theologian, as one statement here and one statement there and then a full explanation somewhere else. **The main objective of this paper is to discuss the rebirth experience, the awareness of Grace and the assurance of salvation in his spirituality.** In spite of the apparent controversial aspects of these three themes, and in spite of our fight as Orthodox against the infiltration of such renewed and foreign-looking spirituality into our legacy and system of faith and into our holy tradition, St. Symeon remains an authentic Father of the Church, holding the official title of Theologian that our church has given to only three Fathers in the course of all her history; the first one was John the Divine Evangelist or the Theologian, the second one was St. Gregory Nazianzen the Theologian, while the third one was St. Symeon the New Theologian. Therefore the writing of St. Symeon should be taken very seriously as generating from an authoritative title holding man of God. I strongly believe that if the Church of the folding second millennium would have taken St. Symeon as seriously as the Church that had given him the title of New Theologian we would have been today performing far better in conformity with our own Orthodox Tradition that is reflected in our rich Spiritual Heritage.

## Spirituality in brief

In this respect I would like to quote our Saint saying: “For this reason I bear witness before you all; I speak and will not cease to say that those of you who have **defiled** their first Baptism through the transgression of God’s **commandments** must imitate the **repentance** of David and of the rest of the saints. Display a **worthy penitence** by means of all sorts of deeds and words, that you may draw on yourselves the **grace** of the all-**Holy Spirit**. For this Spirit, when He descends on you, becomes like a **pool of light** to you, which encompasses you completely in an unutterable manner. As it **regenerates** you it changes you from corruptible to incorruptible, from mortal to immortal, from sons of men into sons of God and **gods by adoption and grace** that is, if you desire to appear as kinsmen and fellow-heirs of the saints and enter with all of them into the **kingdom of heaven**”<sup>b</sup> Those three sentences could outline the complete structure of the spirituality of St. Symeon.

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b For this reason I bear witness before you all; I speak and will not cease to say that those of you who have defiled their first Baptism through the transgression of God’s commandments must imitate the repentance of David and of the rest of the saints. Display a worthy penitence by means of all sorts of deeds and words, that you may draw on yourselves the grace of the all-holy Spirit. For this Spirit, when He descends on you, becomes like a pool of light to you, which encompasses you completely in an unutterable manner. As it regenerates you it changes you from corruptible to incorruptible, from mortal to immortal, from sons of men into sons of God and gods by adoption and grace that is, if you desire to appear as kinsmen and fellow-heirs of the saints and enter with all of them into the kingdom of heaven.  
Discourses XXXII 75-85

## **Chapter 2**

### **Rebirth and Baptism**

## Defiled Baptism

The starting point of his spirituality is that most - if not all - Christians have defiled their first Baptism through the transgression of God's commandments. This statement looks horrible to most of the lay Christians of today who think they are good enough by not transgressing any of the 10 Commandments, and to many of the clergy who think that by the fact of being part of the clergy, baptizing others, and celebrating the Eucharist, take their own baptism and all the related heavenly benefits resulting from it for granted by proxy. But this is not what St. Symeon has in mind; because the defilement of Baptism is a direct implication of the lack of purity: "He who knowingly is led astray, even by a single sin, falls completely from purity, just as a bucket of water is wholly polluted by a little dung. What I call sin is not merely what is committed by the body, but also the passions within us that we invisibly fulfill."<sup>c</sup> And according to St. Symeon, the transgression of commandments is in the lack of gaining and practicing virtue because: "From the fulfillment of the commandments comes the practice of the virtues; through the practice of the virtues the commandments are fulfilled."<sup>d</sup> In this case if we are not living according to the dignity of our Baptism either intentionally or by negligence we will be denied all the

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c He who knowingly is led astray even by a single sin falls completely from purity, just as a bucket of water is wholly polluted by a little dung. What I call sin is not merely what is committed by the body, but also the passions within us that we invisibly fulfill.  
Discourses X 115

d From the commandments spring the virtues, and from them the revelation of the mysteries that are hidden and veiled in the letter. From the fulfillment of the commandments comes the practice of the virtues; through the practice of the virtues the commandments are fulfilled. Thus by means of these the, door of knowledge has been opened to us (cf Lk. 11:52); or, rather, it has been opened, not by them, but by Him who has said, "He who loves Me will keep My commandments, and My Father will love him, and I will reveal Myself to him" an. 14:23,21). When, therefore, God "lives in us and moves among us" (2Cor. 6:16) and perceptibly reveals Himself to us, then we consciously contemplate the contents of the hest, the divine mysteries that are hidden in the divine Scripture.  
Discourses XXIV 55-67

benefits that come from God and that have been conferred on us via Baptism. And same as Adam, after his transgression, has been cast out from paradise, from the enjoyment and from the company of angels, and is laid bare and is moved away from the face of God, exactly the same for us who sin, we will be excluded from the Church of His holy servants and the divine garment that we put on in Baptism, which is Christ himself, as we believe, will be taken away by sin; even worse, the eternal life itself, the inaccessible light, the eternal good, the sanctification and the filial adoption will slip out from us. And we become again worldly, same as the first man, instead of becoming as the second man, our Lord Jesus-Christ;...It is not from a sensible paradise that we are cast out, but from the Kingdom of Heaven...And if the calling back has not been addressed to us via penitence, no one would ever have been saved.<sup>e</sup>

This belief that Christians have been totally stripped of any of the Baptismal benefits is clearly mentioned also in his Discourses: “We have been clothed with Christ through baptism; we have been stripped of Him by evil deeds, let us recall

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e Par conséquent, si nous gardons tout ce qu’a dit et que nous dit Dieu lui-même, nous sommes réellement des fidèles, ceux qui montrent leur foi par les oeuvres, et nous devenons comme lui saints et parfaits”, tout entiers entièrement célestes, enfants du Dieu céleste, en tout semblables à lui par adoption et par grâce, puisque lui-même a été appelé réellement semblable à nous, comme nous, hormis le péché; mais si, méprisant ses commandements saints et vivifiants, nous nous retirons par négligence et que nous agissons à l’encontre de ses préceptes, en faisant ce qu’il nous a interdit de faire, aussitôt nous sommes déçus de tous ces avantages venus de Dieu qui nous ont été conférés par le baptême. De même qu’Adam, après sa transgression, est chassé du paradis, de la jouissance et de la compagnie des anges, qu’il est dénudé et s’éloigne de la face de Dieu, de même exactement nous qui péchons, nous sommes exclus de l’Église de ses saints serviteurs, et le vêtement divin que nous avons revêtu au baptême, c’est-à-dire le Christ lui-même, comme nous croyons, nous est enlevé par le péché; pire encore, la vie éternelle elle-même, la lumière inaccessible, les biens éternels, la sanctification et l’adoption filiale nous échappent. Et nous voici de nouveau terrestres, comme ce premier homme, également terrestre, au lieu d’être célestes et semblables de tout point au deuxième homme, le Seigneur Jésus-Christ; et de plus nous sommes justement exposés à la mort et aux ténèbres et nous sommes envoyés au feu inextinguibles, dans les tourments accompagnés de grands gémissements et de grincements de dents. Car ce n’est pas d’un paradis sensible, comme autrefois Adam, que nous sommes chassés maintenant à notre tour et nous ne sommes pas condamnés comme lui à travailler la terre, mais c’est du royaume des cieux et de ces biens, dont il est écrit que « l’oeil ne les a pas vus, que l’oreille ne les a pas entendus, qu’ils ne sont pas montés dans le coeur d’un homme », que nous nous excluons nous-mêmes en nous mettant à la merci de la géhenne ; et si par la pénitence le rappel ne nous avait été adressé, jamais personne n’aurait été sauvé.  
Théologiques et Ethiques XIII 187-222

ourselves by salutary repentance, and do and perform all the things that are well pleasing to Christ, so that we may be marked with His seal”.<sup>f</sup>

### **Missing Confirmed Loyalty**

The failure of achieving the goal of the Baptism is clarified when he says that at the holy baptism we receive the remission of faults, we are delivered from the antique malediction, we are sanctified by the presence of the Holy Spirit, but the perfect grace, according to his promise “I will habit in them and will walk in them”, we haven’t received it yet, because it is the portion of the confirmed loyal in faith and who manifest it by deeds. The goals of Baptism are conditional to our deeds and loyalty. St. Symeon is indeed basing his belief on the prayer of Church for the baptized that says the following: “that being united with thee, after the pattern of thy death, in baptism, he may, in like manner, be a partaker of thy Resurrection and **having preserved the gift of thy Holy Spirit, and increased the measure of grace entrusted unto him, he may receive** the prize of his high calling, and be numbered with the first-born whose names are written in heaven, in thee, our God and Lord, Jesus Christ.” The baptized who has **pledged allegiance to Christ**, should show his loyalty to Him by preserving the Gift of the Holy Spirit and by increasing the measure of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and by following the Lord’s commandments. But if after Baptism, he falls in wrong doing and dishonest practices, he will lose totally the sanctification; but through penitence, confession and tears he receives in proportion at

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f We have been clothed with Christ through baptism, we have been stripped of Him by evil deeds, let us recall ourselves by salutary repentance, and do and perform all the things that are well pleasing to Christ, so that we may be marked with His seal.  
Discourses 2: 140-150



first the remission of sins and through continuous penitence he receive also holiness and the grace from above.<sup>g</sup>

## **Break with Evil**

“No one gains anything by distributing all his goods to the poor and taking on himself utter poverty and destitution unless he has made a break with evil and cleansed his soul by penitence and tears.”<sup>h</sup> The breaking with evil is very much stressed in the baptismal ceremony in renouncing **the Satan’s pomp**, and in the breathing and spiting upon him that symbolizes the break with him in an unambiguous way. In response to the renewed break with the enemy and to the renewed conversion to God in penitence and tears and cry for help and salvation, God shall recall his adopted sons and will respond to their cry; as Jonas from the belly of the whale and as Daniel from the den of the lions, as the three children in the furnace of fire, and as Manassès from the statue of brass; the very good Master, who has given his life for us sinners, hears the cry of the prayer; He will save him from the whale, this means from the abyss of ignorance and from the darkness of the love of the world, in order that he does not come back to that place not even by thought; He will save him from the lions’ den, that is from the bad desires that carry away and eat up the human souls as in a furnace of fire; this means from convictions resulting from passions that are

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g     Au saint baptême nous recevons la rémission de nos fautes, nous sommes délivrés de l’antique malédiction, nous sommes sanctifiés par la présence du Saint-Esprit mais la grâce parfaite, selon la promesse « J’habiterai en eux et je m’y promènerai », nous ne l’avons pas encore, car elle est l’apanage des fidèles confirmés dans la foi et qui la manifestent par les oeuvres. En effet, après le baptême, si nous tombons dans des pratiques mauvaises et déshonnêtes, nous perdons totalement la sanctification; mais par la pénitence, la confession et les larmes nous recevons en proportion d’abord la rémission de nos fautes et, par le fait, la sainteté avec la grâce d’en haut. 103Théologiques et Pratiques45

h     Discourses V : 85

inherent to all human beings, burning and destructing like fire, that attract us by force towards inconvenient acts and that excite in us the flame of passions, though God covers man by the dew of the Holy Spirit and makes him unflammable and from the statue of brass, which means from this flesh of soil, heavy and subject to passions, that is ours, and in which the soul resides and finds itself maintained, tied up and weighed down, and is absolutely incapable to behave and to decide on any virtue and on the practice of the God's commandments. Delivered from the flesh without being detached from it, the soul cries out with David: "You have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness to the end that my glory may sing praise to You"[Ps30:11-12)]. Not satisfied by that she (the soul) gives thanks with Paul: "I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord![(Rom7:24)] — for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.(Rom8:2)"<sup>i</sup>.

## False Imagination

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i Ensuite, comme en un désert, ou mieux encore, hors du monde, cet homme qui est parvenu à la sensation parfaite', sous l'emprise d'une crainte et d'un frisson indicibles, crie vers Dieu de toute son âme il crie comme Jonas du ventre de la baleine", comme Daniel, de la fosse aux lions', comme les trois enfants, de la fournaise de feu, comme Manassès, de la statue d'airain. Aussitôt le Maître très bon, lui qui a donné sa vie pour nous pécheurs, entend ses gémissements de douleur, le cri de sa prière ; il le sauve de la baleine, c'est-à-dire de l'abîme d'ignorance et des ténèbres de l'amour du monde, pour qu'il n'y revienne plus même par la pensée ; de la fosse aux lions, c'est-à-dire des mauvais désirs qui emportent et dévorent les âmes humaines de la fournaise de feu, c'est-à-dire des préjugés passionnels inhérents à tous les hommes, brûlants et destructeurs comme le feu, qui nous attirent de force à des actes inconvenants et excitent en nous la flamme des passions, alors que Dieu couvre l'homme de la rosée de l'Esprit-Saint et le rend ininflammable de la statue d'airain enfin, c'est-à-dire de cette chair de terre, pesante et sujette aux passions, qui est nôtre, et dans laquelle l'âme qui l'habite et qui s'y trouve fortement maintenue, ligotée et appesantie, est absolument incapable de se porter et de se décider à n'importe quelle vertu et à la pratique des commandements de Dieu. Délivrée de la chair, sans en être détachée, l'âme s'écrie elle aussi avec le prophète David : « Tu as déchiré mon cilice et tu m'as revêtu d'allégresse pour que ma gloire te loue. Non contente de cela, elle rend grâce avec Paul : « Je remercie Dieu par Jésus-Christ Notre Seigneur de ce que la loi de l'Esprit de vie dans le Christ Jésus m'a délivré de la loi du péché et de la mort. Théologiques et Ethiques IV, 160- 190

This being said, one should not convince himself that he has become a son of light because he has been once upon the time baptized in Christ. And stressing more on this issue, St. Symeon says it clearly: "...do not say in your heart, my dear, that all of us who have been baptized in Christ, who believe in him and adore him as God, we have in that put Him on, and without feeling anything at all, we have become sons of the day and sons of light, and not of night and darkness. Do not say that or do not have it as an idea in order to go through the remaining days of your life without concern nor worry, believing only in the imagination of being something (son of light), while you are nothing;<sup>j</sup> he goes on to say in that same paragraph, that when we do not feel having anything different than the rest of our mankind who do not know Christ, we should be going to the same place as them after death, and that place will

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j En entendant parler de fils du jour et de la lumière, ne va pas dire dans ton cœur, mon cher, que nous tous qui avons été baptisés dans le Christ, qui croyons en lui et l'adorons comme Dieu, nous l'avons ainsi revêtu et que, sans rien sentir du tout, nous sommes fils du jour et fils de lumière, et non de la nuit et des ténèbres. Ne dis pas ou ne te mets pas cela dans l'idée pour passer ensuite le reste des jours de ta vie sans soucis ni tracas, en croyant seulement par imagination être quelque chose, alors que tu n'es rien ; réfléchis au contraire, pèse à part toi le pour et le contre et dis : «Si tous les hommes qui sont dans le monde et voient le soleil d'ici-bas de manière sensible sont dans les ténèbres, certainement, puisque je ne vois rien de plus que les autres, je suis moi aussi avec eux dans les ténèbres. De même, en effet, que, lorsque le soleil se couche, chaque fois vient la nuit et je ne vois plus trace de soleil, de même, lorsque je serai mort, je ne verrai nulle part de lumière, je serai dans les ténèbres et sans soleil pour les siècles et je ne verrai plus de mes yeux cette lumière que je vois ; les hommes, en se séparant de leur corps, sont du même coup séparés de toutes les choses sensibles. Donc, si je suis actuellement dans les ténèbres, je serai aussi dans les ténèbres après ma mort ; sur moi aussi certainement le jour du Seigneur surviendra comme un voleur dans la nuit et comme la douleur de l'enfantement sur la femme enceinte, sans que j'aie le moyen d'y échapper.»

Notre salut, en effet, n'est pas uniquement dans le baptême de l'eau, mais encore dans l'Esprit, pas plus que ce n'est pas uniquement dans le pain et le vin de la communion que la rémission des péchés et la participation à la vie nous sont données, mais dans la divinité qui les accompagne et mystérieusement se mêle à eux sans confusion. Je dis mystérieusement, parce que la divinité n'est pas révélée à tous, mais à ceux qui sont dignes de la vie éternelle, et qu'elle rend ceux qui la voient fils de lumière et fils du jour; car ceux qui ne voient pas la lumière malgré la netteté de son éclat, ceux-là sont bien assis dans les ténèbres. Que personne ne vous abuse par de vaines paroles' et que personne n'aille se fier exclusivement à la foi dans le Christ', car il est dit : « Si vous vous faites circoncire, le Christ ne vous servira de rien » et encore : « La foi sans les oeuvres est morte ». Aussi vrai que le corps sans âme est mort, la foi sans les oeuvres est morte. Ceux qui professent que le Christ est Dieu, sans garder ses commandements, seront censés non seulement le renier mais encore le déshonorer; allons plus loin : ils subiront à bon droit, pour les mutilations qu'ils apportent aux commandements de Dieu, une condamnation plus forte que ceux qui circoncisent leur propre corps. Si quelqu'un déshonore son père, comment sera-t-il tenu pour fils? Si quelqu'un est séparé de la lumière, comment vivrait-il en elle comme dans le jour? En aucune façon, frères.

Théologiques et Ethiques X 167-210

be eternal darkness. Further our salvation is not in the baptism of water but also in the Spirit, as well as it is not only in the communion of the bread and wine that the remission of sins is granted, but in the divinity that accompanies them and is mysteriously involved and mixed with them without confusion. He says mysteriously because the divinity is not revealed to all, but only to those who are worthy of eternal life, and it makes those who see it (the divinity) sons of light and sons of the day, because those who do not see the light, in spite of the purity of its brightness, those are well seated in the darkness.

### **Baptism vis-à-vis Circumcision**

St. Symeon stresses also that none should abuse us in vain words, and none should trust exclusively in the faith (or hope) in Christ, because it is said “if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing” (Gal 5:2) and also “faith without works is dead”(Jam2:20). As sure as the body without soul is dead, faith without works is dead. Those who profess that Christ is God, without keeping his commandments, (trusting in Baptism as the Jews trusted in the circumcision) will be supposed not only deny him but also dishonor him; going further: they will receive for good reason, for the mutilations that they have brought to the commandments of God, a condemnation much stronger than those who circumcise their own body (without fulfilling Gods commandments). If someone dishonors his father how would he be counted as son? If someone is separated from the light, how would he live in it as in the day? By no means brothers. <sup>ibid 10</sup>

In this structure of ideas on infant baptism and its resemblance to the circumcision of the Jews, same as circumcision became a symbol, void from any spiritual benefit in itself, infant baptism and chrismation, could become symbols for

the real baptism that will happen at an ulterior phase through tears and the Holy Spirit. The water symbolizes the tears, and the holy unction of oil symbolizes the internal unction of the Holy Spirit.<sup>k</sup>

### **Rebirth as a must**

Therefore the absolute voidance of infant baptism for salvation for the ones who have sinned thereafter is strongly stressed: “just as it is impossible for one to be saved who has not been baptized by water and the Spirit (*Jn. 3:5*), neither is it for him who has sinned after Baptism, unless he be baptized from on high and be born again. This, the Savior confirmed when He said to Nicodemus, “Unless one is born from on high, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven” (*Jn. 3:3, 5*). Again He said to the apostles, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (*Acts 1:5*). If one is ignorant of the Baptism wherewith he was baptized as a child and does not even realize that he was baptized, but only accepts it by faith and then wipes it away with thousands upon thousands of sins, and if he denies the second Baptism—I mean, that which is through the Spirit, given from above by the loving-kindness of God to those who seek it by penitence— by what other means can he ever obtain salvation? By no means!”<sup>l</sup>

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k Dans le premier baptême l'eau est symbole des larmes et l'huile de l'onction préfigure l'onction intérieure de l'Esprit ; mais le second baptême n'est plus la figure de la vérité, c'est la vérité même.

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l Just as it is impossible for one to be saved who has not been baptized by water and the Spirit (*Jn. 3:5*), neither is it for him who has sinned after Baptism, unless he be baptized from on high and be born again. This the Savior confirmed when He said to Nicodemus, “Unless one is born from on high,<sup>1</sup> he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven” (*Jn. 3:3, 5*). Again He said to the apostles, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (*Acts 1:5*). If one is ignorant of the Baptism wherewith he was baptized as a child and does not even realize that he

## Vain Formalism and Void Repentance

This “by no means”, seems to include the formal act of confession and absolution that is done without the marks of real penitence (tears of distress and compunction) and without the marks of real regeneration in the Spirit (tears of the joy of reconciliation). Therefore St. Symeon has stressed as well that absolution and Spiritual Guidance is not a formal or ceremonial act, but should be carefully done by the ones who could lead others to the real spiritual rebirth, those should have gone through it first, and should know its characteristics and the ways to go through it from their own experience.<sup>m</sup>

It should be well noted that repentance alone serves not to justify anyone, “for repentance is but the recognition of sin”<sup>n</sup>, and the acceptance that the commandments of God are all rightful. Also, fulfilling the commandments<sup>o</sup> does not justify anyone, for “by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Rom 3: 20) Therefore the recognition of the sinful state of the soul does not save as such, it only serves everyone to realize that “I have been left abandoned and hell has swallowed me up alive. And Thou, O Lord, seest it; Thou alone canst bring me up and heal the pain of my heart, for Thy hand is able to do all

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was baptized, but only accepts it by faith and then wipes it away with thousands upon thousands of sins, and if he denies the second Baptism—I mean, that which is through the Spirit, given from above by the loving-kindness of God to those who seek it by penitence—by what other means can he ever obtain salvation? By no means!  
Discourses XXXII 60-73

m Discourses XVIII 280-315; Discourses XXXIII 35-45; Discourses XXXIII 229-242; Théologiques et Ethiques VI 413-428 & 324-331; Théologiques et Ethiques XI 450-463 & 469-484

n Discourses XXIII: 84

o The commandments of the Law.

things and reaches the uttermost abyss, working all things at Thy pleasure”<sup>p</sup>. Justification, illumination and sanctification are the works of God that are achieved in us through holy Baptism and Chrismation, therefore every repentance and every Spiritual Guidance has to be centered around that first cleansing, and having as purpose the regain of his baptismal benefits.

### **Baptism of Tears**

Having renounced Satan, one has renounced **“all his pride”** as well. Only the one who has renounced pride can become a real penitent and can show tears. Symeon insists that penitence and tears are very much required to be able to regain the benefits of Baptism, and that all the Saints have regained that honor in this same way, “they too were human like ourselves, they had nothing beyond what we have, except a will for goodness, zeal, patience, humility, and love for God. Get all these for yourself, and the soul that at present is like rock will become for you a fountain of tears. But if you refuse to suffer and be distressed, at least do not say that the thing is impossible! He who says this denies purification, for it has never been heard that without tears a soul that has sinned after baptism has been cleansed from the defilement of sin.”<sup>q</sup> **“It is indeed a marvelous thing how that which flows from eyes, which are objects of**

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p Discourses XXIII: 90

q They too were human like ourselves, they had nothing beyond what we have, except a will for goodness, zeal, patience, humility, and love for God. Get all these for yourself, and the soul that at present is like rock (cf Ex. 17:6) will become for you a fountain of tears. But if you refuse to suffer and be distressed (cf 2 Cor. 4:8), at least do not say that the thing is impossible! He who says this denies purification, for it has never been heard that without tears a soul that has sinned after baptism has been cleansed from the defilement of sin.  
Discourses XXIX 185-193

**the senses, spiritually washes the soul of mire of sins.**<sup>r</sup> “No one will ever prove from the divine Scriptures that any person ever was cleansed without tears and constant compunction. No one ever became holy or received the Holy Spirit, or had the vision of God or experienced His dwelling within himself, or ever had Him dwelling in his heart, without previous repentance and compunction and constant tears ever flowing as from a fountain. Such tears flood and wash out the house of the soul; they moisten and refresh the soul that has been possessed and enflamed by the unapproachable fire.”<sup>s</sup>

Nowhere in the New Testament, could any reference to tears related to adults at Baptism be found, as St. Symeon mention it in a clear way saying: **“But as I have heard from the divine Scripture, some adults at the moment of their Baptism have shed tears,** having been smitten with compunction by the coming of the Spirit; yet not painful tears of suffering, but such as were sweeter than honey. They came by the action and gift of the Holy Spirit, they were shed from their eyes without pain and without sound. Those who some day will have been found worthy to experience such tears will know of what I have spoken and will bear witness that it is true, as the voice of the theologian (Gregory Nazianzen) bears witness to me.” For he says: “Let one man offer one thing, another man another thing,” and after enumerating a great

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r It is indeed a marvelous thing how that which flows from eyes, which are objects of the senses, spiritually washes the soul of mire of sins.  
Discourses II 262

s No one will ever prove from the divine Scriptures that any person ever was cleansed without tears and constant compunction. No one ever became holy or received the Holy Spirit, or had the vision of God or experienced His dwelling within himself, or ever had Him dwelling in his heart, without previous repentance and compunction and constant tears ever flowing as from a fountain. Such tears flood and wash out the house of the soul; they moisten and refresh the soul that has been possessed and enflamed by the unapproachable fire.(1Ti 6:16: Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen.)  
Discourses IV 445-455



number of things he finally cries out, “Let all offer tears, let all offer purification, let all offer (their) ascent and their straining forward to that which lies ahead”.<sup>t</sup>

Does St. Symeon refer to the Orations on Holy Lights<sup>u</sup> and to the Orations on Holy Baptism<sup>v</sup> of Gregory Nazianzen as divine Scripture, when these two orations are

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t But as I have heard from the divine Scripture, some adults at the moment of their Baptism have shed tears, having been smitten with compunction by the coming of the Spirit; yet not painful tears of suffering, but such as were sweeter than honey (cf Ps. 119:103). They came by the action and gift of the Holy Ghost, they were shed from their eyes without pain and without sound. Those who some day will have been found worthy to experience such tears will know of what I have spoken and will bear witness that it is true, as the voice of the theologian\* bears witness to me. For he says: “Let one man offer one thing, another man another thing,” and after enumerating a great number of things he finally cries out, “Let all offer tears, let all offer purification, let all offer (their) ascent and their straining forward to that which lies ahead” (Phil. 3:13). (\*Gregory of Nazianzen)  
Discourses XXIX 195-208

u Gregory Nazianzen, Oration on the Holy Lights.  
XVII. Now, since our Festival is of Baptism, and we must endure a little hardness with Him Who for our sake took form, and was baptized, and was crucified; let us speak about the different kinds of Baptism, that we may come out thence purified. Moses baptized but it was in water, and before that in the cloud and in the sea. This was typical as Paul saith; the Sea of the water, and the Cloud of the Spirit; the Manna, of the Bread of Life; the Drink, of the Divine Drink. John also baptized; but this was not like the baptism of the Jews, for it was not only in water, but also "unto repentance." Still it was not wholly spiritual, for he does not add "And in the Spirit." Jesus also baptized, but in the Spirit. This is the perfect Baptism. And how is He not God, if I may digress a little, by whom you too are made God? I know also a Fourth Baptism-- that by Martyrdom and blood, which also Christ himself underwent:--and this one is far more august than all the others, inasmuch as it cannot be defiled by after-stains. Yes, and I know of a Fifth also, which is that of tears, and is much more laborious, received by him who washes his bed every night and his couch with tears; whose bruises stink through his wickedness; and who goeth mourning and of a sad countenance; who imitates the repentance of Manasseh and the humiliation of the Ninerites upon which God had mercy; who utters the words of the Publican in the Temple, and is justified rather than the stiff-necked Pharisee; who like the Canaanite woman bends down and asks for mercy and crumbs, the food of a dog that is very hungry.  
(Quoted from Harmony Media)

v Gregory Nazianzen, Oration on the Holy Baptism.  
VIII. And since we are double-made, I mean of body and soul, and the one part is visible, the other invisible, so the cleansing also is twofold, by water and the spirit; the one received visibly in the body, the other concurring with it invisibly and apart from the body; the one typical, the other real and cleansing the depths. And this which comes to the aid of our first birth, makes us new instead of old, and like God instead of what we now are; recasting us without fire, and creating us anew without breaking us up. For, to say it all in one word, the virtue of Baptism is to be understood as a covenant with God for a second life and a purer conversation. And indeed all need to fear this very much, and to watch our own souls, each one of us, with all care, that we do not become liars in respect of this profession. For if God is called upon as a Mediator to ratify human professions, how great is the danger if we be found transgressors of the covenant which we have made with God Himself; and if we be found guilty before the Truth Himself of that lie, besides our other transgressions ... and that when there is no second regeneration, or recreation, or restoration to our former state, even though we seek it with all our might, and with many

intense in linking tears to Baptism and to regeneration through tears for adults, specially when St. Symeon quotes the Nazianzen twice in this same paragraph? Or there might be a mistranslation/misunderstanding of the original Greek “Θειαζ

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sighs and tears, by which it is cicatrized over (with great difficulty in my opinion, though we all believe that it may be cicatrized). Yet if we might wipe away even the scars I should be glad, since I too have need of mercy. But it is better not to stand in need of a second cleansing, but to stop at the first, which is, I know, common to all, and involves no labour, and is of equal price to slaves, to masters, to poor, to rich, to humble, to exalted, to gentle, to simple, to debtors, to those who are free from debt; like the breathing of the air, and the pouring forth of the light, and the changes of the seasons, and the sight of creation, that great delight which we all share alike, and the equal distribution of the faith.

IX. For it is a strange thing to substitute for a painless remedy one which is more painful; to cast away the grace of mercy, and owe a debt of punishment; and to measure our amendment against sin. For how many tears must we contribute before they can equal the fount of baptism; and who will be surety for us that death shall wait for our cure, and that the judgment seat shall not summon us while still debtors, and needing the fire of the other world? You perhaps, as a good and pitiful husbandman, will entreat the Master still to spare the figtree,(a) and not yet to cut it down, though accused of unfruitfulness; but to allow you to put dung about it in the shape of tears, sighs, invocations, sleepings on the ground, vigils, mortifications of soul and body, and correction by confession and a life of humiliation. But it is uncertain if the Master will spare it, inasmuch as it cumpers the ground of another asking for mercy, and becoming deteriorated by the long suffering shewn to this one. Let us then be buried with Christ by Baptism,(b) that we may also rise with Him; let us descend with Him, that we may also be exalted with Him; let us ascend with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

XXXI. If then you will listen to me, you will bid a long farewell to all such arguments, and you will jump at this Blessing, and begin to struggle in a twofold conflict; first, to prepare yourself for baptism by purifying yourself; and next, to preserve the baptismal gift; for it is a matter of equal difficulty to obtain a blessing which we have not, and to keep it when we have gained it. For often what zeal has acquired sloth has destroyed; and what hesitation has lost diligence has regained. A great assistance to the attainment of what you desire are vigils, fasts, sleeping on the ground, prayers, tears, pity of and almsgiving to those who are in need. And let these be your thanksgiving for what you have received, and at the same time your safeguard of them. You have the benefit to remind you of many commandments; so do not transgress them. Does a poor man approach you? Remember how poor you once were, and how rich you were made. One in want of bread or of drink, perhaps another Lazarus, is cast at your gate; respect the Sacramental Table to which you have approached, the Bread of Which you have partaken, the Cup in Which you have communicated, being consecrated by the Sufferings of Christ. If a stranger fall at your feet, homeless and a foreigner, welcome in him Him who for your sake was a stranger, and that among His own, and who came to dwell in you by His grace, and who drew you towards the heavenly dwelling place. Be a Zaccheus, who yesterday was a Publican, and is to-day of liberal soul; offer all to the coming in of Christ, that though small in bodily stature you may show yourself great, nobly contemplating Christ. A sick or a wounded man lies before you; respect your own health, and the wounds from which Christ delivered you. If you see one naked clothe him, in honour of your own garment of incorruption, which is Christ, for as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. If you find a debtor falling at your feet, tear up every document, whether just or unjust. Remember the ten thousand talents which Christ forgave you, and be not a harsh exactor of a smaller debt--and that from whom? From your fellow servant, you who were forgiven so much more by the Master. Otherwise you will have to give satisfaction to His mercy, which you would not imitate and take as your copy.

(Quoted from Harmony Media)

Γραφης” (Theias Graphys )that could also mean, at least for St. Symeon, "Divine Writings" (of the Nazianzen) and not only "Divine Scripture"?

Nevertheless the tears of Adults at Baptism, that are absolutely needed for a second cleansing as St. Symeon refers to, gain additional attention and authority when they are confirmed by the Nazianzen as Fifth Baptism <sup>ibid 19</sup> that is much more laborious, specially when the Nazianzen puts it in this form “it is better not to stand in need of a second cleansing but to stop at the first, which is, I know, common to all, involves no labor.... For it is a strange thing to substitute for a painless remedy one which is more painful; to cast away the grace of mercy, and owe a debt of punishment; and to measure our amendment against sin. For how many tears must we contribute before they can equal the fount of baptism; and who will be surety for us that death shall wait for our cure, and that the judgment seat shall not summon us while still debtors, and needing the fire of the other world?” <sup>ibid 20</sup>

## **Spiritual Adolescence**

The issue here is that the very start of the Christian life is in the few drops of tears of gratitude after understanding the benefits we have received from our infant baptism and how worthy we are for God in order to buy us by the blood of his beloved Son that was shed of the Cross while we were still ignorant and unfaithful. And I would like to call those first tears and the experience that follows as the first steps into the adolescence of the Christian life. Same as no one could jump from childhood to a mature man without going through adolescence, it goes the same on the

spiritual level, where the spiritual adolescence is necessary for the correct spiritual development. I will come back later on many times to this notion of adolescence.

## **Criteria of Holiness**

It should be well noted here as well, that the tears of the joy of reconciliation are far away from being the marks or signs of holiness; they are just the first steps in the right direction on the road of becoming a real Christian. Because the criteria of Holiness consist of all the following<sup>w</sup> two sets:

A1- Orthodox Faith.

A2- Praiseworthy life, living rightly (in works) as a friend of God

B1- The Holy Spirit as THE GIFT.

B2- The spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit.

These criteria are satisfied by fulfilling all the commandments<sup>x</sup> with a determined “will for goodness, zeal, patience, humility, and love for God.”<sup>ibid 16</sup>

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w The whole praise and blessedness of the saints consists of these two elements, their orthodox faith and praiseworthy life, and the gift of the Holy Spirits and His spiritual gifts. A third point follows on them. When a man lives rightly, as a friend of God, with orthodox faith, and when God bestows His gifts on him and glorifies him through the gift of the Holy Spirit, there follows the praise of the whole Church of the faithful and on the part of all its teachers and their pronouncement of his blessedness. But if the basis of faith and works is not laid without fail (if. Heb 6:1) it is impossible for any man ever to enjoy the presence of the adorable and divine Spirit and to receive His gift.  
Discourses X 49-59

x What he here calls “faith” is not merely the belief that Christ is God. It is that most comprehensive faith which included all that concerns the holy commandments spoken by Him. ... down to the last iota (Mt 5: 18)...is life and leads to eternal life (Jn 6:63: 68). Thus he who believes this is true of them and through Holy Baptism has pledged himself to observe all these things and to perform them without omitting anything will be saved. Discourses VII : 157-168

Every one who strives to keep all God’s commandments without fail becomes both child of God and a son of God born from above and is known to all as a true believer and a Christian.  
Discourses VIII 160

Fulfilling the commandments<sup>y</sup> is an issue of great importance for St. Symeon and he dedicates for it a great deal of his writing time. Grace and the fulfillment of the commandments are like the foundation and the roof, the roof cannot stand without a foundation, and the foundation is useless for the benefit of the user without the roof; same goes for the grace and the fulfillment of the commandments, “neither the Grace could stay in us without the commandments, neither the fulfillment of the commandments will make us any benefits without the Grace of God” *ibid* 14

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This is the first commandment, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 4:17), and further, “Ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and you will find, knock, and it will be opened to you; for everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Mt. 7:7-8; Lk. 11:9-10)  
Discourses XIV 45-50

Therefore I entreat you, brethren in Christ, let us also run with diligence the race of Christ’s commandments (if Ps. 119:32), and “our faces will not be ashamed” (Ps. 34:5). To every one who persistently knocks He opens the gates of His kingdom, and straightway gives the Most Holy Spirit to him who asks (if Lk. 11:13). It is impossible that he who seeks with all his soul should fail to find (if Mt. 7:7-8), that he should not be enriched with the riches of His gifts.  
Discourses XXIII 333-340

Le Seigneur ne bénit pas ceux qui se contentent d’enseigner, mais plutôt ceux qui, grâce à la pratique préalable des commandements, ont mérité de voir et ont contemplé en eux-mêmes la lumière éclairante et étincelante de l’Esprit, et qui, dans sa vision, sa connaissance et son action véritables, ont connu grâce à lui ce dont ils doivent parler et qu’ils doivent enseigner aux autres.  
101Pratiques et Théologiques 4

La foi, la crainte de Dieu, l’observation de ses commandements nous procurent les récompenses en proportion de notre degré de pureté ; dans la mesure où nous sommes purifiés, nous nous élevons de la crainte à l’amour de Dieu et nous sommes comme transportés de la crainte vers l’amour de Dieu ; c’est alors que nous l’entendons dire : « Celui qui garde mes commandements et les pratique, c’est celui-là qui m’aime. » Ainsi ajoutons efforts sur efforts afin de prouver notre amour par nos actes ; cela fait, le Christ, de son côté, comme il l’a promis, nous aime et, parce qu’il nous aime, son Père aussi nous aime également ; l’Esprit naturellement le précède et vient préparer la demeure, de sorte que, par l’inhabitation commune  
101Pratiques et Théologiques 6

..... Ni le toit ne peut se soutenir sans fondations ni les fondations n’ont aucune utilité ni avantage pour la vie, sans le toit. De même aussi la grâce de Dieu est préservée grâce à l’observation des commandements; et la pratique des commandements est posée comme fondement pour obtenir le don de Dieu; car ni la grâce de Dieu ne peut se maintenir en nous sans l’observation des commandements, ni l’observation des commandements n’est d’aucun avantage ou utilité pour nous sans la grâce de Dieu.  
103Théologiques et Pratiques56

<sup>y</sup> Ascetic commandments of the Church, based on teaching of Christ.

## **Blessed Search in Spiritual Memory**

Most often we would like to understand by the second cleansing as one of the final stages of holiness of life, while it is clear from St. Symeon's writings that he is talking about the very first steps into the Christian life, just after adequate penitence or second baptism and restoration to the Fatherly house; in fact if the children show negligence or if they dissipate themselves in futile occupations, they are excluded from the table and they are denied food in order to be taught to avoid negligence. St. Symeon explains that God gives Himself as food to his beloved children, since he is the bread that comes down from heaven, and He as the nourisher of the universe, deprives them of his presence. So that when they realize what good they have missed, they go searching for it as usual; and not finding it, they will start knocking on their chest, seeking all sort of humbling, torments and voluntary mortifications, so that their master could notice their torments and comes back to them and gives himself back to them: and this is what happens. Then the first intimacy, the glory, the joy and also the good that "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" [1Cor2:9], those are restored to them in an ever growing certitude; even more than before they will revere their father and will fear him like a master, in order not to be implicated again by inattention into the same misfortunes and to be thrown away from such a good father. While the others who would have stepped back in front of the strictness, the torments and the difficulties of penitence, and who have given up into laziness, sluggishness and relaxation, preferring fleshly pleasures to the eternal good of their God Himself, as illegitimate sons disrespectful and insolent. They are not anymore judged as

worthy of that enjoyment (of the presence of God), nor of course of the vestment (post baptismal garment) of the glory of God. They **deprive themselves**, in conformity to the justice of God, of the richness of the goodness of God and become similar to dogs without master erring everywhere in the streets and the places looking for a left behind bone of any piece of old skin to feed upon, or to leak the blood of slaughtered beasts<sup>z</sup>. They will have nothing else to pray other than: “Cast me not away from Thy presence; and remove not Thy Holy Spirit from me”<sup>aa</sup>.

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z Le père qui aime ses enfants fait asseoir ses fils a sa table; quand il constate qu'ils sont portés a négliger leurs études et qu'ils se dissipent en des occupations futiles, il les exclut de sa table et ordonne a ses serviteurs de ne pas leur donner a manger, pour leur apprendre a ne pas manquer au devoir par négligence. C'est ainsi que se comporte également Dieu, notre excellent Maître, avec ses serviteurs, ses fils par amour et par grâce, car il se donne a eux lui-même, a le pain qui descend du ciel et donne la vie au monde; de lui et avec lui, ils se nourrissent sans cesse a satiété et se préparent pour la vie éternelle par cette communion qui les sanctifie tout a fait corps et âme. Lorsqu'ils négligent les commandements et qu'ils veulent user de leur liberté pour paresser ou en prendre a leur aise et s'adonner a quelque occupation mondaine, en glissant jusqu'a des actes incongrus et incompatibles avec le culte de Dieu, alors le nourricier de l'univers les prive de sa présence. Mais prenant alors conscience du bien qui leur a échappé, ils reviennent aussitôt et le cherchent comme d'habitude; et ne l'ayant pas trouvé, ils se frappent la poitrine, se lamentent, déplorent leur état, s'infligent toutes sortes de mauvais traitements ; ils souhaitent toutes sortes de tourments, d'épreuves et d'humiliations, afin que leur bon père puisse constater leurs tourments et leur mortification volontaire et que, prenant pitié d'eux, il revienne et de nouveau se donne à eux : c'est ce qui arrive. Alors l'intimité première, la gloire et la jouissance même des biens « que l'oeil n'a pas vus, que l'oreille n'a pas entendus et dont l'idée n'est pas montée au coeur d'un homme », sont rétablies pour eux avec une certitude accrue ; plus encore qu'auparavant, ils révèrent leur père et le craignent comme un maître, pour ne pas être impliqués de nouveau par inattention dans les mêmes malheurs et rejetés loin d'un si bon père. Tels sont et la conduite et le sort des pénitents assidus, qui leur valent d'obtenir les avantages susdits. Mais tous ceux qui auront reculé devant les rigueurs, les tourments et les difficultés de la pénitence, et qui auront donné dans la paresse et le relâchement, comme des fils indignes ou illégitimes et, plus encore, irrespectueux, après avoir fait plus de cas des plaisirs du corps que des biens éternels et de leur Dieu même, ils ne sont plus jugés dignes de cette jouissance, ni, bien sûr, du vêtement de la gloire de Dieu; ils se privent eux-mêmes, conformément à la justice, de la richesse de la bonté de Dieu et deviennent semblables à des chiens sans maître. En effet les chiens sans maître errent par les places et les rues de la ville pour saisir au hasard un os ou quelque morceau de vieille peau jetée au rebut, ou bien pour lécher une ordure ou du sang de bêtes gorgées....  
Théologiques et Ethiques IV, 280- 322

<sup>aa</sup> Ps 51:11 LXXE

## **Satisfaction in Deprivation**

According to the judgment of St. Symeon, most of the Christians have lost the benefits of their first baptism and did not go deep enough in the struggle of the second baptism or rebirth in the Spirit, and are satisfied to live deprived from the joy that derives from the presence of God in their lives, and believe that they will never be entitled to that joyful experience because they do not consider themselves all holy and saints. By that, they are using pretexts for sins (LXXE Ps.140:4) and they are clearly affirming that the state of beatitude is only the pledge of the confirmed saints that are not counted among the normal people because they have reached to a state where they could not fall and sin like every other man on earth, because they have encountered the Holy Uncreated Light of God. This formula is in absolute contradiction with the catechetical structure and spirituality of St. Symeon, because the conscious experience of Grace, and sometimes of the Holy Uncreated Lights could happen also to adolescents in the Spirit as well as to elders, as we will see.

## **The Lord is “Hungry and Thirsty”!**

St. Symeon has an original and a very impressive way for the reading of the Gospel of the Judgment Day. The Lord will say to every baptized who defiled his baptism and did not take it seriously to repent: “I came to you and I dwelled in you, Me the inaccessible to the angels, and knowingly you have left Me over lying down and buried under the obscurities of your pains. I have been patient so many years waiting for your repentance, reckoning that you will observe My commandments, until the end you have refused to look for Me not even a bit, you did not have pity of



Me who was tightly suffocating in you; you did not allow Me to find the lost drachma that you are, and in not allowing My flame to lit, neither that I could see you, nor that you could see Me; to the contrary you have maintained it under the cover of your passions. Go therefore away from Me, worker of iniquity, into the eternal fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels; because I was hungry to your conversion and to your repentance, and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty to your salvation, and you gave Me no drink; I was naked without your virtuous practices, and you did not clothe Me; I was in the very narrow prison, fetid and dark, of your heart, and you did not deign visit Me nor bring Me to light; you knew Me lying down in the sickness of your negligence and of your inaction, and you, you did not help me by your good works and acts. Then, go away far from Me.”<sup>bb</sup>

### **Accountability to Infant Baptism**

The unavoidable question that should be raised with respect to infant baptism would be the following: Does God count the ones who have got the Infant Baptism, accountable for their first cleansing, when they did not have any involvement with it

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bb C'est pourquoi, voici ce que dit la Lumière: « C'est de ta propre bouche que je te jugerai, mauvais serviteur », parce que, quand je suis venu, comme tu dis, et que j'ai habité en toi, moi qui suis inaccessible aux ordres angéliques, tout en le sachant, tu m'as laissé gisant et enseveli sous les ténèbres de tes maux : c'est ce que tu dis toi-même. Alors que j'ai patienté tant d'années dans l'attente de ton repentir, en escomptant que tu observerais mes commandements, jusqu'à la fin tu as refusé de me chercher si peu que ce fût; tu n'as pas eu pitié de moi qui étouffais à l'étroit en toi ; tu ne m'as pas laissé trouver la drachme perdue que tu es, en ne permettant pas que ma flamme s'allume, ni que je te voie, ni que tu me voies'; au contraire tu l'as maintenue sous le couvert de tes passions. Va-t-en donc loin de moi, ouvrier d'iniquité, dans le feu éternel qui a été préparé pour le diable et ses anges; car j'ai eu faim de ta conversion et de ton repentir, et tu ne m'as pas donné à manger j'ai eu soif de ton salut, et tu ne m'as pas donné à boire ; j'étais nu sans tes pratiques vertueuses, et tu ne m'en as pas revêtu ; j'étais dans la prison très étroite, fétide et obscure, de ton coeur, et tu n'as pas daigné me visiter ni me ramener à la lumière ; tu me savais gisant dans la maladie de ta négligence et de ton inaction, et tu ne m'as pas assisté par tes bonnes oeuvres et tes actes. Alors, va-t-en loin de moi. »  
Théologiques et Ethiques X 645-670

in the first place and when they did not get initiated into the life in Christ in a proper way, and when they lived their lives in the same way as their non baptized co-citizens? And consequently will their --post infant baptism-- second cleansing, be a laborious one; while, the first baptism, of their adult non baptized co-citizen, has to be for sure a non-laborious one (according to the Nazianzen) <sup>ibid 20</sup>? In other words, are we preventing our baptized children from the joy of their first Baptism, and are we offering them enough opportunities to express their pledge of allegiance to Christ on their own will? Nowhere the question of postponing child baptism to adulthood was suggested in the works of St. Symeon the New Theologian, he was only stressing on consciously expressing their pledge of allegiance and accepting willingly and consciously the already received grace of the Holy Baptism in order to get access to all its rights, privileges and responsibilities.

### **Problematic Infant Baptism**

I have learned and I have often taught that the Roman Catholics have separated the three introductory sacraments and that they have changed their sequence in an illogical theological order that is in an unorthodox way. And that the Protestants have denied baptism to innocent children, which is in contradiction with the New Testament Scripture and by that they are leading an unorthodox way as well.

In fact, the Roman Catholic Church has postponed the first communion to the age of 7 years and the Chrismation to a later age, but it seems that most often they did fall back into a ceremonial event, lacking personalized preparation for baptism, specially the re-announcement of the baptismal pledge of allegiance.

On the other hand, the Protestant Churches have postponed the Baptism till the person declares that he has a conversion experience, and therefore we find among them a higher percentage of committed Christians, but most - if not all - of them remain in the stage of spiritual adolescence due to the lack of the fundamental element of asceticism experienced through daily repentance and participation in the sacramental life of the Church leading to sanctification, that can only happen through the Eucharist, that enables them to grow up spiritually, and therefore it is hard for them to reach to the spiritual maturity as we know it in our Orthodox church.

Before reading St. Symeon, I never asked myself and I did not hear any Orthodox asking himself why those two large Churches have moved away from the Orthodox way, and what wrong were they trying to avoid or to correct in doing so. They were for sure seeing something unhealthy in the administration of the introductory sacrament(s) to children, but it seems that they took measures to correct what they were seeing wrong, and they made it worse. But how could it be that us the Orthodox, before St. Symeon did not see anything unwholesome, and still after the warnings of this great and authentic Theologian and Father in our church we are still not taking any measure to correct what he warned against, namely, relying on baptism as a legal ceremony only, to automatically grant every baptized all the end-benefits of Baptism as something already settled, that we do not need to talk about or to activate for the rest of the baptized life?<sup>cc</sup> While the intention of Infant Baptism was to give those infants, in advance, the right<sup>dd</sup> -or power- (εξουσία exousia) to become children of God, same as those who have received our Lord Jesus Christ and believed in His Name.

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<sup>cc</sup> Please refer to page 15 : Baptism vis-à-vis circumcision.

<sup>dd</sup> 1 John: 12: But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name

In the Orthodox Church, Infant baptism has never been based on the “personal faith” of the newborn children, which could not exist at that early age, but on the faith of the community to which the child belongs and especially on the faith of the sponsors or parents who take upon themselves the responsibility for the growth of the child in the new life in Christ within the faithful community. This means that the Church has taken for granted that the child will be brought gradually into convergence, and that he will receive after his baptism all the teachings that the Catechumens were receiving, in the early church, before their baptism, and that the Child will be growing naturally in the liturgical life cycle of the Church; especially that it was taken for granted that everybody was taking part in all the liturgical life of the Church, because it was known that “if anyone without the constraint of necessity leaves his church for three Lord's days, he shall be deprived of communion.” (Trullo Canon LXXX) In our days only 7% of our Orthodox population attend church services regularly and only a minor part of those are able to bring children to Christ through adequate Catechism, what makes the majority of our baptized people ignorant of their baptism and of Christ. Nevertheless most if not all of them are baptized and can show their Infant Baptism Certificate, when required, to get married in the Church for example.<sup>ee</sup>

### **Appropriate Adult Catechism is needed**

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<sup>ee</sup> By digression we can absolutely conclude that Holy Matrimony that is based on Infant Baptism Certificates alone, is comparable to a civil Marriage although celebrated by a Priest at the Church; while a marriage that is based on Infant Baptism Certificates attached to a Catechumen Certificate issued by a Spiritual Father, is a marriage that is able to grow into a “Marriage in the Lord” (1Co 7: 39) which is a sacrament in the form of mysterious Marriage of the Lord to His Church.

Our Orthodoxy, seen through the experience of St. Symeon, implies on us therefore, to have the adults in the church actualize the introductory sacraments through an adult catechesis which gives them the opportunity to have their “Certificate of Infant Baptism” endorsed by a catechumen certificate from a spiritual guide ( or Father), after a **pledge of allegiance to Christ** that places Him as Lord and King over their lives very consciously and in full awareness, in the same wording and in the same spirit of the ceremony where the pledge have been said on their behalf at Baptism, and to approach communion in a much more attentive way. In fact the writings of St. Symeon have such an aim and could be easily translated into such a Catechism for Adults in order to bring them into a fuller conscious awareness of their Baptism. However, going through the baptismal ceremony including the exorcism prayers and what follows from rejecting the devil’s pomp, the spitting on the devil toward the west and the turning to the Lord toward the east and to pledge allegiance to Him, with a full understanding of the obligations and of the consequences of dishonoring the pledged allegiance.

All this is becoming more and more difficult in an age where the majority of Christians do not believe anymore in the presence of the Devil as a person. As a good example, the two major Catholic theological universities in Lebanon, and some Orthodox priests, teach their students -priests to be- that the Devil does not exist, and all what is said in the bible is related to the bad inclinations in the human nature, and to some symptoms of psychical disorder. Therefore the one who did not experience the presence of the power of the devil cannot understand the spiritual struggle. If a patient or his supposed doctor does not recognize the sickness and its causes, how can they appropriate the proper medicine? In the same way those who do not recognize the spiritual sickness and how the enemy has captured our nature under sin, how can

they expect a delivering power from the Lord? And how could they understand baptism and all the benefits related to it, as a remedy? And how could they understand that the Lord did “set our race free from the slavery and oppression of our adversary and enemy?”... “So we have been born again in Holy Baptism and have been released from slavery and become free, so that the enemy cannot take any action against us unless we of our own will obey him.”<sup>ff</sup>

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ff As for those who make excuses for themselves (cf. Ps. 141:4 LXX), let them not say that we are totally under the influence of Adam’s transgression and so dragged down into sin. Those who think and speak to this effect claim that the coming of our Master and our God was to no purpose and in vain. These are words fit for heretics, not believers! Why did He come down, and for what ‘purpose did He taste death (Neb. 2:9)? Was it not that He might altogether cancel the condemnation of sin and set our race free from the slavery and oppression of our adversary and enemy? True independence consists in being in no way under the dominion of another. Because of him who had committed sin we were sinners, because of the transgressor we too were transgressors, because of the slave of sin we ourselves became slaves of sin (cf Rom. 6:17, 20). Because he was accursed and died we became accursed and dead. Because he was influenced by the counsel of the evil one and was enslaved and lost his independence, so we, as his children, were influenced, dominated, oppressed, and tyrannized. But God came down and was incarnate and became man like us, “but without sin” (Heb. 4:15), and destroyed sin. He hallowed conception and birth and, as He grew up, bit by bit blessed every age. When He had reached mature manhood He began His preaching and taught us that we, especially those who are mere youths and not mature men, should not leap ahead in any way or surpass those who are aged in understanding and virtue (cf Wis. 4:8f). He assumed that I which was enjoined on us and kept all the commandments of His own God and Father (Jn. 15:10, 5:18). Thus He canceled the transgression and set the transgressors free from their sentence (cf. Rom. 8:2). He became a slave and “took on Himself the form of a slave” (Phil. 2:7) and restored us slaves to the dignity of masters in that he made us masters of him who had been our tyrant. To this the saints bear witness, for even after their death they drive him and all his servants away like weaklings. He became a curse by being crucified; as it is said, “Accursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Gal. 3:13; Deut. 21:23). He destroyed altogether [the curse of Adam. He died, and by His own death He destroyed death. He rose, and did away with the power and activity of the enemy (cf Lk. 10:19), who had held sway over us through death and sin (cf Heb. 2:14). As He applied the ineffable and life-giving power of His Godhead and His flesh to the deadly venom and poison of sin, He completely delivered all our race from the action of the enemy (cf 2 Thess. 2:9). Through Holy Baptism and the Communion of His undefiled Mysteries, His Body and His precious Blood, He cleanses us and gives us life and restores us to holiness and sinlessness (cf 1 John 5:18). More than that, He sends us forth to enjoy the honor of liberty, so that we may not appear to serve our Master by compulsion, but out of free choice. In the beginning Adam was free and without sin and violence; yet of his own free will he obeyed the enemy and was deceived [by him] and transgressed God’s commandment. So we have been born again in Holy Baptism and have been released from slavery and become free, so that the enemy cannot take any action against us unless we of our own will obey him. Before the Law and before Christ’s coming many people, countless people, were able to please God without these aids and were found without reproach (Gen. 17:1). Among these God translated and thus honored righteous Enoch (Gen. 5:24). He took up Elijah into heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2: 11). If this is so, what excuse have we, who live after [the coming of] grace, who have enjoyed such great and wonderful benefits, who live after death and sin have been destroyed? After the regeneration of Baptism, the protection of the holy angels, and the overshadowing and descent of the Holy Spirit, shall we not be found equal to those who lived before grace? Are we

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Rebirth as Experience**

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to be slothful, despisers of God's commandments who transgress them? But that we, if we persist in evil, are liable to greater punishment than those who sinned under the Law, Saint Paul made clear when he said, "If the message declared by angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Heb. 2:2f.).

Discourses V: 395-468

## The rebirth experience

This takes us to a more precise description of that new cleansing or Baptism in the Holy Spirit as a rebirth experience, as experienced, understood and explained by St. Symeon. We go here a little deeper behind the real reasons of the outwardly flowing tears. We enter here into a much more intimate and fully experienced area that could only be understood by those who have been introduced to it through their own intimate experience, because “how then will those who claim that they have never known at all the Holy Spirit’s presence, radiance, illumination, and His coming to dwell in them, have the power to know or perceive or think of them in any way? How shall they apprehend such mysteries, **who have never at all experienced in themselves** the recasting, renewal, transformation, reshaping, regeneration, that He brings about? Those who have not yet been **baptized in the Holy Spirit** (Mt. 3:11), how can they know the change ((metamorphose in the Greek text)) that comes over those who have been baptized in Him?”<sup>gg</sup>

St. Symeon affirms that every Christian who should be called or call himself Christian should have got such an experience. “So we must know that, when he who is “born from above” comes out from this world as from a dark womb, he enters into the intellectual and heavenly light, and as he, so to speak, peers slightly inside it he is

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<sup>gg</sup> How then will those who claim that they have never known at all the Holy Spirit’s presence, radiance, illumination, and His coming to dwell in them have the power to know or perceive or think of them in any way? How shall they apprehend such mysteries, who have never at all experienced in themselves the recasting, renewal, transformation, reshaping, regeneration, that He brings about? Those who have not yet been baptized in the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11), how can they know the change that comes over those who have been baptized in Him? Those who have not been “Born from above” (Jn.3:3), how shall they see the glory of those who have been “born from above” (as the Lord said), those who have been born of God (Jn. 1:13) and have become the children of God (Jn. 1:12)? Those who have refused to experience this, but by their negligence have missed this glory-for they have received the power to become such (cf Jn. 1:12)-tell me, what knowledge will enable them to understand or in any way imagine what the others have become?

Discourses XXIV 110-121



at once filled with unspeakable joy. As he naturally thinks of the darkness from which he has been delivered, he painlessly shed tears. This is how one begins to be counted among Christians”<sup>hh</sup>. This goes on everyone without exception for he strongly opposes his opponents who should have pretended that tears are subject to the more sentimental and soft nature and maybe less rational people: “Has the great Gregory said, as you foolishly pretend, that some men have obtained a hard nature and are forever incapable of compunction and tears? Far from it! There is no human nature that has less aptitude for tears and weeping and mourning, nor has this saint, nor any other saint, said or written to this effect.”<sup>ii</sup>

The rebirth being a real experience in every Christian life, open to every Christian as the first step into real Christianity, and not only to some elect saints, we should be able to discuss it now as an experience in itself with the related metamorphoses (changes) that are experienced by those who go through it as described by St. Symeon.

## **Spiritual Regeneration**

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<sup>hh</sup> Discourses VIII: 97

<sup>ii</sup> Has the great Gregory said, as you foolishly pretend, that some men have obtained a hard nature and are forever incapable of compunction and tears? Far from it! There is no human nature that has less aptitude for tears and weeping and mourning, nor has this saint, nor any other saint, said or written to this effect.

But that weeping comes naturally to all of us, let the newborn children teach you! For as soon as they come forth from the womb and fall on the ground they weep (Wis. 7:3), and for their nurses and mothers this is a sign of life. For if the child does not weep, it is not said to be alive, but as it weeps it shows thereby that human nature has mourning and tears as a concomitant from birth.

As our holy father Symeon the Studite used to say, it is with such weeping that man ought to spend his present life and die with it, if he wishes to be saved and enter into the blessed life (cf Mt. 19:17), since the tears of birth are expressive of the tears of this life present here (on earth). For as food and drink are necessary for the body, so are the tears for the soul; so much so that he who does not daily weep—I hesitate to say every hour, for fear of seeming to exaggerate—will destroy his soul and cause it to perish from hunger.

Discourses XXIX 213-233

“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. It is through the Holy Spirit that there will be a universal resurrection. I do not mean the resurrection of the bodies at the end (Heb. 9:26), for then the angel will blow the trumpet and the dead bodies will rise (1 Cor. 15:52), but I mean **the spiritual regeneration and resurrection of the dead souls that takes place in a spiritual manner every day**. This [resurrection] He gives who has died once [for all] and risen (Rom. 6:9), and through all and for all those who live in a worthy manner, He causes the souls to rise, who have died with Him in will and faith, and raises them up. This He grants through His all-holy Spirit, as He even now bestows on them from henceforth, the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>jj</sup>

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<sup>jj</sup> Discourses VI: 354-368

St. Symeon repeats this statement in a slightly different way when he affirms that before death another death is produced, and **before the resurrection of the body, another resurrection of the soul is produced in work, in power, in experience and in truth.** When mortal wisdom fades away in front of the immortal intelligence and mortality is driven away by life, the soul, as if she is waking up from among the dead, sees itself and recognizes itself, as do the dormant as they wake up from sleepiness; she recognizes God who raised her up: by contemplation, by thanksgiving, she rises up outside the sensual and outside all the world, filled by an ineffable pleasure, and she immobilizes in Him all its intellectual activity.<sup>kk</sup>

“Those who have not been “born from above” (Jn.3:3), how shall they see the glory of those who have been “born from above” (as the Lord said), those who have been born of God (Jn. 1:13) and have become the children of God (Jn. 1:12)? Those **who have refused to experience this**, but by their negligence have missed this glory - for they have received the power to become such (cf. Jn. 1:12) - tell me, what knowledge will enable them to understand, or in any way imagine, what the others have become?”<sup>ll</sup>

## Faith, Hope or Experience

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<sup>kk</sup> Avant la mort se produit une mort et avant la résurrection des corps une résurrection des âmes en oeuvre, en puissance, en expérience et en vérité. Lorsque la sagesse mortelle s’efface devant l’intelligence immortelle et que la mortalité est chassée par la vie, l’âme, comme si elle se levait d’entre les morts, se voit et se reconnaît, comme se voient les dormeurs qui se lèvent du sommeil; elle reconnaît Dieu qui l’a ressuscitée : en le contemplant et le remerciant, elle s’élève hors des sens et du monde entier, remplie d’une volupté ineffable, et elle immobilise en lui toute son activité intellectuelle.  
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<sup>ll</sup> Discourses XXIV 101-120

Pledging allegiance to Christ as Lord and King does not fall in the context of faith or faithful belief or hope (in view) that one is Christian as a consequence of baptism, but rather in the context of radical change in one's life based on spiritual experiences by facts that occur to every individual in a different way, but that have such an impact on one's life that the person cannot be the same as he was before that encounter or that experience that follows that pledge of allegiance (in the same language that is actually used in the celebration of baptism in our Orthodox Church). This experience has indeed such an impact on one's life, that some Western non Orthodox Christians in our times write down the date and time of accepting and declaring Christ as king, same as the Orthodox memorize the baptism date and time and place of their kids.

It is absolutely true that every, deep and real, repentance is a rebirth experience in itself at the spiritual level, but it always carries the memories of that very first encounter with Christ as Lord and King at the same time.

St. Symeon affirms that if the Spirit is in you, you will assuredly understand from His effects in you what the Apostle says: "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Or "the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." Or "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." **All those who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit have put on Christ entirely**; they are sons of light and walk in the light that has no decline; seeing the world, they do not see it, hearing what comes from the world they do not hear it. It is written of carnal men: "Seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand" the divine things and neither they could understand the things of the Spirit, because for them it is pure foulness. We could think similarly of those who

have got the Holy Spirit: They have a body but they do not reside in the flesh: “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.”

They are dead for the world and the world is dead for them: “The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”<sup>mm</sup>

This experience is a sort of usual and common intellectual illumination of the mind, that is within the reach of every Christian who has gone into repentance, but that is far below the state of seeing of the uncreated light, which remains a special Grace or reward that is granted, by the Lord at His discretion, to those who are mature in the spirit as well as to beginners as He wishes.

St. Symeon exhorts every Christian to examine scrupulously his own soul, to see if he has really received the power to become a child of God.<sup>mm</sup> To all who have received him – he wants to say of course: those who have professed that He is God

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<sup>mm</sup> Si le Saint-Esprit est en toi, tu comprendras assurément d’après ses effets en toi ce que dit de lui l’Apôtre : « Là où est l’Esprit du Seigneur, là est la liberté. » Ou bien : « Le corps est mort à cause du péché mais l’esprit est vie à cause de la justice. » Ou bien « Ceux qui sont du Christ ont crucifié leur chair avec leurs vices et leurs désirs. » Tous ceux qui ont été baptisés dans l’Esprit-Saint ont revêtu le Christ’ tout entier; ils sont enfants de lumière et marchent dans la lumière qui n’a pas de déclin; voyant le monde, ils ne le voient pas, entendant ce qui vient du monde ils ne l’entendent pas’. Il est écrit des hommes charnels : « voyant ils ne voient point, entendant ils ne comprennent point » les choses divines et ils ne peuvent non plus comprendre les choses de l’Esprit, car pour eux c’est pure folie. Nous pouvons penser de même à propos de ceux qui ont en eux l’Esprit-Saint : ils ont un corps, mais n’habitent pas dans la chair : « Vous n’êtes pas dans la chair mais dans l’Esprit, si du moins l’Esprit de Dieu habite en vous. » Ils sont morts pour le monde et le monde pour eux : « Pour moi le monde est crucifié et moi au monde. »  
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<sup>nn</sup> Il est donc nécessaire, frères, de nous regarder nous- mêmes et d’examiner scrupuleusement notre âme, pour voir si nous avons reçu le Seigneur Jésus qui nous a été annoncée et si nous le possédons en nous-mêmes, afin de connaître, comme le dit l’évangéliste Jean, si nous avons reçu de lui le pouvoir de devenir enfants de Dieu’. Que chacun prête attention aux paroles des saintes Écritures et s’examine soi-même, comme nous avons dit, de peur qu’en s’égayant soi-même, avec la vaine illusion de posséder la foi, il ne se trouve sans la foi, et qu’en s’imaginant avoir le Seigneur en lui, il ne se trouve vide au sortir du corps : il serait condamné, comme s’il n’avait rien et, privé de ce qu’il croit avoirs, il serait jeté dans le feu”. Par où donc connaissons- nous si Christ est en nous et comment apprendrons- nous à nous juger nous-mêmes? C’est en recueillant (ses) paroles dans les divines Écritures et en les plaçant devant notre âme comme un miroir C que nous pourrons nous juger tout entiers. Prenons donc le sujet plus haut et, si Dieu accorde une parole à la bouche impure que j’ouvre, je vous montrerai en quelque façon, mes frères, la manière de vous examiner. Alors, attention, je vous prie, car il s’agit de choses à faire trembler.  
Théologiques et Ethiques X 350-369

and not only man – , he has given them the power, through baptism, to become children of God, in delivering them from the tyranny of the devil; in a way that they will not be satisfied to only become counted among the faithful, but, if they want to follow his commandments, they will acquire on top of that, holiness through the practice of commandments. This lack of satisfaction from being a usual part of the faithful congregation, by simple family tradition or customs, is coming from the spiritual birth that is a spiritual transformation that becomes real and visible through its effects, after the baptism of the Holy Spirit.<sup>oo</sup>

## **Beginners and Elders**

As in principle no human can gain access to such experience by his own efforts, nor can anyone claim merit for such an experience by his own deeds and will; God could grant the rebirth to anyone who asks for it faithfully in a penitent and humble heart. “It happens often, in the beginning, to those who fervently embrace penitence, that a divine illumination lights them up but it fades up immediately.”<sup>pp</sup> Therefore such experiences are shared by both great Saints and novices in

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<sup>oo</sup> Voilà le miroir que je vous ai promis : ce sont ces paroles. Examine avec moi l’exactitude des expressions de l’Évangile et avec quelle clarté elles nous enseignent les marques distinctives des fidèles, de sorte que chacun de nous se reconnaisse soi-même et reconnais le prochain. A ceux qui l’ont reçu — et il veut dire évidemment : ceux qui ont professé par la foi qu’il est Dieu et pas seulement homme —, il a donné pouvoir de devenir par le baptême enfants de Dieu, en les délivrant de la tyrannie du diable ; de la sorte ils ne se contenteront pas d’être des fidèles, mais, s’ils veulent suivre ses commandements, ils acquerront en plus la sainteté par la pratique des commandements, comme il est dit ailleurs : « Devenez saints, parce que je suis saint » et encore « Devenez miséricordieux comme votre Père céleste est miséricordieux. » Puis, après cela, l’Évangile indique le mode de l’adoption, en disant «Ceux qui ne sont pas nés du sang, ni de la volonté de la chair, ni de la volonté de l’homme, mais de Dieu. » La naissance désigne ici la transformation spirituelle qui devient réelle et visible dans le baptême du Saint-Esprit, comme le Seigneur qui ne ment pas le déclare en personne : « Jean a baptisé dans l’eau, mais vous, vous serez baptisés dans l’Esprit-Saint. » C’est en lui donc que les baptisés deviennent lumière en la lumière et connaissent celui qui les a engendrés, du fait même qu’ils le voient.  
Théologiques et Ethiques X 426-448

Christianity. The only difference between a Holy man and a novice on the road to Holiness is in the capability to preserve, as long as possible, the Grace of the indwelling of Holy Spirit in them. In the beginning it is easy to receive Grace but hard to keep it, and after many failures in preserving it, and with progress in Holiness, it becomes harder to receive it but much easier to keep it longer and longer. In this respect, St. Symeon gives nine advices, counsels and recommendations on how to preserve the visitation of the Grace in us as long as possible.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>pp</sup> Car il arrive souvent, dans les débuts, chez ceux qui embrassent avec ferveur la pénitence, qu'une illumination divine les éclaire; mais elle passe aussitôt; Théologiques et Ethiques X: 527-529

<sup>99</sup> Mais prends garde, toi qui as été jugé digne de devenir tel toi à qui j'adresse maintenant la parole, toi qui as obtenu à demeure en toi-même Dieu tout entier,

- a) de ne faire, ni de proférer de tes lèvres rien d'indigne de sa volonté ; sinon tu perdras aussitôt le trésor caché en toi, car lui, il se sera éloigné de toi.
- b) Honore-le de toutes tes forces et n'introduis dans ta maison rien de ce qui lui déplaît et qui répugne à sa nature ; sinon il te laissera et s'en ira, irrité contre toi.
- c) Ne l'accable pas de paroles et de prosternations, en osant sans rougir calculer à part toi et dire: « Je vais montrer une ferveur extraordinaire et un amour très ardent pour lui, afin qu'il admette ma bonne intention et qu'il connaisse que je l'aime et que je l'honore. » Sache-le bien, avant même que tu les conçoives, lui de son côté sait toutes les démarches de ta pensée sans que rien lui échappe.
- d) Ne tente pas non plus de le retenir avec les mains de ton intelligence, car il est insaisissable, et tu auras beau t'enhardir à le toucher ou t'imaginer le tenir, tu n'auras rien au-dedans ; au contraire il disparaîtra aussitôt entièrement de toi, et toi, avec beaucoup de regrets et de larmes, Lui te meurtriras toi-même de coups sans en retirer vraiment aucun avantage<sup>1</sup>.
- e) Il est la joie et ne supporte pas d'entrer dans une maison de deuil et de tristesse, pas plus que l'abeille diligente ne supporte d'entrer dans une maison enfumée ; mais si, sans inquiétude et dans la joie, tu Le tiens prêt, il se trouvera de nouveau au-dedans de toi; laisse alors le Maître, sans l'importuner, se reposer sur ton âme comme sur un lit. Et ne commence pas non plus à dire en toi-même : « Si je ne pleure pas en sa présence, il se détournera de moi en pensant que je le méprise. » S'il avait voulu que tu pleures après avoir atteint la perfection, comme si tu étais encore pénitent, c'est plutôt en se faisant voir de loin, en se cachant, ou même en t'illuminant, qu'il t'aurait accordé de le faire pour purifier et orner ta maison; mais après ta pénitence et ta purification par les larmes, il est venu t'accorder le repos de tes peines et de tes gémissements, la joie et l'allégresse au lieu de la tristesse. Tiens-toi donc droit, je ne dis pas seulement par le corps, mais par les démarches et les élans de ton âme. Fais le silence, en pensant que le roi des rois est arrivé dans ta maison. Parle énergiquement à tous les portiers de ta maison, je veux dire à tes

## Novice with Experience

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propres sens: ((C'est le roi! — (comme l'on) dit. — Tenez-vous bien aux portes' ; tenez-vous en silence et grand respecta. Que personne ne s'approche de la porte pour frapper ; que nul cri, proche ou lointain, ne parvienne jusqu'à l'intérieur; que personne n'avance subrepticement le pied jusqu'à l'intérieur; sinon le roi nous abandonnera aussitôt. et s'en ira. »

- f) Après cet avertissement, tiens-toi dans la joie éclatante de ton âme ; contente-toi de voir ton Maître, l'illimité qui est en toi limité sans l'être réellement, de comprendre sa beauté incomparable et de concevoir inconcevablement son très saint visage qui reste inaccessible aux anges, aux archanges et à toutes les puissances célestes. Sois stupéfait, réjouis-toi et exulte avec des tressaillements de joie spirituelle, pieusement attentif à faire et à dire ce qu'il t'ordonnera.
- g) Attention donc à ce que je te dis. Ce n'est pas comme les rois de la terre, comme s'il était lui aussi à la merci de subordonnés, qu'il te demanderait quelque chose pour son service et usage personnels ; il est. absolument sans besoin et ce n'est qu'après avoir enrichi ses serviteurs qu'il se présente dans leur maison. Ainsi, puisqu'il est sans besoin, comme j'ai dit, et qu'il t'a enrichi en t'affranchissant du besoin par sa présence, sois attentif à ce que dira" en toi celui qui, venu de si haut, sort du sein béni de son Père sans se séparer de lui et descend des cieux jusqu'à ta bassesse. Car jamais tu ne saurais trouver qu'il a fait cela en vain ; au contraire, pour le salut de beaucoup d'autres également, c'est ainsi que notre bon Maître ami des hommes agit toujours à son habitude.
- h) Donc, comme nous l'avons dit, si tu le reçois avec honneur, si tu lui fais place et que tu lui procures le silence', sache-le bien : tu entendas les secrets qui viennent du trésor de l'Esprit, non pas en te penchant simplement sur la poitrine du Maître comme autrefois Jean, le bien-aimé du Christ, mais en portant tout entier dans ta poitrine le Verbe de Dieu ; tu prêcheras en théologien les paroles anciennes et nouvelles de la théologie et tu comprendras parfaitement toutes celles qui ont été prononcées et écrites auparavant ; tu deviendras un instrument qui sous les doigts (de l'artiste) rend des sons plus harmonieux que n'importe quelle musique.

(a to h : Théologiques et Ethiques XI 187-259)

- i) Mais si tu réponds qu'il est l'ami des hommes? C'est bien ce que je dis moi aussi; mais c'est à l'égard de ceux qui ont conscience de sa bonté, qui l'honorent dignement et lui rendent grâces. Si, en effet, ne faisant aucun cas de son amour et de sa douceur, tu te prêtes à l'amour d'un autre et que tu fixes entièrement sur cet autre l'élan de ton âme, si tu prends plaisir à quelque jouissance, telle que nourriture, boisson, habits, spectacle séduisant, or et argent, ou que ton âme reçoive intérieurement l'empreinte du désir de tout autre objet, est-ce que celui qui est par nature pur, saint et immaculé, celui qui t'a rendu tel toi-même par l'Esprit, admettra le moins du monde de rester avec toi qui as consenti à autre chose? Est-ce qu'il ne t'abandonnera pas aussitôt? C'est tout démontré'.

Théologiques et Ethiques XI 284-295



In the XXII<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the Discourses, St. Symeon brings up the story of George (St. Symeon himself before becoming a monk), how he was found worthy to see the uncreated Holy Light, after following his conscience in spending more time in prayer at night while he was every day “engaged in worldly affairs”, and how through few tears and prostrations and prayers to the Mother of God, he received from God the vision of Light which is known to be reserved to the highest stages of holiness that come after accomplishment of purification, while it was counted by George as the fruit of faith and vigilance. And how after few days George was “assailed by constant temptations of ordinary life”<sup>rr</sup> and how he “fell into more evils than had ever before befallen”<sup>ss</sup>... “as though he had never heard of Christ’s holy words”<sup>tt</sup>; and how he fell through negligence into “the pit of destruction”<sup>uu</sup>. In order to conclude from this story: “Have you understood that youth [novice in the spiritual life] is not to be rejected, and that old age is useless without understanding and the fear of God? Have you learned that [living in] the midst of the city does not hinder us from practicing the commandments of God as long as we are zealous and vigilant? That solitude and retirement from the world are useless if we are slack and careless?” ...

“This young man had not observed long fasts; he had never slept on the ground. He had not worn a hair shirt, nor received the tonsure. He had not left the world in his body, but in spirit, after keeping but few vigils....He who has promised to save by faith alone does not lie, my brethren!”<sup>vv</sup>

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rr Discourses XXII:279

ss Discourses XXII:289

tt Discourses XXII:291

uu Discourses XXII:296

vv Discourses XXII:157-160 & 198

After his fall, George confessed what had happened, “the merciful Lord has overlooked the multitude of [his] offenses”<sup>ww</sup>, he became a monk. And George puts his own repentance this way: “With great toil, many tears, strict solitude, and perfect obedience, with complete elimination of my own will and with many other very difficult pursuits and practices, I had been going forward without stopping or delaying on my course. So I have been vouchsafed again in some dim, fashion to see a small ray of that most sweet and divine light, but until now I have never been found worthy to see a vision such as I saw at that time.”<sup>xx</sup> This story confirms to St. Symeon what St. Gregory the Nazianzen had described when he spoke of sequential baptisms, how every second cleansing, will be more laborious than the previous one, while the very first baptism is void from any labor whatsoever.

St. Symeon confirms in this chapter (XXII<sup>2nd</sup>) that normally the illumination comes sequentially after keeping the commandments of God and after the purification. “By this saying he showed that the illumination of the Spirit is the infinite goal of every virtue. He who attains to this illumination has arrived at the end and limit of all things that can be perceived and has found the beginning of knowledge of spiritual things.” But when this infinite goal could be achieved by a beginner like George by the grace of God, then the much lower spiritual goals and stages, like the sense of relief after repentance, the awareness of the restoration of the contact with God, being a sort of awareness of Grace, become as few elementary experiences for every baptized and repentant Christian as we will see thereafter.

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ww Discourses XXII:309-310

xx Discourses XXII:315-320

## Restored Liberty

Our free will is not abolished by baptism, but baptism gives us back the liberty of not being anymore unwillingly submitted to the tyranny of the devil. It is in our will, after baptism, either to preserve voluntarily the commandments of Christ or to deviate through bad actions on the track of our enemy.<sup>yy</sup> And if we fall in bad and dishonest practices, we will lose completely the sanctification, that is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our souls, which is the portion of the faithful who have been confirmed in faith; because He says “I will dwell in them and walk among them” [1Cor 6:16]; but by penitence, confession and tears, we receive in proportion the remission of our sins and by that also the holiness with the grace from above.<sup>zz</sup> We enter into a new dimension of life that is a spiritual one, where a spiritual experience starts to be built, piece after piece, in a continual growth, in as much as we are perseverant in praying and in learning and in executing the commandments of the Lord within the sacramental life of the Church.

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<sup>yy</sup> Notre autonomie ou notre libre arbitre n'est pas supprimé par le baptême, mais celui-ci nous accorde la liberté de ne plus être malgré nous soumis à la tyrannie du diable. Il est en notre pouvoir après le baptême, ou de persévérer volontairement dans la voie des commandements du Christ notre maître en lequel nous avons été baptisés et de marcher dans la voie de ses préceptes, ou bien de dévier de cette voie toute droite et de retourner par les actions mauvaises sur les traces de notre adversaire et de notre ennemi, le diable.  
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<sup>zz</sup> Au saint baptême nous recevons la rémission de nos fautes, nous sommes délivrés de l'antique malédiction, nous sommes sanctifiés par la présence du Saint-Esprit mais la grâce parfaite, selon la promesse « J'habiterai en eux et je m'y promènerai », nous ne l'avons pas encore, car elle est l'apanage des fidèles confirmés dans la foi et qui la manifestent par les oeuvres. En effet, après le baptême, si nous tombons dans des pratiques mauvaises et déshonnêtes, nous perdons totalement la sanctification; mais par la pénitence, la confession et les larmes nous recevons en proportion d'abord la rémission de nos fautes et, par le fait, la sainteté avec la grâce d'en haut.  
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## **Sorrow for sins (Πενθος, Penthos) and tears**

“Mourning and afflictions that come from the discovery of the self limitations and of the knowledge of the weakness and lack of power to attain to the heights of the commandments”<sup>aaa</sup>, are also the fruits of the rebirth experience, nevertheless “the comfort that comes to the souls that mourn from the enlightenment of the Spirit is a visitation of God”<sup>bbb</sup>. “The sorrow that comes from the poverty in the spirit is full of joy accompanied with ever-flowing tears that purify the soul and cause it to be completely filled with light”<sup>ccc</sup>. Due to the tendency to reticence that exists in the works of most of Orthodox Fathers and spirituals in our Orthodox Church, an outsider could think that sorrow for sins is the overwhelming character of mature Christians and of saints in general. In fact, the experience of the comfort that dwells in the soul and of the visitations of joy are communicated exclusively between a son his father in the Lord and are kept secretly as the most precious experiences that we do not expose, and talking about it may be considered or seen as vanity. In fact sorrow for sins is only a perpetual path and not a goal or a dwelling place in itself, as it may look to an outsider. Joy characterizes the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Sorrow for sins can be harmful, without humility, because a person engulfed with pride can show sorrow for his limitations and for his sins without profiting from

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aaa Discourses II: 200-205

bbb Discourses II:212

ccc Discourses II: 225-227

his sorrow, because his sorrow is on himself and is focused on self improvement for the love of self or for love of improvement in itself. But sorrow in humility, for the sins that have defiled the purity we had received at baptism, and that have grieved the Holy Spirit is a sorrow that calls Him back to comfort us and to re-establish His joy in us.

Joy characterizes the totality of our Liturgical prayers at Church. When we fast the “Alleluia” overwhelms. When we celebrate the Great Friday and especially what the outsiders call the “sorrowful Friday of funerals of the Lord”, all our prayers are abundant with joy, and the look is always focused towards the Glorious Resurrection. Thanks to St. Symeon<sup>ddd</sup>, we are now able to point up those experiences of joy that follow the sorrow for sins, within the individual private spirituality and to expose all what relates to those experiences, from the awareness of Grace to a sort of assurance of salvation, as we will see in the coming chapters of this thesis.

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<sup>ddd</sup> Please refer to Paragraph **Reticence or Openness Pages 6-7**

## **Appendix to Chapter 3**

### **The experience of new ferocious Spiritual fight**

One of the firstfruits of the rebirth experience is the opening to a new world that was hidden before and that remains hidden to the overwhelming majority of the Christians of today. The First side of this world is characterized by the presence of the Grace of the Holy Spirit in one's life, as a comforter; and we will come back to this side in the next chapter. The second side of this new world is in the ability to recognize the presence and to the actions of Satan in the world; and in the growing ability to discern the obvious idolatry in the old but renewed pagan values and notions that are based on pride, and that are taking over the attention from the traditional Christian values that come down from the commandments of Christ. Some of these well known notions are "success", "achievement", "total liberty", "individual freedom", "free sexuality", "sex for sex", "love for beauty", "money and wealth", "satisfaction with self", "seek for superiority", "modernism", "anti-traditional" and "newness". What is worse is that some of these values, like "Wealth", "Freedom" and "Happiness" are being falsely baptized or Christianized as deriving from Christ himself.

All the spiritual fight experiences are totally to the unknown to the ones who have not been born from above and who are still nailed with pride to this infernal world. Indeed "when the devil sees us dominated by the will of the flesh, they see that we carry death with us. For what reason do they wage war against us? The whole

warfare of the demons against us is waged with the one purpose of alienating those who obey them from the glory of God and the grace of the Holy Spirit”<sup>eee</sup>.

After the rebirth experience, the Christian will be able to discern three major threats for his spiritual life, the lust of flesh, the deception of the world, and the devil as a catalyzes, and all those three form a complex combination that we call passions in general. St Symeon has a wonderful and accurate description of the passions:

“He is wicked who receives the seed of the wicked sower into his heart and brings forth thorns and thistles as fruit for the devil. These are fuel for eternal fire, consisting of envy, hatred, rancor, jealousy, rivalry, presumption, vainglory, pride, guile, idle curiosity, slander, and any other abominable passion the flesh delights to fulfill, and which defiles our inward man, according to the word of the Lord.”<sup>fff</sup>

The passions belong to the soul although executed in the body because “lust and the desire for marriage (in the case of a monk), sexual union, voluptuousness, gluttony, greed in eating, excessive sleep, idleness, pretentiousness in dress, and all the other things that, as most people think, the body seeks for it, is not the body as such, since it does not seek them when it is dead, but the soul that through the body seeks pleasure by their means.”<sup>ggg</sup>

The passions could establish themselves deep in the heart of the human being and they become so much dissimulated, normal and habitual, that the person does not feel he is doing anything wrong at all:

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eee Discourses III: 170

fff Discourses X 145

ggg Discourses XXV 75-80

“A well established (inveterate) passion and a long-standing evil habit in the soul acquire the strength of a [second] nature so that one may never be able to be cured of it. Such persons are changed from light into darkness, since they have fallen from goodness into wickedness, their sickness is incurable.”<sup>hhh</sup> Because “when we have become slaves of passion we are nailed fast to earth and what is on it and altogether refuse to look up to heaven and to God. Being deceived by folly of soul we disobey His commandments and fall away from His adoption of us as His sons.”<sup>iii</sup>

“The Prince of the world, is called prince, not because he is endowed with power, — far from us this blaspheme, because he has not any power even on little pigs! —, but because he reduces into slave under his authority those who are nailed into the world by lust of the things and of the goods that it contains.”<sup>jjj</sup>

When we surrender willingly to passions, we sin intentionally, and we defile the purity acquired at baptism. And we loose the Grace of Holy Spirit. “He who knowingly is led astray even by a single sin, falls completely from purity, just as a bucket of water is wholly polluted by a little dung. What I call sin is not merely what

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hhh Discourses II: 350

iii Discourses VIII: 142-145

jjj Et la preuve que le diable est le prince de ce monde et des ténèbres éternelles, écoute le Christ lui-même qui dit : « Voici que le prince du monde arrive, et il ne trouvera rien en moi. » Cependant il est appelé prince du monde, non pas à titre de maître doté du pouvoir — loin de nous ce blasphème, car il n’a même pas pouvoir sur des pourceaux ! —, mais parce qu’il réduit en esclavage sous son pouvoir ceux qui sont cloués au monde par la convoitise des choses et des biens qu’il contient. Et il est dit prince des ténèbres, parce que, de son côté, étant déchu de la lumière, à l’origine, par sa révolte, il sera pour l’éternité héritier des ténèbres. Tandis que Dieu, notre Maître, en tant que créateur et auteur de toutes choses, règne par nature et avec plein pouvoir sur toutes choses, au ciel, sur terre et sous terre, car il est lumière sans déclin et inaccessible a, Seigneur de toutes choses, présentes et futures. Donc ceux qui lui obéissent et gardent sans accrocs ses commandements, en jouissant avec modération des choses passagères, en les prenant avec retenue et action de grâces, déjà, par les choses visibles elles-mêmes, sont ramenés vers les biens incorruptibles et éternels, parce qu’ils se sont soumis au roi et Dieu de toutes choses et qu’ils ont observé ses préceptes. Tous ceux, au contraire, qui vont à l’encontre de ses commandements, se trouvent rangés avec l’adversaire ; ils deviennent ouvertement les ennemis de Dieu, comme le déclare le Sauveur lui-même « Celui qui n’est pas avec moi est contre moi; celui qui n’amasse pas avec moi, dissipe » .  
Théologiques et Ethiques XI 576-600)



is committed by the body, but also the passions within us that we invisibly fulfill.”<sup>kkk</sup>

Therefore we pray in the Orthodox Church to the Lord, to cleanse us from “our hidden” transgressions, that we have become accustomed to, and we pray also to him not to allow our souls to be tricked or deceived by the devil in order not to fall back as slaves into the hands to our enemy.

## **The Victory over passions, over lust and over the devil is from the Lord**

“By Thy mighty hand and Thine outstretched arm Thou didst lead me out (Deut. 5:15) from the **deceitful world and the affairs and pleasures** of the world, and separated me in body and soul from them all. What a marvel.”<sup>lll</sup> And somewhere else he says: “While I was being **tempted by evil demons in my sleep**, and being drawn by their machination to a **passion of pollution**, I resisted mightily and called on Thee, the Lord of light, for help. So I awakened and escaped without harm from the hands of the tempters. I was amazed at myself how I had shown firmness and courage, and even more that I had not been moved toward passion. I thought “How did this **unaccustomed triumph happen**, that I should resist even while asleep and prevail over my adversaries and enemies, and win an unexpected mighty victory through Christ?” What a marvel! **At once I realized that He whom I had thought to**

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kkk Discourses X 115

lll Discourses XXXV: 120-129

**be in heaven was within me;** I mean Thee, O Christ, my Creator and King! And then I knew that the victory was Thine, which Thou gavest me to overcome the devil.”<sup>mmm</sup>

## **Asceticism as a pathway**

Asceticism is living the death of Christ in self emptiness through acquiring the virtues and, out of love for Him, keeping His commandments at any cost: “Through what other works or in what other way will you be glorified with Him? For He says, “Whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him will I also be ashamed before My Father, who is in heaven” (*Mk.* 8:38; *Lk.* 9:26). Therefore Paul also says, “If we suffer with Him we shall also be glorified with Him” (*Rom.* 8:17). 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. If that is true of us we shall be believers in word only, not in deed. When deeds are absent, our faith is dead (*Js* 2:17, 26)”.<sup>nnn</sup>

“He was God, but He became man for the sake of us men. He was slapped, spit upon, crucified, as though He who is impassible in His Godhead was teaching and telling each one of us for whom He suffered: “O man, if you wish to become a god and obtain eternal life and to be with Me, that which your ancestor failed to obtain because he wished for it in an evil way, then abase yourself even as I abased Myself for your sake. Cast aside the boastful pride of the devilish mind; accept being beaten, spat upon, buffeted, and endure those things until death and be not ashamed of it. But

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mmm Discourses XXXV 140-154

nnn Discourses VI: 343-353

if you are ashamed to suffer for the sake of My commandments even as I, who am God, suffered for your sake, I on My part will consider it a disgrace for you to be with Me at My coming with glory (*cf Mk. 8:38*), when I shall say to My angels, ‘This man was ashamed at My humiliation and was unwilling to forsake the glory of the world and become like Me. But now when he has been stripped of corruptible glory and I am glorified in the immortal glory of My Father, I am ashamed even to see him! Let him therefore be cast out, let him be taken away like the ungodly, that he may not see the glory of the Lord!’ (*Is. 26:10*). Those words they will hear who keep all the commandments in appearance only, but do not accept the insults and dishonors and reproaches of men because they feel disgrace and shame before them, and are unwilling to endure their buffets and blows.”<sup>ooo</sup>

### **Fasting as an example of ascetic toil, and its benefits**

Ascetic toil becomes a necessity for the spiritual life, and in this respect, fasting is only one element, beside prayer, watchfulness and others. As an example on the benefits of asceticism in the spiritual fight against passions, Symeon teaches us that fasting although performed by the bodies is a healer for the souls: “For this healer of our souls is effective, in the case of one to quieten the fevers and impulses of the flesh, in another to assuage bad temper, in yet another to drive away sleep, in another to stir up zeal, and in yet another to restore purity of mind and to set him free from evil thoughts. In one it will control his unbridled tongue and, as it were by a bit (*Jas. 3:3, 8*), restrain it by the fear of God and prevent it from uttering idle or corrupt words (*Eph. 4:29; Mt. 12:36*). In another it will invisibly guard his eyes and fix them

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ooo Discourses XXVII 280-300

on high instead of allowing them to roam hither and thither, and thus cause him to look on himself and teach him to be mindful of his own faults and shortcomings. Fasting gradually disperses and drives away, spiritual darkness and the veil of sin that lies on the soul, just as the sun dispels the mist. Fasting enables us spiritually to see that spiritual air in which Christ, the Sun who knows no setting, does not rise, but shines without ceasing. Fasting, aided by vigil, penetrates and softens hardness of heart”....

“But without fasting no one was ever able; to achieve any of these virtues or any others, for fasting is the beginning and foundation of every spiritual activity. Whatever, you will build on this foundation cannot collapse or be destroyed, because they are built on solid rock. But if you remove this foundation and substitute for it a full stomach and improper desires, they will be undermined like sand by evil thoughts, and the whole structure of virtues will be destroyed (cf Mt. 7:261; Lk. 6:49).” ppp

## Degrees in Holiness and in Απαθεια

Salvation comes from the Lord who is speedy to answer those who are fighting against Satan, against the lust of the world and against passions, most often people are confused with the notion of dispassion or passionless (Απαθεια Απαθεια)<sup>qqq</sup> state

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ppp Discourses XI :50 & 80

qqq \* Απαθεια is in itself a goal in Hinduism and other Oriental religions, and those who reach that degree through various ascetic-looking toils entitle themselves to accept worship from their fellow students, and therefore those Απαθεια’s are engulfed with pride, which was the main cause of self destruction of angels.

\* While in Orthodoxy, Απαθεια is not a goal in itself, it comes from the Lord as a healing and as a visitation and is kept is total humility and cannot coexist with any sort of pride. And it is a dynamic state and never considered as a static state in itself.

\* We always remember Paul through this passage: “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made**

that some of our orthodox saints have experienced. Some people think that passionless is a requirement for sanctity and holiness, and they believe that as far as they are fighting passions they are still worldly, and do not deserve the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit. Following this path of thought, we could ask in return, if the Holy Spirit is the comforter, why would we need a comforter, if we were able to reach dispassion by some ascetic toil and adequate spiritual training? St. Symeon, he who has reached the *Ἀπαθεια* in its highest degrees, and in order not to discourage anybody in the race of holiness tells us the following: “Same as you have heard the Master saying “For many are called, but few chosen”<sup>III</sup>” and “in My Father’s house are many mansions”, in the same way I want you all to know that **there are many saints, but few of them impassible**, and even more, that there are many degrees in these two distinct classes (saintliness and impassibility). As an example of the degrees I have chosen this simple example out of the many he has written for us: “Something else is not to be pricked nor irritated by the insults, the injuries, the tests and the afflictions, something else to be pleased in them. Something else to pray for those who treat us so, another thing is to forgive them, something else to love them from the inner part of the soul as benefactors and another thing is to engrave in our deeps the face of everyone of them and to kiss them impassibly as authentic friends with sincere tears of love, that is to say without the slightest trace of repulsion in the lodging of the soul. And there is an even better than all of that: that is, in course of the test or of the trial, to keep without stumbling an attitude equal and uniform moreover towards those who abuse us in the face and who accuse us, as well as towards all the others who follow us, who insult

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**perfect in weakness.**” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Cor 12: 7-9)

\* And in this same idea we see Paul fighting till his last breath saying: “**But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified**”(1Cor 9:27)

<sup>III</sup> Mat 20: 16

us, who condemn us, who spit on our face, as well as those who adopt from the outside a look of pretended friendship, but underneath they commit against us similar offences, that however do not slip out from our knowledge. Finally and much better that all of that, without comparison, in my opinion, is to come to forget all what we have undergone and not to keep the slightest memory, neither in the absence, nor in the presence of those who have saddened us or insulted us, otherwise, and to treat them, to the contrary, exactly as friends without any form in the background-thought during conversations and meals. All this constitute the practices at work by the virile souls who walk in the light. But those who see themselves far from similar acts and other similar ones, they should not mislead and deceive themselves, and they should know it perfectly: they walk in darkness.<sup>sss</sup>

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<sup>sss</sup> De même que vous avez entendu le Maître dire : « Il y a beaucoup d'appelés mais peu d'élus » et : « Dans la maison de mon Père les demeures sont nombreuses ta, de même je veux que vous sachiez tous qu'il y a beaucoup de saints, mais peu d'impassibles et, de plus, qu'il y a encore bien des degrés dans ces deux classes distinctes. Considère exactement la portée et l'exactitude de ce que je dis.

Autre chose l'impassibilité de l'âme, autre chose l'impassibilité du corps. la première sanctifie aussi le corps, Tandis que la seconde toute seule par elle-même ne sert de rien a celui qui l'a.

Autre chose l'inertie des membres du corps et des passions même de l'âme, autre chose l'acquisition des vertus ; la première dépend de la nature, Tandis que la seconde a pour habitude de réprimer tous les mouvements même naturels. Autre chose de ne désirer aucun des agréments et des plaisirs du monde, autre chose d'aspirer aux biens éternels et célestes, puisque beaucoup ont méprisé les premiers, chacun pour un motif différent, tandis qu'une toute petite minorité s'est souciée des seconds. Autre chose de ne pas chercher la gloire des hommes, autre chose d'être suspendu a la gloire de Dieu et de la rechercher sans cesse beaucoup, même en étant dominés par d'autres passions, ont rejeté la première, tandis qu'un très petit nombre a mérité de recevoir la seconde a force de travail et de peine". Autre chose de se contenter d'un vêtement grossier et de ne pas désirer de beaux atours, autre chose de revêtir la lumière de Dieu certains, tirillés par mule autres désirs, ont sans doute méprisé les premiers, mais seuls ont revêtu la seconde ceux qui ont mérité de devenir fils de la lumière et du jour. Autre chose l'humilité en paroles, autre chose l'humilité de pensée autre chose encore l'humilité, autre chose la fleur de l'humilité, autre chose son fruit et la beauté de son fruit et sa douceur, autre chose les activités qui en découlent'. En cela, certaines choses sont en notre pouvoir, d'autres non ce qui est en notre pouvoir c'est de concevoir, de penser, d'apprécier, de dire, de faire tout ce qui nous porte a l'humilité mais la sainte humilité, le reste de ses propriétés et de ses dons et son efficacité, sont un don de Dieu et non en notre pouvoir, afin que même en cela personne ne puisse se glorifier ; ces dons, personne ne méritera jamais de les obtenir, s'il ne s'applique pas a jeter en semence tout ce qui dépend de lui. Autre chose de ne pas être piqué ni irrité par les affronts, les injures, les épreuves et les afflictions, autre chose de s'y complaire. Autre chose de prier pour ceux qui nous traitent ainsi, autre chose de leur pardonner, autre chose de les aimer du fond de l'âme comme des bienfaiteurs et autre chose de graver dans notre tréfonds le visage de chacun d'eux et de les embrasser impassiblement comme d'authentiques amis avec des larmes d'amour sincère,

## True Απαθεια

Someone will possibly say, “Since the passions are so many and almost without number, who can search them all out and abstain from them all, so that he is not dominated by any of them?” By the grace of Christ I will instruct you. He who always keeps his own sins in mind and constantly looks forward to the coming Judgment, and fervently repents and weeps, will , **overcome them all at the same time**. As he is lifted up by repentance he “is more than a conqueror” (*Rom. 8:37*). Not a single passion of those that I have mentioned will be able to reach his soul and touch it in its flight. But 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, we shall not have the strength to become free from all those we have mentioned. At one time we shall be stung by one passion, at another time by another one, and thus we shall not cease from being devoured by them as if by wild beasts. After death, since we shall have lost the kingdom of heaven because of them, we shall in turn be eternally punished by such [passions] as these.<sup>ttt</sup>

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c'est-à-dire sans la moindre trace de répulsion dans le gîte de l'âme. Mais il y a encore mieux quo tout cola c'est, au cours do l'épreuve, do conserver sans broncher une attitude égale et uniforme aussi bien a l'égard de ceux qui nous invectivent en face et nous accusent qu'envers tous les autres qui nous poursuivent, qui nous injurient, qui nous condamnent, qui nous crachent au visage, et même envers ceux qui adoptent an dehors- les semblants de l'amitié, main en dessous commettent contre nous do pareils actes, qui cependant no nous échappent pas. Enfin mieux encore quo tout cela, sans comparaison, a mon avis, est d'en venir a oublier totalement ce quo l'on a subi et do n'en garder aucun souvenir, ni en l'absence, ni en la présence de ceux qui nous ont attristés on injurées autrement, et de les traiter an contraire exactement comme des amis sans autre forme d'arrière-pensée dans les conversations et les repas. Tout cola constitue les pratiques mises en oeuvre par les âmes viriles qui marchent dans In lumière ; mais ceux qui s'aperçoivent qu'ils sont loin do ces actes et autres semblables, qu'ils no s'égarant pas et ne se trompent pas eux-mêmes, qu'ils le sachent parfaitement us marchent dans les ténèbres.  
Discourses IV : 60-123

ttt Discourses V: 1050-1068

This means that we need to be healed from passions, we need to be saved from them, and who could heal us except our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit, therefore we should pray that we “may we not be taken captive by any passion, but walk in the way without turning aside and hasten to come to Jesus (Phil. 3:12), who walks before us. Once we have taken hold of Him let us fall before Him and weep before His goodness and fervently ask that He may never at all be separated from us nor allow us to depart from the way. He is that way, for He Himself has said, “I am the way and the resurrection and the life” (Jn 11:25, 14:6). Let us then seek Him out, let us endeavor to attain to Him, that we may lay hold on Him (cf Phil. 3:12). If we attain to this, if we live with Him and associate with Him, we shall ascend with Him and be assumed with Him into heaven, and that not merely when we depart this life, but even now.”<sup>uuu</sup>

Again passionless is not a static status (as in eastern religions and Hinduism) to be achieved, it is rather a dynamic status and mainly a **visitation from the Lord**: “Thou didst cleanse the dim eyes of my intellect. Thou didst remove the barriers of my eyes and didst open them; Thou tookest away the veil of insensitivity. At the same time Thou didst **put to sleep all passion and every fleshly pleasure** and totally expel them from me. Having thus brought me to this state Thou didst clear the heaven of every mist. By “the heaven” I mean the soul Thou hast cleansed in which Thou comest invisibly (how or from whence I know not). Thou who art everywhere present art suddenly found and manifested like another sun. O ineffable condescension!”<sup>vvv</sup>

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uuu Discourses VII: 445-462

vvv Discourses XXXV: 117-128



Please mind the accurate terminology used by St. Symeon when he says that the passions have been **put to sleep**, that means they did not perish completely from existence and that they could wake up after the visitation of the grace is terminated for one or another reason. The fight against passions is perpetual till the last breath of every human being, when we do not give up, and when we call to the Lord, we will always find Him is us, this is surety. In this concept we always remember Paul through this passage: “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Cor 12: 7-9) And in this same idea we see Paul fighting till his last breath telling us: “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”(1Cor 9:27)

## **Chapter 4**

**The rebirth experience implies a conscious awareness  
of Grace**

## Growing into conscious awareness

The other side of the new spiritual world is characterized by the presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life, as said above<sup>www</sup>. Everyone should be able to tell if he has the Holy Spirit in himself or not, from the effects of His presence. All those who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit have put on Christ, all of Christ; they have become children of light and walk in the light that has no decline. This does not apply to the baptized but to the one's who have experienced the rebirth in truth. "Hearing about the children of the day and of the light, do not say in you heart, my dear, that all of us who have been baptized in Christ, who believe in Him and adore Him as God, we have put Him on, and without feeling anything at all, we are children of the Day and children of Light, and not of night and darkness. Do not say that and do not get this idea in order to live the rest of your life without bother, trouble or worry. ...Say instead, if all humans who are in the world and who see the sun of this underworld in a sensible way are in darkness, certainly, because I do not see anything more that what the others see, I am also as well with them in darkness."<sup>xxx</sup>

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<sup>www</sup> Pease see above : **The experience of new ferocious Spiritual fight**, page 41

<sup>xxx</sup> Que nul non plus n'aille dire « Pour moi, depuis le saint baptême j'ai reçu le Christ et je l'ai. » Qu'il apprenne au contraire que ce ne sont pas tous les baptisés qui reçoivent le Christ par le baptême, mais ceux-là seulement qui sont affermis dans la foi et (parvenus) à une connaissance parfaite ou qui, par une purification préparatoire, se sont bien disposés pour accéder ainsi au baptême<sup>2</sup>. On le saura, en scrutant les Écritures, d'après les paroles et les actes des Apôtres, car il est écrit ((Les Apôtres qui étaient à Jérusalem, ayant appris que la Samarie avait reçu la parole de Dieu, y envoyèrent Pierre et Jean. Ceux-ci s'y rendirent et prièrent pour eux, afin qu'ils reçoivent le Saint-Esprit ; car il n'était encore descendu sur aucun d'eux et ils étaient seulement baptisés au nom du Seigneur Jésus-Christ. Alors ils leur imposaient les mains et ils recevaient le Saint-Esprit . » Vois-tu comment tous les baptisés ne reçoivent pas immédiatement le Saint-Esprit? N'apprends-tu pas des Apôtres que certains, bien qu'ils aient cru et aient été baptisés, n'ont cependant pas revêtu le Christ par le baptême? En effet, si cela était arrivé, ils n'auraient pas eu besoin ensuite d'une prière et de l'imposition des mains par les Apôtres puisque, en recevant l'Esprit-Saint, c'est le Seigneur Jésus qu'ils auraient reçu. En effet, le Christ n'est pas une chose et l'Esprit une autre: qui dit cela? Le Verbe de Dieu lui-même, en s'adressant à la Samaritaine : « Dieu est esprit". » Si donc le Christ est Dieu, il est esprit selon la nature de la divinité et celui qui le possède, possède également l'Esprit-Saint ; inversement, celui qui possède

Individual Christians who have consciously pledged allegiance to Christ, must grow into conscious awareness of the operation of Grace within their lives. This conscious union with Grace is possible in this life and is a goal of the Christian life. According to St. Symeon, the desire and the efforts to seek purity of heart, through a state of constant repentance and faithful observation of God's commandments, lead to this conscious awareness of Grace. We know that we have God in our hearts, from the Spirit which we have received from Him: "Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us."(1Jn3:24) ; "But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him." (1Jn2:27) <sup>yyy</sup>

The effects of the conscious and "sensible" awareness of Grace (divinity in three persons) in the perfect has other benefits for them, it is not anymore a satisfaction of what is desired, (as in the case of normal debutant Christians) but instead the origin and the cause of a much more vivid desire that does not leave any

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l'Esprit possède aussi le Seigneur, conformément à la parole de Paul : «L'Esprit, c'est le Seigneur. »

Il est donc nécessaire, frères, de nous regarder nous-mêmes et d'examiner scrupuleusement notre âme, pour voir si nous avons reçu le Seigneur Jésus qui nous a été annoncée et si nous le possédons en nous-mêmes, afin de connaître, comme le dit l'évangéliste Jean, si nous avons reçu de lui le pouvoir de devenir enfants de Dieu'. Que chacun prête attention aux paroles des saintes Écritures et s'examine soi-même, comme nous avons dit, de peur qu'en s'égarant soi-même, avec la vaine illusion de posséder la foi, il ne se trouve sans la foi, et qu'en s'imaginant avoir le Seigneur en lui, il ne se trouve vide au sortir du corps : il serait condamné, comme s'il n'avait rien et, privé de ce qu'il croit avoir, il serait jeté dans le feu". Par où donc connaissons-nous si Christ est en nous et comment apprendrons-nous à nous juger nous-mêmes? C'est en recueillant (ses) paroles dans les divines Écritures et en les plaçant devant notre âme comme un miroir C que nous pourrions nous juger tout entiers. Prenons donc le sujet plus haut et, si Dieu accorde une parole à la bouche impure que j'ouvre, je vous montrerai en quelque façon, mes frères, la manière de vous examiner. Alors, attention, je vous prie, car il s'agit de choses à faire trembler. Théologiques et Ethiques X 323-369

<sup>yyy</sup> Catéchèses II: 425-429 & Traités Théologiques et Ethiques IV: 598

instant of relax or rest to the one who enjoys it; but it pushes him unceasingly, as devoured and consumed by the fire, towards the flame of a desire more and more divine.<sup>zzz</sup>

### **Illumination of the "νοῦς"**

Saint Symeon describes the conscious awareness of Grace as "sensible" as well, and I believe that he remains within the boundaries of Orthodoxy because he is talking of the senses of the human reasoning and intelligence which means a sense beyond the five senses of the body, that is the additional sense that we acquire from the illuminated "**νοῦς**" (nous) as we will see it in the paragraph below. In any case and as it is not very well clarified in the above paragraph, however he is specifying "the perfect", which means that the one whose senses have been purified and whose discernment has become perfect as well. St. Symeon could not be talking of the five senses at any time in what concerns the conscious awareness because if it was so, one could easily attribute a Messalianism touch to his spirituality. Anyhow to what senses were the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus referring to, when they said to one another, "Did not our **heart burn within us** while He talked with us on the road, and while He **opened the Scriptures** to us?" Were they referring to a sense in the heart that no other human being has, and was the Lord holding some material Scripture in his hands, that He was opening to them on the road, or was He opening their mind

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<sup>zzz</sup> L'inhabitation de la divinité en trois personnes dans les parfaits, qui se produit d'une manière consciente et sensible, n'est pas la satisfaction du désir, mais plutôt l'origine et la cause d'un désir plus vif et plus grand désormais cette présence ne laisse plus un instant de repos celui qui en jouit; elle le pousse sans cesse, comme dévoré et consume par le feu, vers la flamme d'un désir de plus en plus divin.

"**νοῦς**" in order to understand the scriptures, and with the opening of the "**νοῦς**", they "sensed" what they described as a burning in the heart? In this same concept of renewed spiritual sensitivity St. Symeon says: "Thou didst cleanse the dim eyes of my intellect, Thou didst remove the barriers of my eyes and didst open them; Thou tookest away the veil of insensitivity."<sup>aaaa</sup>

For an additional clarification, St. Symeon tells us that the one who has not put on, in a very sensible and conscious way, in what constitutes human reason and intelligence (i/e by the sense of the nous), the image of our Lord Jesus-Christ, of the celestial, man and God, is still no more than flesh and blood, because he cannot acquire the feeling of the spiritual glory by reason alone (without the senses of the nous), same as a blind man from birth cannot know by reason only, the light of the sun.<sup>bbbb</sup>

The son of God, God Himself, has come to earth in order that we, who were his enemies, become by Him reconciled to His Father and that He unites us to Him consciously by His consubstantial Holy Spirit. If it is so, the one who lacks this grace, what else should he receive instead? He is surely not reconciled with Christ and he has not been united to Him by the presence of the Spirit.<sup>cccc</sup>

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<sup>aaaa</sup> Discourses XXXV: 188-190

<sup>bbbb</sup> Celui qui n'a pas revêtu d'une manière bien sensible et consciente, en ce qui constitue la raison et l'intelligence humaine, l'image de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ, du céleste, homme et Dieu, n'est encore que chair et sang, car il ne peut acquérir le sentiment de la gloire spirituelle par la raison, de même que l'aveugle de naissance ne peut connaître par la seule raison la lumière du soleil.  
101Pratiques et Théologiques 53

<sup>cccc</sup> Le Fils de Dieu, Dieu lui-même, est venu sur terre afin que nous, qui étions ses ennemis, nous soyons par lui réconciliés à son Père et qu'il nous réunisse à lui-même consciemment par son Esprit saint et consubstantiel. S'il en est ainsi, celui qui manque cette grâce, quelle autre obtiendra-t-il? Il n'est sûrement pas réconcilié avec le Christ et il ne s'est pas uni à lui grâce à la présence de l'Esprit.  
103Théologiques et Pratiques58

## **A documented debate on conscious awareness**

In order to reprove the opponents of his opinion and views on the necessity of conscious awareness of Grace, he documented an important debate of arguments with them that I found very useful to try to translate some of it because the argumentation reflects a theological debate that is still valid to our days:

*"Here I am once more at grips with those who say having the Spirit of God in an unconscious way and who imagine themselves having Him in themselves since Baptism, who are persuaded to have without doubt the treasury, but without recognizing not at all its weight in them. In front of those who admit having absolutely felt nothing at baptism and who suppose that it is in an unconscious and insensible way that the gift of God has dwelt since then, in them, and that it subsists till now in the inner part of their soul; and this is not all, in front of those who affirm not having had ever the sensation in a contemplation and a revelation, and who had received that uniquely from faith and from reasoning, and not from the experience, and they are still holding it in them, as an effect of the divine oracles that they have heard.*

*To start with their own words, here is what these savants are saying, who judge themselves expert:*

- *As many as have been baptized in Christ – Paul says-, you have put on Christ. Well, so what! Haven't we been baptized as well? If we have thus been baptized, it is evident, as says the Apostle, that we also have put on Christ.*

*This is then, and from their part, the first proposition with demonstration.*

*What to say into this? It is not to us, but to the Holy Spirit to respond to them.*

- *This garment, tell us then, you, what is it: the Christ?*
- *“Yes” they say.*
- *The Christ, now – in order to speak as an insane with insane –, is it something or is it nothing at all?*
- *“It is something.”*

*They could not say otherwise, unless having lost completely the head. So, if you admit that he is something, then, say what it is in the first place, in order to teach yourself by yourself not to talk as incredulous but as believers. What is thus then the Christ, if not true God and became perfect man in all truth. Since you admit this, tell us more why did God became man. In one word, as the divine Scriptures teach, and the events that happened themselves as well those of everyday, in spite that you may ignore them in making yourselves deaf, it is to make man god. By what means does He realize this? By the flesh or by the divinity? By the divinity, it is evident, because it says: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing."(Jn6:63) If then it is by His divinity that he has divinized in the first place the flesh that he has assumed, he vivifies all of us as well not by the corruptible flesh but by the divinized one, in a way that we never again recognize him as man but as unique God, himself perfect in two natures – because God is one– the corruptible had been absorbed by the incorruptible and the corporeal by the incorporeal, not overwhelmed nevertheless fundamentally transformed, and remaining impossible to confound, indivisibly mixed and united in a fusion without confusion to the Trinitarian divinity, so that one God is adored in the*



*Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, without the Trinity getting numerical addition from the fact of incarnation neither passibility from the part of the flesh....*

*Again I will then remind you of what has been said in brief, in order to make it easier to grasp what I will have to say. Christ then exists. And what is he? Really true God and perfect man in all truth, became man, what he was not earlier, in order to make the man god, what he has never been; it is by His divinity that He has divinized us and made us gods, of course, and not by his flesh alone; that moreover is not separable. Now, pay attention: I am asking you, answer me intelligently. If the baptized put on Christ, in what consists this vestment that they receive? It is God. The one then who put on God doesn't he recognize by his intelligence and doesn't he see what he is vested with? The one who has the body naked feels when he is dressed and sees how his vestment is, and the one who has the soul naked, by putting on God, will he not notice that? If the one who puts on God does not feel what he has been able to put on, it does not remain to conclude, according to you, else than, that God is absolutely nothing; because, if he was something, those who wear him will notice it. But if we put on nothing, we will feel nothing neither, whereas, if we put on something of real by ourselves or by the help of somebody else, we will feel it, and even very strongly, if at least we have the senses intact; alone cadavers, when they are vested, do not feel anything and I am afraid that those who emit (send out) this opinion are as well cadavers and really nude in reality. And by this the question is resolved.*

*Then, they say, Paul orders: "Do not extinguish the Spirit". And saying this without knowing the extent of this word, they manifest their own ignorance because the one who tells another "Do not extinguish the lamp", he does not talk to him of the*

*one that is already extinguished, but of the one that is still burning and which light is shining. Here too we are going to go for them.*

- *Well what! Do you see the least of the world in you, you others, the Spirit burning and shining, as it should be?*
- *Towards this, not only they do not respond anything, but they change immediately the face and they turn away, bothered as if they have heard a blasphemy; next they assume to interrogate and taking a fellow look to retort without sourness:*
- *"And who would have the audacity to say that he has seen God once, or that he has ever seen him? Halt here! It is written: "No one has seen God at any time."*
- *What blindness! Who said that? Tell-us.*
- *"The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" he says.*
- *You say rightly and the citation is correct, but against your cause. If I show you, myself, the same Son of God telling you that this is possible, what would you say? Because he says: "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" and this is not related to the vision of the flesh, but to the revelation of the divinity. Indeed, if we receive this vision with respect to the aspect of the flesh, then those who have crucified him and have spitted on him, have seen also the Father; thus there would never be any difference between incredulous and believers, since all equally have attained and, evidently, will attain this beatitude so desired. But it is not that, it is not possible, as Christ demonstrates it again, in discussing with the Jews: "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also".*

*In proof that it is possible to us to see God, in the measure where he is at the reach of the man to see him, listen to Christ, the Son of God, saying too by himself: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." What have you then to say to this? Oh I know it, the one who defy himself of goods that he has under his hand and does no effort to hold them, will take refuge in the future and will do this reply: "Yes, the pure hearts will really see God, but in the time to come, and not in the present, that this will take place." Why this and how, my dear? If the Christ has said that we see God by the means of the purity of heart, for sure, when the purity of heart is acquired, the vision will follow it. Moreover, if you had for one time purified yours, you would have known that the word is truthful; but it is because you have never taken this to heart, because you have not believed the sincerity of the fact, you have also neglected the purification and missed the vision. But, in fact, down-here is the purity, down-here will be also the vision; but if you say that the vision does not exist till after death, forcibly you will place also the purification of the heart after the death and so it will happen to you that you will never see God, because you will not have, after death, any activity that will allow you to reach to purity. But what says also the Lord? "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him". When, then, His manifestation will take place? Is it Down-Here, or in the times to come? Evidently, it is Down-Here where the commandments are exactly kept, Down-Here too will be the manifestation of the Savior and, after the manifestation; the pure charity will present itself to us. But if it is not like this, we will not be able to believe in Him, nor love Him as it should, because it is written: "For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" In no way!<sup>dddd</sup>*

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dddd Me voici encore une fois aux prises avec ceux qui disent avoir l'Esprit de Dieu de manière

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inconsciente et qui s'imaginent le posséder en eux depuis le saint baptême, qui sont persuadés d'avoir sans doute le trésor, mais sans reconnaître nullement son poids en eux : devant ceux qui admettent n'avoir absolument rien ressenti au baptême et qui supposent que c'est de manière inconsciente et insensible que le don de Dieu a habité depuis lors en eux et qu'il subsiste jusqu'à présent au dedans de leur âme et ce n'est pas tout devant ceux qui affirment n'en avoir jamais eu la sensation dans une contemplation et une révélation et qui ont reçu cela uniquement de la foi et du raisonnement et non de l'expérience, en le tenant en eux comme un effet des oracles divins qu'ils ont écoutés.

Pour commencer par leurs propres paroles, voici ce que disent ces savants qui se jugent eux-mêmes experts. ((Vous tous qui avez été baptisés dans le Christ — dit Paul —, vous avez revêtu le Christ. Eh bien, alors ! Est-ce que nous ne sommes pas baptisés nous aussi? Si donc nous sommes baptisés, il est évident, comme le dit l'Apôtre, que nous avons aussi revêtu le Christ. » Telle est donc, et de leur part, la première proposition avec démonstration.

Que dire à cela? Ce n'est pas à nous mais à l'Esprit-Saint de leur répondre.

Ce vêtement, dites-nous donc, vous, ce qu'il est : le Christ? Oui, disent-ils. Le Christ, maintenant — pour parler comme un insensé avec des insensés —, est-il quelque chose ou n'est-il rien du tout? Il est quelque chose; ils ne pourraient dire autrement, à moins d'avoir tout à fait perdu la tête. Donc, si vous admettez qu'il est quelque chose, alors, dites ce qu'il est en premier, afin de vous apprendre à vous-mêmes à ne pas parler comme des incrédules mais comme des croyants. Qu'est donc alors le Christ, sinon Dieu véritable et devenu homme en toute vérité parfait.

Puisque vous admettez cela, dites-nous encore pourquoi Dieu est devenu homme. En un mot, comme l'enseignent les divines Ecritures et les événements passés eux-mêmes aussi bien que ceux de tous les jours, même si vous l'ignorez peut-être en, faisant les sourds, c'est pour rendre l'homme dieu o. Par quel moyen réalise-t-il cela? Par la chair ou par la divinité? Par la divinité, c'est évident, car il est dit : ((La chair ne sert de rien, c'est l'Esprit qui vivifie b• » Si donc c'est par sa divinité qu'il a divinisé en premier lieu la chair assumée par lui<sup>2</sup>, nous aussi, il nous vivifie tous non par la chair corruptible mais par celle qui est divinisée, de sorte que jamais plus en aucune façon nous ne le reconnaissons comme homme mais comme Dieu unique, lui-même parfait en deux natures — car Dieu est un —, le corruptible ayant été absorbé par l'incorruptible c et le corps par l'incorporel, non pas anéanti cependant mais foncièrement transformé, tout en restant impossible à confondre, indiciblement mélangé et uni dans une fusion sans confusion à la divinité trinitaire, afin qu'un seul Dieu soit adoré dans le Père, le Fils et le Saint-Esprit, sans que la Trinité reçoive addition numérique du fait de l'incarnation ni passibilité de la part du corps.

....

De nouveau je vais donc te rappeler ce qui a été dit en résumé, afin qu'il soit plus facile de saisir ce que j'ai à dire. Le Christ donc existe. Et qu'est-il? Réellement Dieu véritable et homme parfait en toute vérité, devenu homme, ce qu'il n'était pas auparavant, afin de rendre l'homme dieu, ce qu'il n'a jamais été ; c'est par sa divinité qu'il nous a divinisés et qu'il nous fait dieux, bien sûr, et non par sa seule chair ; elle n'est d'ailleurs pas séparable. Maintenant, attention : je t'interroge, réponds-moi avec intelligence a• Si les baptisés revêtent le Christ , en quoi consiste ce

vêtement qu'ils reçoivent? C'est Dieu. Celui donc qui a revêtu Dieu ne reconnaîtra-t-il pas par l'intelligence et ne verra-t-il pas ce qu'il a revêtu? Celui qui a le corps nu sent quand il est habillé et voit comment est son habit, et celui

qui a l'âme nue, en revêtant Dieu, ne s'en rendra pas compte? Si celui qui revêt Dieu ne sent pas ce qu'il a bien

pu revêtir, il ne reste plus à conclure, d'après toi, que Dieu n'est absolument rien ; car, s'il était quelque chose, ceux qui l'ont revêtu s'en rendraient compte. Mais si nous revêtons le néant, nous ne sentons rien non plus, tandis que, si nous revêtons quelque chose de réel nous-mêmes ou avec

le secours d'un autre, nous le sentons, et même fortement, si du moins nous avons les sens intacts ; seuls les cadavres, quand on les vêt, ne sentent rien et je crains que ceux qui émettent cette opinion ne soient aussi des cadavres et vraiment nus en réalité<sup>1</sup>. Et avec cela la question est résolue.

Ensuite, disent-ils, Paul ordonne : ((N'éteignez pas l'Esprit. » Et en disant cela sans connaître la portée de cette parole, ils manifestent leur propre ignorance car celui qui dit à un autre :

((N'éteins pas la lampe », ne lui parle pas du tout de celle qui est déjà éteinte, mais de celle qui est encore allumée et dont la lumière brille. Ici encore nous allons les prendre à partie.

Eh quoi! est-ce que vous voyez le moins du monde en vous, vous autres, l'Esprit brûler et briller,

## Now in this life

For St. Symeon, things are simple and straight forward; not taking them seriously is letting ourselves fall into incredulity down into an abyss of perdition. If we have believed in Scriptures, and if we go through them carefully we should be sure that Down-Here and in full consciousness we are given, as faithful, the seal of the Holy Spirit. Having believed we should run to attain the goal. We should struggle not in beating the air, but in asking as it will be given, in knocking as it will be open, either

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comme il se doit? Là-dessus non seulement ils ne répondent rien, mais ils changent aussitôt de visage et se détournent, gênés comme s'ils avaient entendu un blasphème ; ensuite ils affectent d'interroger et prennent un air bonhomme pour répliquer sans aigreur: ((Et qui aurait l'audace de dire qu'il l'a vu une fois, ou qu'il l'a jamais vu? Halte-là ! Il est écrit : Personne n'a jamais vu Dieu . » Quel aveuglement ! Qui a dit cela? Dis-le nous. ((Le Fils unique, celui qui est dans le sein du Père, c'est lui qui nous l'a fait connaître», dit-il. Tu dis vrai et ta citation est vraie, mais contre ta propre cause. Si je te montre, moi, le même Fils de Dieu te dire que cela est possible, que diras-tu? Car il dit : ((Celui qui me voit, voit mon Père O)) Et cela ne se rapporte pas à la vision de la chair, mais à la révélation de la divinité. En effet, si nous concevions cette vision par rapport à l'aspect du corps, alors ceux qui l'ont crucifié et ont craché sur lui, ont vu aussi le Père ; ainsi il n'y aurait aucune différence ou préférence entre incroyants et croyants, puisque tous également ont atteint et, évidemment, atteindront cette béatitude si désirée. Mais ce n'est pas cela, ce n'est pas possible, comme le montre justement le Christ de nouveau, en discutant avec les Juifs : ((Si vous m'aviez connu, vous auriez aussi connu mon Père. »

A preuve qu'il est possible pour nous de voir Dieu, dans la mesure où il est à la portée de l'homme de le voir, écoute le Christ, le Fils de Dieu, dire encore lui-même : ((Bienheureux ceux qui ont le coeur pur, car ils verront Dieu a» Qu'as-tu donc à dire à cela? Oh je le sais, celui qui se défie des biens qu'il a sous la main et ne fait aucun effort pour les saisir, se réfugiera dans le futur et. fera cette réponse : ((Oui, les coeurs purs verront réellement Dieu, mais c'est dans le siècle à venir, et non dans le présent, que cela se produira.)) Pourquoi cela et comment, mon cher? Si le Christ a dit que l'on voit Dieu au moyen de la pureté du coeur, à coup sûr, lorsque la pureté est acquise, la vision s'ensuit. D'ailleurs, si tu avais une fois purifié le tien, tu aurais su que la parole est véridique ; mais c'est parce que tu n'as pas pris cela à coeur, parce que tu n'as pas cru à la vérité du fait, que tu as aussi négligé la purification et manqué la vision. Si, en effet, ici-bas est la pureté, ici-bas aussi sera la vision ; mais si tu dis que la vision n'existe qu'après la mort, forcément tu placeras aussi la purification après la mort et ainsi il t'arrivera que jamais tu ne verras Dieu, puisque tu n'auras, après le trépas, aucune activité qui te permette de trouver la pureté. Mais que dit aussi le Seigneur? ((Celui qui m'aime gardera mes commandements ; et moi je l'aimerai et je me manifesterai à lui. s Quand donc aura lieu sa manifestation? Ici-bas, ou dans le siècle à venir? Evidemment, c'est ici-bas l. Là où les commandements sont exactement gardés, là aussi sera la manifestation du Sauveur et, après la manifestation, la charité parfaite se présente en nous. Tant qu'il n'en est pas ainsi, nous ne pouvons ni croire en lui, ni l'aimer comme il faut, car il est écrit : ((Celui qui n'aime pas son frère, qu'il voit, comment peut-il aimer Dieu qu'il ne voit pas? D'aucune façon.

Théologiques et Ethiques V, 1-135

Down-Here or in the times to come. But for the present, we should learn the teaching, we should make penitence, we should submit, fast, weep and pray. We should continue until we have grabbed, taken and received, until it has been open and we have entered, until we have become children of the Day and of Light. **Before that we should guard ourselves from believing we are something, when we are nothing. We should not imagine ourselves spiritual before having received the Holy Spirit.** We should not press ourselves to hear the confessions or others, or get access to the charge of priesthood, metropolitan or bishop in order to feed the cattle of Christ.<sup>eeee</sup>

St. Symeon is very firm and sincere in his call: "Let us separate ourselves from the harmful teaching of heretics and of the background-thinking of those who say that the glory of the divinity of our Lord Jesus does not reveal itself to us, faithful, in this present life, by the gift of the Holy Spirit; because the gift is given in the revelation and the revelation is realized in the gift. In this case nobody receives a Holy Spirit that

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<sup>eeee</sup> Oh non ne nous laissons pas aller nous-mêmes à l'incrédulité jusqu'à descendre dans un abîme de perdition; et même si jusqu'ici vous n'avez pas eu l'espoir d'acquérir le sentiment de pareils biens et que, pour cela, vous n'avez rien demandé, à présent du moins, après avoir tout d'abord cru à la réalité de ces biens et à leur conformité avec les divines Ecritures, si vous les parcourez évidemment en entier, soyez pleinement assurés que dès ici-bas, consciemment, nous est donné à nous, les fidèles, le sceau du Saint Esprit. Ayant cru, courez alors pour atteindre le but; lutez, mais non en battant l'air; de plus, ((demandez et on vous donnera, frappez et l'on vous ouvrira », soit ici-bas, soit dans le siècle à venir. Pour le moment, apprenez l'enseignement, faites pénitence, soumettez-vous, jeûnez, pleurez, priez ; ainsi, par ces pratiques et autres semblables, courez, lutez, poursuivez, cherchez, frappez à la porte, demandez, sans jamais tourner la tête ailleurs jusqu'à ce que vous ayez saisi, pris et reçu, jusqu'à ce qu'on ouvre et que vous entriez, jusqu'à ce que, dans la chambre nuptiale, vous contempriez l'époux, jusqu'à ce que vous entendiez : « Bien, serviteur bon et fidèle : tu as été fidèle pour de petites choses, je vais t'établir sur beaucoup », jusqu'à ce que vous deveniez fils du jour et fils de la lumière. Mais gardez-vous bien, avant d'avoir vu cela, avant de l'avoir reçu et éprouvé, de croire, en égarant vous-mêmes votre esprit et votre raison, que vous êtes quelque chose, alors que vous n'êtes rien : de vous imaginer, comme si vous aviez perdu toute conscience, que vous êtes vous-mêmes spirituels avant d'avoir reçu le Saint-Esprit : en conséquence, de vous presser inconsidérément pour recevoir les aveux d'autrui, d'accéder à la charge d'higoumène et à d'autres, d'oser accepter sans crainte la prêtrise, de vous mettre impudemment en avant par mille intrigues pour des métropoles et des évêchés, afin de paître le troupeau du Christ. Au contraire, portez votre attention, je vous en prie, sur vous-mêmes, cultivant les pensées d'en-haut, cherchant les choses d'en-haut, désirant les choses d'en-haut, sans vous soucier d'aucun bien de la terre, tant que vous n'avez pas reçu ceux-là'.  
Théologiques et Ethiques V, 500-531

is not revealed nor seen intellectually; nobody neither sees the revelation, if he is not illuminated in the Holy Spirit, and nobody could be said perfectly faithful, if he did not receive the Spirit of God, as the Christ was telling the Samaritan: "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." And the Evangelist said "But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive;" You see that those who do not possess the Spirit acting and speaking in them, are unfaithful. Because Christ does not lie, because he did not commit any sin and none could find ruse in his mouth; if he says himself that he gives the Spirit to those who believe in Him, assuredly those who do not have the Spirit are not heartily faithful."<sup>fff</sup>

### **Blasphemy of Unconsciousness and Unawareness**

To get more clear on the issue of conscious awareness of Grace the Saint goes on to say it in a more clear way: "And if someone was saying that everyone of us, faithful, receives and possesses the Spirit without having knowledge nor consciousness, he is blaspheming in making the Christ lying, who has said: "will

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<sup>fff</sup> Restons, frères, devant ce miroir de la vérité et écartons-nous de l'enseignement nocif et hérétique et de l'arrière-pensée de ceux qui disent que la gloire de la divinité du Seigneur Jésus ne se révèle pas à nous, fidèles, dans la vie présente, par le don du Saint-Esprit ; car le don est donné dans la révélation et la révélation se réalise dans le don. Dans ce cas personne ne reçoit un Esprit-Saint qui ne serait ni révélé ni vu intellectuellement ; personne non plus ne voit la révélation, s'il n'est pas illuminé dans l'Esprit-Saint, et personne ne peut être dit parfaitement fidèle, s'il n'a pas reçu l'Esprit de Dieu, ainsi que le disait le Christ à la Samaritaine : « Celui qui boit de l'eau que je lui donnerai n'aura jamais soif, mais il se produira en lui une source d'eau qui jaillit pour la vie éternelle. » - Et cela dit l'Évangéliste « il le disait à propos de l'Esprit que devaient recevoir ceux qui croient en lui. » Tu vois que ceux qui ne possèdent pas l'Esprit agissant et parlant en eux, sont des infidèles. Car le Christ ne ment pas, puisqu'il n'a pas commis de péché et que l'on n'a pas trouvé de ruse dans sa bouche; s'il dit lui-même qu'il donne l'Esprit à ceux qui croient en lui, assurément ceux qui n'ont pas l'Esprit ne sont pas fidèles de coeur. (Théologiques et Ethiques X 480-501)

become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" and more "he who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." If the fountain springs up, certainly also the rivers that go out and that flow out are seen by those who look; but if all of this, according to the opinion of those who think this way, is realized in us at our unaware, without being able to feel anything, it is evident as well that we will not have neither the minor awareness of eternal life that follows and that resides in us, and that we will not contemplate the light of the Holy Spirit; on the contrary, we will remain dead, blind and insensible, then as well as now. Thus, according to them, vain is our hope, and our race useless, because we are in the death, and we are not conscious of eternal life."

"But it is not this way, not at all, and what I have said many times, I will say again and will not cease to say it. Light is the Father, Light is the Son, Light is the Holy Spirit Light unique, immortal, without division nor confusion, eternal, uncreated, without quantity nor defect, invisible, outside and above everything in the realm of reality as of thought, that no man could have contemplated before being purified, nor received before having contemplated. Many without doubt have seen it, but they did not acquire it, same as those who have got the favor to see a considerable treasure in the imperial warehouses and have gone hands empty. Because it happens often, in the beginnings, to the ones who embrace penitence with fervor, that a divine illumination enlightens them but she fades immediately; if they engage themselves entirely until the peril of life and seek with efforts, in presenting themselves to the Lord worthy and irreproachable in every point, and if they do not enter now, they will never enter again after having left the bodies, this is evident. If they receive it entirely when it comes again; but if they neglect a little refusing to engage in greater tiredness, in love of their own soul, they become unworthy of such a gift and do not enter into



the eternal life while they are still in the flesh; the one who has received the unique talent and has hidden it, has been condemned for not having fructified it, to how much more reason the one who did not keep what he has received, but lost it by laziness, will be condemned."gggg

### **George the Novice pulled up**

The Saint could be speaking of himself, referring to George again, how in his beginnings and after a fair but zealous engagement in the spiritual life, he was granted the vision of the Holy Light, and how he lost the Grace and went down willingly into the abyss of carnal lusts and adultery of the heart until becoming "sodomiste en

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gggg Et si quelqu'un disait que chacun de nous, fidèles, reçoit et possède l'Esprit sans en avoir connaissance ni conscience, il blasphème en faisant mentir le Christ qui a dit: « En lui se produira une source d'eau jaillissant pour la vie éternelle » et encore : « Celui qui croit en moi, des fleuves couleront de son sein en eau vive » Si la source jaillit, certainement aussi le fleuve qui sort et qui s'écoule est aperçu de ceux qui regardent ; mais si tout cela, selon l'opinion de ceux qui pensent ainsi, se réalise en nous à notre insu, sans que nous en ressentions rien, il est bien évident que nous n'aurons pas non plus la moindre conscience de la vie éternelle qui en découle et qui demeure en nous, et que nous ne contemplerons pas la lumière de l'Esprit-Saint; au contraire, nous resterons morts, aveugles et insensibles, alors aussi bien que maintenant. Ainsi, d'après eux, vaine est notre espérance, et notre course inutile, puisque nous sommes dans la mort et que nous ne prenons pas conscience de la vie éternelle.

Mais il n'en est pas ainsi, pas du tout, et ce que j'ai dit bien des fois, je le dirai encore et ne cesserai de le dire. Lumière est le Père, lumière le Fils, lumière l'Esprit-Saint lumière unique, intemporelle, sans division ni confusion, éternelle, incréée, sans quantité ni défaut, invisible, en dehors et au-dessus de toutes choses dans le domaine du réel comme de la pensée, que nul homme n'a pu contempler avant d'être purifié, ni recevoir avant de l'avoir contemplée.

Beaucoup sans doute l'ont vue, mais ne l'ont pas acquise, comme ceux qui ont eu la faveur de voir un trésor considérable dans les dépôts impériaux et sont partis les mains vides. Car il arrive souvent, dans les débuts, chez ceux qui embrassent avec ferveur la pénitence, qu'une illumination divine les éclaire mais elle passe aussitôt ; s'ils se donnent entièrement jusqu'au péril même de la vie et cherchent avec effort, en se présentant au Seigneur dignes et irréprochables en tout point, et s'ils n'y entrent pas à présent, ils n'y entreront pas plus après être sortis du corps, c'est évident. Si ils la reçoivent complètement quand elle vient à nouveau ; mais s'ils se négligent tant soit peu et refusent de s'engager dans de plus grandes fatigues, par amour de leur âme propre, ils deviennent indignes d'un pareil don et n'entrent pas dans la vie éternelle pendant qu'ils sont encore dans le corps; celui qui a reçu l'unique talent et l'a caché, a été condamné pour ne l'avoir pas fait fructifier, à combien plus forte raison celui qui n'a même pas gardé ce qu'il avait reçu, mais l'a perdu par sa paresse, sera-t-il condamné.

Théologiques et Ethiques X 501-540

oeuvre et en désir"<sup>hhhh</sup>, and how he did all of that by his free will, and he was saved by the hand of the Lord as pulled up from the mud by his hair what is wonderfully described like this: "Again I, wretched one, cast myself into the pit and the mud of the abyss (Ps. 69:3) of shameful thoughts and deeds and once I had come there I fell into the hands of those who were concealed by the darkness. From these neither I alone, nor the whole world gathered into one, could have availed to bring me up from thence and deliver me out of their hands.

Nevertheless when I was there held captive, miserably and wretchedly dragged about, strangled, and mocked by them, Thou the compassionate Master who lovest man didst not overlook me, nor didst Thou bear me ill, will not turn away from my ingratitude, nor didst Thou abandon me for long to bandits, though I was willingly tyrannized by them. Even when I in my senselessness rejoiced in being led astray by them Thou couldest not bear to see me led about and dragged in dishonor, but Thou didst have compassion, O Master, and show pity on me. It was not an angel or a man whom Thou didst send to me, miserable sinner, but Thou Thyself was moved by Thy tender goodness (Is. 63:7). Thou didst stoop into that exceeding deep pit; Thou didst stretch forth Thy spotless hand to me, when I was sitting buried deep in the mud, and while I did not see Thee—for how could I have been able to do so or have any strength to look up at all when I was covered and choked by mud?—Thou didst grasp the hair of my head and forcibly drag me up from thence. I felt the pains and the sudden upward movement, and how I was going up, but I did not at all know who it was who brought me up, or held me to bring me up." <sup>iiii</sup>

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<sup>hhhh</sup> Hymn XXIV: 75

<sup>iiii</sup> THANKSGIVING PRAYER: So in advance Thou didst reform me and give me life and set me free from my forefather's fall and so restore to me the ascent into heaven. Afterwards, when I had been born and as I was gradually growing in size Thou renewed me by Holy Baptism and

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formed me anew (cf Tit. 3:5) and did adorn me with the Holy Spirit and appoint an angel of light to be my guardian, and until mature age didst preserve me from the hostile attacks and the snares of the enemy. ...

But since Thou hast seen fit to save us, not by compulsion but by free choice, Thou didst permit me also to be honored by freedom of the will that I might freely choose to show love toward Thee by keeping Thy commandments. Yet in my ingratitude and contempt, like a horse set free from its reins, I so valued the dignity of my free will that I leaped away from Thy authority and cast myself down the precipice. As I was lying there senselessly wallowing and inflicting greater injuries on myself, Thou didst not turn away, nor didst Thou allow me to be defiled in the mud, but by Thy tender mercy (cf Lk. 1:79) Thou didst send for me and bring me up from thence and yet more gloriously honor me. From kings and princes who would use me as a vessel of dishonor (Rom. 9:21; 2 Tim. 2:20) to minister to their desires Thou didst deliver me by Thine ineffable judgments. Though I was full of avarice, yet didst Thou not permit me to receive gifts of gold and silver; as for glory and distinction in life, Thou grantedst me to regard as an abomination the price that was offered me instead of Thy holiness.

Yet, O Lord God of heaven and earth (cf Mt. 11:25; Lk. 10:21), I confess I regarded all these [benefits] as nothing. Again I, wretched one, cast myself into the pit and the mud of the abyss (Ps. 69:3) of shameful thoughts and deeds and once I had come there I fell into the hands of those who were concealed by the darkness. From these neither I alone, nor the whole world gathered into one, could have availed to bring me up from I thence and deliver me from out of their hands.

Nevertheless when I was there held captive, miserably and wretchedly dragged about, strangled, and mocked by them, Thou the compassionate Master who lovest man didst not overlook me, nor didst Thou bear me ill will nor turn away from my ingratitude, nor didst Thou abandon me for long to bandits, though I was willingly tyrannized by them. Even when I in my senselessness rejoiced in being led astray by them Thou couldst not bear to see me led about and dragged in dishonor, but Thou didst have compassion, O Master, and show pity on me. It was not an angel or a man whom Thou didst send to me, miserable sinner, but Thou Thyself was moved by Thy tender goodness (Is. 63:7). Thou didst stoop into that exceeding deep pit; Thou didst stretch forth Thy spotless hand to me, when I was sitting buried deep in the mud, and while I did not see Thee—for how could I have been able to do so or have any strength to look up at all when I was covered and choked by mud?—Thou didst grasp the hair of my head and forcibly drag me up from thence. I felt the pains and the sudden upward movement, and how I was going up, but I did not at all know who it was who brought me up, or held me to bring me up. But when Thou hadst brought me up and placed me on the ground, Thou gayest me over to Thy servant and disciple. I was yet wholly defiled, with my eyes, my ears, and my mouth still covered with mud, and therefore did not see who Thou wast. I knew only that Thou art good and byest men. So Thou broughtest me out of that deepest pit and mud, and when Thou hadst told me, “Hold on to this man, cleave to him and follow him, for he will lead you along and wash you,” Thou didst inspire me with faith in him and didst depart. Where Thou didst go, I know not.

According to Thy command, most holy Master, I followed without turning aside from him whom Thou didst show me.

While he with much trouble led me to the fountains and the wells, he drew me in my blindness after him by the hand of faith, which Thou gayest me, and compelled me to follow him. While he could see clearly and lifted his feet and went over stones and through pits and obstacles, and leaped over them all, I was constantly stumbling and falling into them, and suffered many pains, many hurts and bruises. But while he cleansed and washed himself in every spring and fountain each successive hour, I passed most of them by because I did not see them. Had he not held me by the hand and made me stand close to the fountain and guided the hands of my mind, I should not ever have been able to find where the water was welling forth. But while he showed me and let me wash myself, I often took into my hands not only the pure water, but the clay and the mud beside the spring and so befouled my face. Often as I groped for the spring in order to find the water I scratched the earth and stirred up the dust and, since I could not see at all, I bathed my face with mud as though it were water, and thought that I was washing it perfectly clean.

But how can I tell of all the violence and constraint I suffered thereby? It was not only thence, but also from those who were frequently protesting and insinuating day by day as they said, “Why do you waste your effort, and follow this fraud and deceiver? It is vain and useless to expect to recover your sight! It is no longer possible! Why do you follow him, and hurt your

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feet so that they bleed? Why not rather approach some merciful man, who will urge you to rest, to take food, and take good care of yourself? It is impossible for you to rid yourself of this leprosy of soul, or ever to recover your sight at this time. Where does this fraud come from, who now claims to work miracles, and promises you things that are impossible for any man of the present generation? Woe is you, not only because you lose the care that is given you by compassionate people who love Christ and their brethren, but because you also endure the hurts and bruises to which you expose yourself because of false expectations! Most surely you will fail to obtain the things which this mountebank and deceiver promises you! Can he do anything whatever? Are you trying to arrive at conclusions without our help, or to think on your own? How? Do we not all see? Are we blind, as that man tells you in his error? We all indeed see; do not let yourself be deceived, there is no other vision better than ours” (cf Jn. 9:40—41). But from all these men who were truly mountebanks and deceivers, who offer their neighbor a drink of speedy destruction (cf Heb. 2:15), Thou the merciful and compassionate One didst deliver me through the faith and hope Thou didst grant me, through which also Thou gavest me strength to endure the aforesaid troubles and many others as well.....

From thenceforth I stood by the fountain, and Thou who art without pride didst not disdain frequently to come down: Thou camest to me and laidst hold of my head and so didst dip it into the waters and so madest me see more clearly the light of Thy countenance (cf Ps. 4:7, 89:16). Yet at once Thou didst fly away, without granting me to know who Thou wast, who wast doing this, or whence Thou camest or whence Thou wast going, for Thou hadst not yet granted this to me. Thus as Thou camest for a time and wentest away Thou didst gradually appear to me more fully; Thou didst pour the water on me and grantedst me to see more plainly and gayest me more light. ...

Again Thou didst leave me alone upon the earth, on which I had stood before, and I was found lamenting and astounded at my wretchedness. Then when I had not been long below, Thou didst vouchsafe to show me Thy face in the heavens above, as if they were rent apart (cf Acts 7:56). It was a light like a sun without form. And who Thou wert, still Thou didst not grant me to know. How could I have known Thee when Thou didst not speak to me? But Thou didst at once conceal Thyself, and I went about seeking Thee whom I did not know, and I longed to see Thy form and consciously to know who Thou wert. Therefore I continually wept because of the great vehemence and the fire of my love for Thee. I knew not who Thou art, who has brought me forth out of nothing into being and taken me out of the mud, and done to me all the things that I had said. ...

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. At that time Thou tookest me out of the world—I might even say, out of the body, but Thou didst not grant me to know this exactly (cf 2 Cor. 12:2—3). Thou didst shine yet more brightly and it seemed that I saw Thee clearly in Thy entirety. ...

Thou saidest, “I am God who have become man for your sake. Because you have sought me with all your soul, behold, from now on you will be My brother (cf Mt. 12:50; Mk. 3:35; Lk. 8:21), My fellow heir (cf Rom. 8:17), and My friend (cf Jn. 15:14—15).” ...

Then Thou again, the Master, didst speak as a friend conversing with his friend, and didst say to me through Thy Spirit, which spoke in me (cf Rom. 8:11; Mt. 10:20), “I have given you these things, and will continue to give them, solely for your intention, your will, and your faith.

Whatever else have you ever had as your own? I brought you into the world naked (cf Job 1:21)—for what could I have given you in exchange for these things? For unless you are released from the flesh you will not see that which is perfect, nor will you ever be able to enjoy it in full.” ...

Thou didst say, “You are indeed too fainthearted to be contented with this. Compared with the blessings to come, this is like a description of heaven on paper held in the hand; for so the extent that this would be inferior to the reality, the glory that will be revealed (Rom. 8:18) is incomparably greater than that which you have now seen.” ...

How could I have failed to rejoice? Yet I again fell into sorrow and so I longed to see Thee again, I went off to reverence the spotless ikon of her who bore Thee. As I fell before it, before I rose up, Thou Thyself didst appear to me within my poor heart, as though Thou hadst transformed it into light; and then I knew that I have Thee consciously within me. From then onwards I loved Thee, not by recollection of Thee and that which surrounds Thee, nor for the

What is described above should be of everyone's experience, because every baptized Christian, should be able to tell similar experiences; he only needs to take his baptism seriously and try to seek the Lord in the deeper part of his being. I have always been amazed to hear clergymen making fun of people talking about the intervening of God in their daily lives, and I have heard many testimonies where monks and spiritual fathers have told their children in confessions that those intimate experiences with the Lord that are mixed with tears of joy are from the Devil! They consider those experiences as demonical pretexts for the purpose of deception, because they have in their mind as a standard background, that the Lord will never get close or show his salutary grace to repentant people who cry onto Him to save them from the pit of their deceived life, until they are better, if not fully, purified and truly holy men.

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memory of such things, but I in very truth believed that I had Thee, substantial love, within me. For Thou, O God, truly art love (1 John 4:8, 16)....

Again, O Master, Thou didst say, "Listen! As you see the sun reflected in the water, but do not see the sun itself, especially when you bend over to see it, so think of what happens in your case. Take care and endeavor constantly to see Me within you clearly and distinctly, as you see the sun in pure water. Then you will be granted thus to see Me, as I have told you, even after death. If not, the whole course of your works, your toils, and your words will be of no avail to you; nay, rather, they will avail to greater condemnation and obtain for you more affliction, since, as your hear, 'mighty men will be mightily tested' ...

Those who for some reason have fallen out of the favor and service of the earthly monarch may continue to own property and to enjoy it and live. But if one falls away from My love and friendship, he cannot live at all, for I am his life (cf Jn. 11:25, 14:6). At once he is stripped of all things and is handed over to both his enemies and Mine as a prisoner. Once they seize him they will attack him the more savagely because of the affection and love that he once showed me and punish him as an object of derision and contempt." ...

Thou hast willed it. Thou knowest my weakness; Thou understandest my misery and my complete inability to do anything. Do thou therefore have compassion on me even more from henceforth, O Lord who art rich in compassion. With my heart

I fall before Thee, that Thou, who hast done me so many bene- fits, abandon me not to my will, but in Thy love establish my soul and make Thy love take deep root in me, that in accordance with Thy holy, unspotted, and infallible promise Thou mayest be in me and I may be in Thee ([n. 14:20) and I may be protected by Thy love and may protect and guard it in me. In that love Thou dost look on me, O Master, and grant me to see Thee through it even now dimly, as in a mirror, as Thou hast said it (1 Cor. 13:12). But hereafter in all love may I see Thee, who art love and hast deigned to be so called (1 John 4:8, 16), for all thanksgiving, power, honor, and adoration are due to Thee, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, now and ever, and to unending ages of ages. Amen.

EXTRACTS FROM Discourses XXXVI

## **Christ is God incarnate and not a prophet!**

For St. Symeon, it is obvious that the Lord intervenes in our lives and saves us in facts and in deeds, because if we do not receive the salutary grace in this flesh, then Christ would be a prophet and not God incarnate, and all what the Gospel proclaims would be no more than prophecies concerning the future and not a Gospel of true and experienced Salvation, and the Apostles would have been charged to prophesy but not to realize their prophecies. They would have not received anything and would have not transmitted anything to other? "What ignorance to those who are there and what blindness"; because if that was the case, the salutary Grace of God would have appeared in words and not in deeds. This goes to say that if He is Light and if we who have put Him on, do not feel anything, in what then are we different from cadavers? The same applies to those who get to the communion with the body and blood of our Lord without feeling anything other than getting material bread and wine, without taking notice of the other aspect of life that is present in them, they receive then simple wine and bread but not God at the same time. Because Christ is God and man, his holy flesh is not only flesh, but flesh and God unseparated and also without confusion: visible in the flesh, so to say in the bread, for the eyes of the flesh, invisible in his divinity for the eyes of the flesh, but visible for the eyes of the soul.<sup>jjjj</sup>

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jjjj S'il n'en est pas ainsi, en effet, si, dès ici-bas, tant que nous sommes dans le corps, nous ne sommes pas admis à la communion et à la participation des biens éternels et que nous ne recevions pas la grâce, nous les élus, dès lors le Christ lui-même n'est qu'un prophète, et non pas Dieu, et tout ce que son Évangile déclare est une prophétie concernant l'avenir et non un don de grâce, et pareillement les Apôtres ont été chargés de prophétiser mais non de réaliser les prophéties : ils n'ont rien reçu eux-mêmes et ils n'ont rien transmis aux autres. Quelle ignorance chez ceux qui en sont là et quel aveuglement! Par conséquent, d'après eux, notre foi n'est que paroles en l'air, vides de faits. Car si la grâce salutaire de Dieu est apparue seulement en paroles à tous les hommes, et non en fait, si c'est ainsi, d'après nous, que s'est accompli le mystère de

## The Holy Spirit that convicts

In other words, our Lord is reachable to anyone who stretches his soul towards Him and as much the stretching is sincere and eager, his Holy Lights could be seen by beginners as well as by purified holy men, but the Grace of the indwelling of His Holy Spirit and its convicting effects could be felt by anyone who has received the Holy Spirit, for "when He (the Spirit) has come, He will **convict** the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (Jn16:8) and also "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD."(Heb8:10-11) And when Paul says "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." (Eph 4:30) he is talking to normal people who have received the grace of the Holy Spirit and who could easily lose it by grieving Him in not accepting his convictions and His guidance wrought by Him in their hearts, thus losing the awareness of Grace in their hearts. The loss of the

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notre foi, qui est plus misérable que nous? Si le Christ est lumière du monde et Dieu, mais que personne, croyons- nous, ne soit à même de le voir sans cesse, qui donc est plus incroyant que nous?

Par conséquent, s'il est, lui, lumière, mais que, disions- nous, ceux qui le revêtent n'en ressentent rien, en quoi différons-nous d'un cadavre? Si d'autre part il est la vigne et nous les sarments, au cas où nous n'avons nulle connaissance de notre union à lui, nous sommes sans âme, sans fruits, bois sec, matière du feu inextinguible. Si, encore, ceux qui mangent sa chair et boivent son sang ont la vie éternelle, conformément à sa parole divine, mais que nous qui en mangeons nous ne sentions pas plus d'effet en nous qu'en prenant la nourriture matérielle, sans en tirer connaissance d'une autre vie, alors nous avons reçu un pain pur et simple et non pas Dieu en même temps. Si le Christ est Dieu et homme, sa sainte chair n'est plus uniquement chair, mais chair et Dieu inséparablement et tout de même sans confusion : visible dans la chair, autrement dit dans le pain, pour les yeux du corps, il est invisible dans sa divinité pour les yeux du corps, mais perçu par ceux de l'âme. (Théologiques et Ethiques X 754-769)

internal conviction is in itself a judgment, and a sign that the grace of the Holy Spirit has departed from the soul.

## **An Unmistaken Experience**

The consciousness of Grace cannot be mixed up or be mistaken by other type of mystical experiences because according to St. Symeon, same as a woman knows clearly, when she is pregnant, that the child moves in her womb, and she could not miss that she is carrying him in herself, in the same way the one who has the Christ formed in himself knows his movements, otherwise speaking his illuminations, cannot ignore his thrills, otherwise spoken his lightning's, and recognizes His formation in him.<sup>kkkk</sup>

St. Symeon is sincere and very accurate about the watchfulness over the awareness of Grace, and he gives to the one who wants to follow his instructions some nine practical guidelines on how to keep the grace as long as possible without losing it due to inadequate behavior on the physical or on the mental levels. Going through those guidelines, one could easily see that he is not addressing saints and holy men who are much advanced in the stages of holiness, but mere normal people who are showing seriousness in their spiritual life and who are eager to grow deeper in

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kkkk Cependant, de même que la femme connaît clairement, quand elle est enceinte, que l'enfant remue dans son sein, et qu'elle ne saurait ignorer qu'elle le porte en elle, de même celui qui a le Christ formé en lui-même connaît ses mouvements, autrement dit ses illuminations, n'ignore pas le moins du monde ses tressaillements, autrement dit ses éclairs, et se rend compte de sa formation en lui. Prenons la lumière de la lampe qui apparaît dans le miroir: ce n'est pas ainsi qu'est (le Christ), dans une image sans support, mais il apparaît en substance et en essence dans la lumière, dans une forme sans forme et dans une figure sans figure, que l'on voit invisiblement et que l'on comprend incompréhensiblement.

Théologiques et Ethiques X 878-889



their relationship with the Lord. For documentation, I have copied those guidelines in the endnotes.<sup>37</sup>

It is obvious that St. Symeon has faced and will always be facing debates with some traditional theologians who could misunderstand the experimental approach towards God, in the theology of St. Symeon, however nowhere our Saint has shown other than apophatic statements when he addresses the issues of the uncreated light or of Grace in itself, awareness of Grace remains for him an apophatic experience in itself. Nowhere our Saint has tried to explain Grace but has always tried to talk cataphatically about the effects of Grace on his soul, and on his mind. The enlightenment of the soul is a mystical experience, but it is as well a true experience that cannot be mistaken. "Therefore the one who declares possessing in his heart the light under the cover of the darkness of his passions and without being able to see it, declares that light is dominated by darkness and makes a liar of the Holy Spirit Who says: "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend (other possible meanings: oppress, dominate) it." The Holy Spirit says that the light is not oppressed by darkness, and you, you say that in you it is covered by the obscurity of your passions."<sup>iii</sup> St. Symeon translates the expression "**κατελαβεν**" as "oppress" or "dominate" instead of "comprehend", he wants to say that if all the darkness of the

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<sup>iii</sup> Par contre, si tu dis que l'Esprit en toi est recouvert par les passions, tu fais de la divinité, sans t'en rendre compte, un être limité et dominé par le mal ; car une conscience mauvaise est ténèbres, même sans péché du corps. Donc celui qui déclare posséder en son coeur la lumière sous le couvert des ténèbres des passions et sans qu'il la voie, déclare que la lumière est dominée par les ténèbres et fait mentir l'Esprit-Saint qui dit : « Et la lumière brille dans les ténèbres et les ténèbres ne l'ont pas opprimées. » L'Esprit-Saint dit que la lumière n'est pas opprimée par les ténèbres, et toi, tu dis qu'elle est en toi recouverte par l'obscurité des passions? Connais-toi donc toi-même d'abord : qui que tu sois pour dire cela, sache que tu pêches en pleine connaissance ; car si tu avoues que les ténèbres des passions arrivent à couvrir la lumière qui est en toi, dès l'abord c'est toi que tu accuses et incrimines, parce que sciemment tu es assis dans les ténèbres et esclave des passions; bien que tu aies reçu pouvoir de devenir enfant de Dieu, autrement dit de lumière, et d'être qualifié enfant du jour, en restant inactif et oisif tu vis dans la nuit ; loin de vouloir te relever pour pratiquer les commandements de Dieu et chasser la nuée des passions, tu regardes avec dédain gisant en ton coeur souillé, comme en un borbier, celui qui est descendu des cieux pour te sauver. Théologiques et Ethiques X 623-645

world cannot extinguish or hide the light of a lighted candle, how could the darkness of passions hide the light of the Holy Spirit so that It could not be seen or made aware to the eyes of the soul, unless the soul or its spiritual eyes are dead, or in other words the “**νοῦς**” is still darkened.

## Appendix to Chapter 4

### God is Light, He speaks and He is heard

“Brethren, such are the wonderful deeds of God toward us! As we ascend to that which is more perfect, He who is without form or shape comes no longer without form or without shape. Nor does He cause His light to come to us and be present with us in silence. But how? He comes in a definite form indeed, though it is a divine one. Yet God does not show Himself in a particular pattern or likeness, but in simplicity, and takes the form of an **incomprehensible, inaccessible, and formless light**. We cannot possibly say or express more than this; still, He appears clearly and is **consciously known and clearly seen**, though He is invisible. He sees and hears invisibly and, just as friend speaks to friend face to face (*cf Ex. 33:11*), so He who by nature is God speaks to those whom by grace He has begotten as gods. He loves like a father, and in turn He is fervently loved by His sons. Thus for them He becomes a strange thing to behold and even more awesome to hear, for though He cannot be fittingly expressed in words by them, yet He cannot bear to be veiled by silence.”<sup>mmmm</sup>

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<sup>mmmm</sup> Discourses XXXV 196-211

## **Chapter 5**

### **The assurance of Salvation**

## **Pledge of Betrothed Soul**

A woman without the pledge does not have the certitude that the union with her spouse will for sure occur one day. In the same way, the soul, in whom is wrought the conscious awareness of Grace by the Holy Spirit, Who is the portion of the faithful and the pledge of the soul betrothed to Christ, is lead to an assurance of its mystical and ineffable union with God and that she will enjoy His inaccessible beauty.<sup>nnnn</sup>

## **Take hold before departure**

"He who has not hastened to come inside the kingdom of heaven while he is still in the day of this life below, but is found outside it at the departure of his soul, has the night of death fall on him. He does not know what will happen to him on the following day, the Day of Judgment, and whether or not he will be allowed to enter."<sup>oooo</sup> "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

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<sup>nnnn</sup> La grâce de l'Esprit très saint est donnée comme gage aux âmes qui sont fiancées au Christ. De même que sans gage la femme n'a pas la certitude que l'union avec l'époux s'accomplira sûrement un jour, de même l'âme non plus n'a pas la ferme assurance qu'elle sera réunie pour l'éternité à son Dieu et maître, ni qu'elle obtiendra l'union mystique et ineffable, ni qu'elle jouira de sa beauté inaccessible, si elle n'a pas reçu le gage de sa grâce et si elle ne le possède pas en elle consciemment.  
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<sup>oooo</sup> Discourses XXVII 40-45

Master may open to you (Mt. 7:7; Lk. 11:9) before you die, and that He may show Himself to you (Jn. 14:21). Endeavor to possess the kingdom of heaven within you (Lk. 17:21). Possess it consciously, and do not leave this life empty-handed, particularly you who think you have it within you unconsciously, though you have nothing because of your conceit.”<sup>PPPP</sup>

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<sup>PPPP</sup> Discourses XXXIV 67-80

## **The Mind of Christ**

The conscious awareness of the heavenly kingdom within oneself is directly related to acquiring the "mind of Christ" and is at the same time the key for the entrance to the heavenly kingdom after departure from this life: "Tell me then, how will he contemplate Christ's Father who has not acquired "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16)? He who does not see Him speaking within himself, by what means or in what way will he say "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6)? He who has failed consciously to acquire the kingdom of heaven within himself, how will he enter it after his death? He who does not contemplate the Son abiding in him through the Spirit (1 John 3:24; Jn. 14:23) together with the Father, how will he be with Them in the future?<sup>qqqq</sup>

## **Now Down-Here or in Eschatological Hope**

Salvation is not something to be expected in hope, and to be fulfilled in the age to come, because if it was only so, our Lord would be no more than a prophet for the world to come, as our St. Symeon has said it above. Therefore he goes one step further and teaches that the resurrection, the incorruption, eternal life, the kingdom of heaven and all the eternal blessings should not be anticipated in hope, "**but we teach that they are present and revealed, apparent and visible, and already given as**

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<sup>qqqq</sup> Discourses XXXIV 80-90

**pledges to those who are elect and will be saved.**"<sup>TTTT</sup> When our Saint was hearing St. Paul saying: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9), he was sure that it was impossible for anyone who was in the flesh to enter into the contemplation of them, he thought that the Lord showed those things to Paul alone out of a special generosity, and he goes on to say **"I the wretched one, did not know that Thou doest this to all those who love Thee. ...When I heard these things spoken by Thy messengers, I supposed that they pertained to the world to come and would happen only after the resurrection. I did not know that they take place now, when we are in greatest need of them."**<sup>SSSS</sup>

By repentance everyone should run in the way of the commandments of God, while it is still time when He shines on us and before the night of death overtakes us and we could be sent to eternal darkness. It is necessary according to St. Symeon that everyone receives the lights of the Lord in this world, to be entitled to enter into the lights of the eternal life: "Run, seek, knock, that the door of the kingdom of heaven may be opened to you and you may enter within it and have it within you. As those who depart from this present life without attaining to it, how will they ever find it

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<sup>TTTT</sup> We urge them not merely to look forward to the resurrection to incorruption, to life [eternal] and the kingdom of heaven and to all the eternal blessings with hope, but we teach that they are present and revealed, apparent and visible, and already given as pledges to those who are elect and will be saved. If we are anxious to prove and establish the very things that others postpone till after death and the resurrection, ought we not rather be acceptable and greatly beloved by them and by all as those who perform a work of perfect love?  
DISCOURSES XXXIV 265-273

<sup>SSSS</sup> When I heard Thy herald Paul proclaim and say, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him" (2 Cor. 2:9), I was sure that it was impossible for anyone who was in the flesh to enter into the contemplation of them. I thought that Thou didst show these things to him alone out of a special generosity and I, the wretched one, did not know that Thou doest this to all those who love Thee. ...When I heard these things spoken by Thy messengers, I supposed that they pertained to the world to come and would happen only after the resurrection. I did not know that they take place now, when we are in greatest need of them.  
DISCOURSES XXXV 52-70



once they have gone there? Accordingly, it is here that we have been commanded to ask, to seek, and to knock by means of penitence and tears, and the Master has promised to give it to us if we do so. If then we refuse to do this and to obey Christ our Master, so that we may endeavor to receive the kingdom within us while we are still in this life, will we not deserve to hear Him speak to us when we have departed thither and say, “Why are you now seeking the kingdom which you refused when I was giving it to you? Were you not unwilling when I earnestly entreated you to exert yourselves to receive it from Me? Have you not despised it and preferred to enjoy corruptible and earthly things? By what deeds or words will you be able to find it from now on?”<sup>tttt</sup>

### **Assurance of Salvation**

The most direct statement applauding the belief in the assurance of salvation while still alive on this earth is said in this unique phraseology containing the wording "assurance of salvation": **“Happy and blessed are those who do not attribute to**

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<sup>tttt</sup> But to you, who are Christ’s servants, who are anxious to learn and have prepared your ears to hear, the Master of all things shouts through His holy Gospels, saying, “While you have the light, run to the light, lest the darkness overtake you” (cf In. 12:35-36). By repentance run in the way of His commandments (cf Ps. 119:32). Run, run, while it is still the time when He shines on you, before the night of death overtakes you (if In. f):4) and you be sent away into eternal darkness. Run, seek, knock, that the door of the kingdom of heaven may be opened to you (cf Mt. 7:7; Lk. 11:f)) and you may enter within it and have it within you (if Lk. 17:21). As for those who depart from this present life without attaining to it, how will they ever find it once they have gone there? Accordingly, it is here that we have been commanded to ask, to seek, and to knock by means of penitence and tears, and the Master has promised to give it to us if we do so. If then we refuse to do this and to obey Christ our Master, so that we may endeavor to receive the kingdom within us while we are still in this life, will we not deserve to hear Him speak to us when we have departed thither and say, “Why are you now seeking the kingdom which you refused when I was giving it to you? Were you not unwilling when I earnestly entreated you to exert yourselves to receive it from Me? Have you not despised it and preferred to enjoy corruptible and earthly things? By what deeds or words will you be able to find it from now on?”  
Discourses XV 125-145

**themselves that it is not in this life that they receive the assurance of their salvation, but at leaving or after leaving this life, because they will strive to receive it from now”.**<sup>uuuu</sup>

Grace is freely granted to any baptized Christian who is willing to claim it eagerly, but keeping the granted grace requires humility in the first place, spiritual knowledge in the second place, and practice of the commandments<sup>vvvv</sup> in the third place. The practice of the commandments **in humility and with spiritual knowledge** is the only way towards purification in order to be able to keep the Grace longer and longer. Living in full conscious awareness of Grace is an anticipated resurrection of the soul due to the total purification that has occurred before the total enlightenment by Grace, and is therefore a bridge to the eternal life, anticipation of the Day of Judgment, the Day of the Lord, where there will be no other judgment day to follow; and is in this respect a sort of assurance of salvation. In other words the one who lives totally in Grace has already gone the purification of the Day of the Lord, where every deed will be tested by fire and everyone will be purified like pure gold into fire. This fits completely in the concept of the Day of the Lord according to St. Symeon.

## **The Day of the Lord**

"In the same way it will happen [on the day of Judgment] to all who are in the world. "The night will become as light as the day" (Ps. 139:12); every house and

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<sup>uuuu</sup> Bienheureux ceux qui n'ont pas estimé à part eux que ce n'est pas dès ici-bas que les hommes reçoivent déjà l'assurance de leur propre salut, mais à la sortie ou après la sortie de la vie, car ils lutteront pour recevoir des a présent.  
Théologiques et Ethiques X 808-811

<sup>vvvv</sup> The ascetic commandments of the Church based on the teaching on Christ.

cave, even heaven and earth themselves, will be removed. All who have not been clothed with Christ (Gal. 3:27), that is, those who have not received the light, as we said earlier, those who have not previously been in it and become light (Eph. 5:8), will appear naked and will be filled with much shame from every quarter. In addition, every act of each person, whether good or bad, every word, every thought, every memory that has arisen in us from our very birth till our last breath, will then be gathered together and be revealed in every member of mankind. With what, brethren, may we compare that disgrace, that unique disgrace? What punishment is greater than that fear and confusion of those who, as we have said, are then found in darkness and without the light-giving Spirit? How can that man live, how can he act, who sits in the darkness? Can he avoid the sudden flash of light that exposes every defilement of thought and deed? Let us hasten, then, my brethren, from henceforth even now to enter the narrow gate (Mt. 7:13) through penitence and to see the light that is within it! Indeed I beseech you, let us not be fainthearted in knocking and seeking and asking before the door is opened to us and we receive (cf Mt. 7:7f; Lk. 11:9f). Further, let us continue [to do so] till we enter within and receive the light and have it burning in our hearts without ceasing."<sup>www</sup>

St. Symeon goes on to explain that it is not because the judgment should happen on that Day that it is called the Day of Judgment, because there will not be, on that day from one side a certain place, and from the other side the Lord who will come to that place, but because God and the Master of the Universe, will shine at that moment with the glory of His divinity. The material sun will be dimmed by the brightness of the Master and will become invisible, same as the stars fade out in front

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www Discourses XXVIII 164-190

of the sun and become invisible. God alone will become at the same time Day and God, He who now is invisible for all eyes, and He who inhabits the inaccessible light will reveal Himself to all as He is, He will fill everything from His own light and will become for the saints the Eternal Day and Joy, without decline and without end, but absolutely inaccessible and invisible for the lazy and the sinful. In fact because those did not take heartfully during their lifetime to see the light of His glory thanks to their purification and to introduce it fully into themselves, he will be lawfully inaccessible to them in the future. But when people practice the commandments not reluctantly and by necessity, but for love of God, and by their free will and joyfully, they acquire virtues that will be counted for them as acquired by their own labor and offered to them by their Master as their own gifts; those gifts shall elevate them as well, proportionally towards the perfection of the image and resemblance of God, and will enable them to draw near to the inaccessible without being consumed from generation to generation.<sup>xxxx</sup>

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<sup>xxxx</sup> Le Jour du Seigneur .

Ce n'est pas non plus parce que le jugement doit se produire en ce jour qu'il est dit Jour du jugement" —car il n'y aura pas d'un côté ce jour-là et de l'autre le Seigneur qui doit y venir—, mais bien parce que lui, le Dieu et Maître de l'univers, brillera en ce moment de la gloire de sa divinité. C'est alors aussi que le soleil matériel sera voilé par l'éclat du Maître et deviendra invisible, comme maintenant les astres s'effacent devant le soleil et ne se voient plus ; et les astres eux-mêmes s'éteindront et les choses visibles seront toutes enroulées comme un livre, autrement dit s'écarteront en cédant la place au Créateur ; et c'est Lui uniquement qui sera à la fois Jour et Dieu, lui qui pour l'instant est invisible à tous les yeux, et lui qui habite la lumière inaccessible se révélera alors à tous tel qu'il est, comblera toutes choses de sa propre lumière et deviendra pour ses saints le Jour de joie éternelle, sans déclin et sans fin, mais absolument inaccessible et invisible pour les paresseux et les pécheurs de mon espèce. En effet, puisque ceux-ci n'ont pas eu à coeur durant leur vie présente de voir la lumière de sa gloire grâce à leur purification et de l'introduire tout entier en eux-mêmes, il sera à bon droit également inaccessible pour eux dans le futur'. Dieu, ayant voulu dès le commencement que le bien fût aussi nôtre, comme le dit la divine Ecriture, accorda à nos premiers parents, les premiers créés, le libre arbitre, et par leur intermédiaire, à nous également : s'ils pratiquaient et gardaient ses commandements, non à contrecoeur et par nécessité, mais par un amour bénévole à son égard, par leur volonté libre et avec joie, les vertus leur seraient comptées comme acquises par leurs propres peines et offertes par eux à leur Maître comme leurs propres dons; elles les élèveraient également au fur et à mesure vers la perfection de l'image et de la ressemblance de Dieu et leur feraient approcher l'Inaccessible sans danger d'être consumés et de subir la mort corporelle, de génération en génération, à mesure que chacun l'aborderait.  
Théologiques et Ethiques X 16-48

## Anticipated Purification and Judgment

St. Symeon explains further that for those who remain in infidelity retained in passions, Grace is absolutely unreachable and invisible, but for those who fulfill the commandments **with fear and trembling by faith** and who manifest a worthy repentance, Grace reveals itself visibly and produces incontestably in them the future judgment. Those come through **sequential judgment into the divine fire**, and bathed into the waters of tears that penetrate the entire body, are baptized gradually and entirely by the action of the fire of the Holy Spirit and become pure, entirely without any stain, sons of light and of the day. Those men are not judged by the judgment and the justice to come, because they have been judged in advance. For them and for their senses the Day of the Lord is already there, and when the Day will come for the rest of the world they will not notice any change because they are already in that Day. They are already in the assurance state of salvation.<sup>yyyy</sup>

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<sup>yyyy</sup> Ainsi nous est enseigné exactement que, pour ceux qui sont encore retenus dans l'infidélité' et dans les passions, la grâce est absolument inabordable et invisible, tandis que, pour ceux qui accomplissent les commandements avec crainte et tremblement par la foi et manifestent un digne repentir, elle se révèle visiblement et d'elle-même produit incontestablement en eux le jugement futur; ou plutôt, elle devient le jour du jugement divin, qui éclaire continuellement le purifié et lui fait apercevoir quel il est lui-même en vérité et quelles sont en détail toutes ses oeuvres, les actes matériels aussi bien que les activités spirituelles. Ce n'est pas tout, car il passe et repasse au jugement du feu divin, et, baigné dans l'eau des larmes qui pénètre le corps tout entier, il est baptisé peu à peu tout entier sous l'action du feu et de l'Esprit divins et devient pur tout entier, tout entier sans tache, fils de lumière et de jour e et non plus désormais d'un homme mortel. C'est bien pour cela qu'un tel homme n'est pas jugé par le jugement et la justice à venir, car il est jugé d'avance ; il n'est pas dénoncé par cette lumières, car il est illuminé d'avance ; ce n'est pas en entrant dans ce feu qu'il est éprouvé ou brûlé, car il est éprouvé d'avance ; ce n'est pas alors, à son sens, qu'apparaît le Jour du Seigneur, car il est devenu tout entier, grâce à la conversation et à la compagnie de Dieu, un jour clair et éclatant<sup>2</sup> ce n'est plus dans le monde qu'il se trouve alors ou avec le monde, mais absolument hors de celui-ci. Car (le Seigneur) dit : ((Je vous ai choisis du milieu du monde » et l'Apôtre ((Si nous nous jugions nous-mêmes, nous ne serions pas jugés ; mais jugés par le Seigneur, nous sommes châtiés, afin de ne pas être condamnés avec le monde C »), et encore : « Marchez en enfants de lumière. »

When the soul is fired up, it is not unconsciously that it is consumed, because the soul is not an insensible substance, but in full sensation and knowledge and in an unsupportable pain in the beginning, because the soul is endowed with sensation and reason. Then, after having purified us perfectly from the stains of passions, this fire becomes food and beverage, illumination and joy incessant in us, and transforms us into light by participation.<sup>zzzz</sup>

In other words, The Day of the Lord will not surprise the just, in fact it is the revelation of His divinity that constitutes the judgment for those in whom the divinity is revealed; because not any flesh would have been able to support the glory of His Divinity, if it appears in its nudity, without the association Man-God and the ineffable union, and all the creation would have perished, consumed body and soul together because of the incredulity that was taking hold of everybody in its power. In fact the divinity or the Grace of the Holy Spirit has never manifested itself to anyone without faith; if it does, it does not enlighten, but it burns, punishing rigorously rather than vivifying. This is clearly apparent in the fate of Paul, the elected vessel, that he

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Théologiques et Ethiques X 104-131

<sup>zzzz</sup> Chez ceux en qui le feu s'allume, il s'élève avec une grande flamme et il arrive jusqu'au ciel, ne laissant à celui qui est embrasé ni trêve ni repos. Et ce n'est pas de manière inconsciente, comme le pensent d'aucuns à mettre avec les morts, qu'il consume l'âme enflammée, car celle-ci n'est pas matière insensible, mais en pleine sensation et connaissance et dans une douleur insupportable au début, car l'âme est douée de sensation et de raison. Par la suite, après nous avoir purifiés parfaitement de la souillure des passions, ce feu devient nourriture et breuvage, illumination et joie incessante en nous, et il nous transforme nous-mêmes en lumière par participation. Le four que l'on allume est sans doute au début plutôt noirci par la fumée que dégage le combustible, mais lorsqu'il brûle à fond, il devient tout entier translucide et semblable au feu, sans que la fumée lui communique désormais la moindre noirceur. De même exactement, une âme qui a commencé à s'enflammer de l'amour divin aperçoit d'abord l'obscurité des passions, qui s'élève en elle dans le feu de l'Esprit comme une fumée; elle voit comme en un miroir la noirceur que produit en elle la fumée et se désole, puis elle sent que les épines des pensées et le bois mort des préjugés sont en train de se consumer et de se réduire complètement en cendres; lorsque tout cela est enfin anéanti et que l'essence de l'âme seule reste, débarrassée des passions, alors le feu divin et immatériel s'unit aussi à elle essentiellement<sup>1</sup> aussitôt elle s'enflamme, devient translucide et participe, comme le four, à ce feu sensible. C'est ainsi que le corps, lui aussi, devient un brasier en participant à la lumière divine et ineffable<sup>2</sup>.  
Théologiques et Ethiques VII, 512-537

suffered facing the inaccessible light, his eyes were hit, not illuminated; he was blinded and darkened rather than enlightened.<sup>aaaaa</sup>

## Denying the Future Resurrection is Anathema

Many of his opponents understood him wrongly saying that St. Symeon does not believe in the day of Judgment, and that he denies the resurrection and the compensations that are reserved for the just at that day, therefore he ripostes vigorously: “To the issue of the crowns and to the future rewards, it is learned by God Himself that He will initiate them, in a sense that he (St. Symeon in his vision) guesses that they transcend the intelligence, the word and the thought; but , and further more, **he conceives clearly as well in what state he will be himself after the resurrection as well as all his companions**, but he does not receive this presently, in spite that some have wrongly sought that we affirm it. Because, if we claim in principle that we receive everything down here, it follows, according to them, that we are denying the resurrection itself, the judgment as well as the retribution, and that we

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<sup>aaaaa</sup> En effet, c’est la révélation de sa divinité qui constitue le jugement pour ceux en qui elle se révèle; car aucune chair n’aurait pu supporter la gloire de sa divinité, si elle était apparue dans sa nudité, sans l’association Homme-Dieu et l’ineffable union, et toute la création aurait péri d’un coup, consumée corps et âme à la fois à cause de l’incrédulité qui tenait alors tous les êtres en son pouvoir. La divinité, c’est-à-dire la grâce de l’Esprit très saint, ne s’est jamais manifestée à personne en dehors de la foi ; si elle a pu se manifester, ou si elle venait à se manifester encore, contrairement à toute attente, à quelque homme, elle se montre redoutable et terrible ; elle n’éclaire pas, mais brûle, punissant rigoureusement plutôt qu’elle ne vivifie. C’est ce qui apparaît clairement dans le sort que Paul, le vase d’élection, a subi ; face à l’éclat de la lumière inaccessible qui fulgure en lui, ses yeux ont été atteints mais non illuminés ; il a été enténébré plutôt qu’éclairé ; il a perdu jusqu’à la faculté naturelle de voir, et cela, alors même qu’il était destiné à devenir le grand docteur de l’Eglise du Christ. Cet homme si excellent et si grand, qui a déclaré : ((Le Dieu qui a dit à la lumière de briller hors des ténèbres a brillé dans nos coeurs)> et un peu plus loin ((mais nous avons ce trésor», celui de l’illumination, ((dans nos coeurs° », à ce moment-là, n’était pas capable de voir le moindre rayon de la lumière.  
Théologiques et Ethiques X 82-103

reject deliberately the hope in the coming goods. Well, far thinking or saying anything of the sort, ourselves, contrarily **we through resolutely the anathema on those who say it**. We profess then and say that **for the present, in certain measure, we receive Down-Here the pledges of all the good**; the all, we hope to receive after death, according to the scripture: "Now –it is said- I know in part<sup>bbbb</sup>, but when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away<sup>cccc</sup>". And somewhere else: "now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.<sup>dddd</sup>" And how do you know, you the beloved friend of Christ, that you will be like him? Tell us how do you know it? – "It is by the Spirit Whom He has given us<sup>eeee</sup>, it is by Him that we know that we are children of God and that God Himself is in us.<sup>ffff</sup>"

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<sup>bbbb</sup> 1Cor 13:12

<sup>cccc</sup> 1Cor 13:10

<sup>dddd</sup> 1 Jn 3: 2

<sup>eeee</sup> 1Jn 3: 24

<sup>ffff</sup> Et au sujet des couronnes et des récompenses futures il est instruit par Dieu lui-même qui l'initie, en ce sens qu'il devine qu'elles transcendent l'intelligence, la parole et la pensée ; mais, de plus, il conçoit clairement aussi en quel état il sera lui-même après la résurrection ainsi que tous ses compagnons, mais il ne reçoit pas cela présentement, bien que certains aient pensé à tort que nous l'affirmons. Car, si nous posons en principe que nous recevons le tout ici-bas, il s'ensuit d'après eux que nous nions la résurrection elle-même, le jugement aussi bien que la rétribution, et que nous rejetons délibérément l'espérance des biens à venir. Or, loin de penser nous-mêmes ou de dire rien de tel, nous jetons au contraire résolument l'anathème à ceux qui le disent. Nous professons donc et nous disons que, pour le présent, dans une certaine mesure, nous recevons dès ici-bas les gages de tous les biens ; le tout, nous espérons le recevoir après la mort, selon l'Écriture ((Maintenant — est-il dit — je connais en partie ; mais quand sera venu le tout, ce qui est partiel prendra . Et ailleurs «Dès maintenant nous sommes enfants de Dieu et il n'a pas encore été manifesté ce que nous serons ; mais nous savons que, lorsque cela sera manifesté, nous serons semblables à lui. »

Et pour passer ici au discours par question et réponse, faisons comme si nous interroignons celui qui a dit cela ((D'où sais-tu, ami bien-aimé du Christ, que tu seras semblable à lui? Dis-le nous, d'où le sais-tu? s — ((Par l'Esprit qu'il nous a donnée ;> dit-il e c'est par lui que nous connaissons que nous sommes enfants de Dieu et que Dieu lui-même est en nous : voila ce qu'il m'a dit lui-même d'une voix mystérieuse. »

Théologiques et Ethiques V, 250-354



## St. Symeon's Orthodox perception of Hope

Hope is never based anymore on pure belief and faith in something yet to come (as in Judaism), but rather on a belief in what “we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life – the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us – that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us”<sup>ggggg</sup>; a belief in a truth that is being lived and experienced in the Church and that became an integral part of the spiritual, collective and individual, memory of the Church; a truth which has got already some “firstfruits of the Spirit” in conscious awareness; because God did in fact become Man, and He made it possible to everyone who believes in Him to experience His salvation, and to receive the Holy Spirit (Who is the long-awaited-for promise of the Father) as a pledge guaranteeing eternal life and salvation for whom who keeps that pledge undefiled and guards himself from losing Him by continuously “grieving”<sup>hhhhh</sup> Him in laziness and lack of full watchfulness against our passionate inclinations.

In this respect it is unorthodox to build a theology and a spirituality on one sentence taken out of its context, for example, when the Apostle Paul says “For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?”<sup>iiiiii</sup>, we should not forget that in the previous verse he was already

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<sup>ggggg</sup> 1Jn 1:1-3

<sup>hhhhh</sup> Eph 4:30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

<sup>iiiiii</sup> Rom 8:24 NKJV

speaking of “the firstfruits of the Spirit” as a pledge, the firstfruits do not belong to something that is still somewhere in the roots that is still to flower and to become fruits, but they are real fruits from the same nature and savor of the fruits to come. If it wasn’t so, our salvation in hope would be built on fully subjective ideas of salvation, same as the Judaic hope where not all Jews could agree on what type of salvation and consequently what type of Christ they could expect. As Orthodox, we know exactly what will happen at death and at the coming of the Day of the Lord because we are supposed to have tasted the firstfruits that is the Spirit of the Lord in our life. Besides that, he puts the verb “were saved” in the past tense to show the **salvation as something that has already occurred in the past and of which we have already tasted the “firstfruits”, and is yet to be consummated in the future.** And St. Symeon goes further to affirm, as we have seen above, that “**he conceives clearly as well in what state he will be himself after the resurrection as well as all his companions**”, therefore hope cannot be related to subjective imagination or unknown goodness to come, but is based on what we could already consciously taste, although in part, Down-Here.

### **The Paradox of assured Salvation while still in this body**

While reading St. Symeon, one could find himself with this Saint into an enigmatic situation, at a certain time carried away into exaltation by an overwhelming love for the Lord and suddenly completely down in sorrow for his sins: “That love prevented me from turning to things below, as though I were already completely freed from the bonds of the flesh, and I rejoiced and then I was again wholly human. I received the **certain knowledge** of the forgiveness of my sins, yet I saw myself as a **greater sinner than all** other men. It was impossible for me to disbelieve Him who spoke to me, yet I was **afraid to believe** because of the descent from that exaltation.<sup>iiiij</sup>”

At other times he is carried up to the height of contemplation; but with his will he draws himself down from it because of the limitations of human nature and **finds safety in abasement**. He sees himself knowing many things that are unknown to most men, yet he find himself more ignorant than all others. He rejoices because Christ, whom he has believed, has bestowed on him an eternal and unshakable kingdom, yet he constantly weeps as one who is unworthy of that which is above, and he ceases not weeping! And he continues describing his paradoxical situation:

“I dare not open my mouth and ask forgiveness for my actions; yet for the sake of others I speak boldly out of love and, to speak foolishly (cf 2 Cot. 11:23), people listen to me! I stand before Him **as a son**, yet my attitude is that of **a stranger** who dares not speak. I hear Him say, “**Well done**, faithful servant” (Mt. 25:21) and the rest, yet in reality I find that **I have not kept** even one talent of all those that were given me (cf Mt. 25:24f). It seems to me that **I reach the very summit of blessings**, yet I am **lying as a prisoner down in the abyss of my sins**, engulfed in despair. It is

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<sup>iiiij</sup> Disc XVII 59-66

**when I am abased below all others that I am lifted up above the heavens** (cf. Eph. 4:10) and am once more united in love to Christ our God. Before Him I hope to stand, once I am rid of the burden of this earthly flesh, and even closer to Him, and in addition be yet more clearly initiated into the eternal joy and exultation of the love that is on high.”<sup>kkkkk</sup>

The apostle Paul and St. Symeon have spoken openly of being lifted above the heavens, we could hardly find anyone else speaking about similar experiences, due to the overwhelming reticence or discretion in the Orthodox heritage. Most of our Fathers have avoided talking directly about Assurance of Salvation, and in the same trend, the Church does not declare the Sanctity of any person while still alive, for the main reason that Holiness and Passionless are dynamic states from where anyone could fall back, for many reasons and reasons. Therefore the Fathers as well as St. Symeon, teach to always keep the thoughts focused on the hour of death, and on the **abyss of the sins** from where we have been delivered by Grace, in order not to lean in front of ongoing calls of the “the old man”<sup>lllll</sup> who tries to come back to life through the passions that have been **put to sleep**<sup>mmmmm</sup> by the visitation of the Grace; all that in order to preserve oneself in the state of beatitude as long as possible and not to grieve<sup>nnnnn</sup> the Holy Spirit, by sinning in following the passions deliberately.

In not talking much about the mystical experiences, most of the Orthodox spiritual writers were probably trying to avoid misunderstandings that could lead to undesirable and unprofitable disputes, contentions and strivings by some theologians

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kkkkk Discourses XVII : 59-87

<sup>lllll</sup> Eph 4:22 “that you put off, concerning your former conduct, **the old man** which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts”

<sup>mmmmm</sup> Please see Paragraph True Απαθεια, page 49-51

<sup>nnnnn</sup> Ephesians 4:30 “And do not **grieve** the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption”

or some authorities in the Church, who could be lacking similar spiritual experiences. This happened indeed to St. Symeon from some theologians and some authorities of his times, and could be still happen today! However the importance of St. Symeon for the Orthodox spirituality, is in the fact that this authentic Theologian and Man of God has left for us, on purpose<sup>oooo</sup>, some written step by step guides, with full details, explanations and well reported personal mystical experiences, that everyone could follow or mirror his own little experiences against those well noted experiences of the Saint, in order to correct himself accordingly. Everyone therefore, will be able to find in his writings something that suits his spiritual situation and needs varying from the beginners to the middle and to the advanced ones on the ways of our Lord.

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<sup>oooo</sup> Please see paragraph Reticence or Openness, pages 7-8

## **Chapter 6**

## **Conclusion**

## The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence

Having gone through all those straightforward quotations on the rebirth experience, the awareness of Grace and the assurance of salvation in the spirituality of St. Symeon the New Theologian, one could reach a false conclusion that our Holy man, is deviating from the Orthodox spirituality that is expressed in much more emphasis on asceticism, rather than on grace and its effects in the soul. This is not the case because the foundation of this spirituality remains pure asceticism with meticulous adherence to the commandments of the Lord with great ascetic violence. The nuance remains that an experienced ascetic and a zealous beginner could reach to similar experiences of the presence of Grace in their souls, but the experienced ascetic will be able to keep it, while the beginner will easily lose it, but it will require a great deal of toil and asceticism to regain it. "As for the superhuman deeds of Euthymius and Sabas and the saints who followed them, who will recount them? Whether it was **before** they had received the grace of the Spirit or **afterwards**, it was never without many toils and labors, sweat and violence, difficulty and tribulation, that anyone was able to break through the darkness of the soul or see the light of the all-holy Spirit." "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force" (Mt. 11:12), since it is "through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of heaven. (Acts 14:22) The "kingdom of heaven" consists in partaking of the Holy Spirit, for this is what the saying "The kingdom of heaven is within you" (Lk. 17:21) means. So we must endeavor to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit within ourselves and to keep it. Thus how could those who are strangers to constant violence and difficulty, lowliness and tribulation, claim that they have the Holy Spirit within them. Without the works and sweat and the toils of virtue nobody obtains this reward.

Therefore I think that the common saying is true, “Show your works [first], and [then] seek the reward.”<sup>ppppp</sup>

The asceticism referred to in this document does not encompass monastic asceticism in its feats only, but extends to encompass the daily “giving oneself to the other” (Eph 5: 25) that is encountered in marriage and life in general.

However our holy man adds his nuance as follows: “As for me, I know one who, before he wearied himself and did violence to himself, with upright thoughts and in simplicity of heart diligently studied the divine Scriptures. After he had spent but a few days and nights doing so without wearying himself, if I may say so, he was so greatly enlightened by the grace from on high that it seemed to him that he had gone outside his body and his dwelling and the whole world. Though it was night it became like broad daylight. But since he had obtained them without toil he very quickly made light of these riches. So, by being careless, he lost all those riches at one time and went so far as not even to remember that he had ever contemplated such glory”.<sup>qqqqq</sup>

Ascetic toil does not entitle anybody to receive any spiritual gift from the Lord in return, because no one could offer any service to the Lord by pure asceticism, and no one could profit from the ascetic efforts of someone else, however one may profit from his own ascetic labor if he does it in humility and with spiritual knowledge<sup>rrrr</sup>,

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ppppp Discourses VI : 100

qqqqq Discourses VI : 122

<sup>rrrr</sup> Que nul n’aille donc s’imaginer qu’en pratiquant le jeûne ou les veilles, qu’en souffrant la faim ou la soif, en couchant à terre, en s’affligeant, en pleurant, en supportant les injures et les épreuves qui surviennent, il rend un service à Dieu ou que, par ces actes, il rapporte quelque chose à quelqu’un d’autre. C’est pour lui-même uniquement qu’il y a profit, et encore, s’il supporte et pratique tout cela dans l’humilité et la connaissance spirituelle ; sinon, même lui n’y trouve aucun profit. Car toute oeuvre, aussi grande qu’elle soit, qui n’est pas accomplie avec humilité et connaissance spirituelle, ne sert de rien à son auteur. Comment cela se fait-il, toutes les divines Ecritures l’apprendront à qui veut bien. Pour nous, notre seule intention est de



because in humility and with spiritual knowledge he will be able to keep the grace longer and longer and to integrate it into his own being.

## **Presumption and messalianism**

And our Saint remains shocked from the presumption of people who claim having the Spirit in themselves by faith, without having the slightest experience of rebirth or awareness of Grace, either in the beginning of their spiritual journey or anywhere thereafter: "How those who have never been found worthy to receive this glory or in any way to see it make the claim that they have it wholly within themselves, I cannot understand. What hardness of heart, what darkness, what ignorance and vain presumption!"<sup>sssss</sup>

It is easy to make an illusionary approach between what St. Symeon is saying and how Theodoret of Cyrus has described<sup>tttt</sup> the heresy of messalianism or the

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montrer que les pénitents aussi bien que les ascètes chevronnés, loin de rendre service au Seigneur, ne trouvent que leur propre avantage et ne font de bien qu'à eux-mêmes.  
Théologiques et Ethiques VII, 117-131

<sup>sssss</sup> Discourses VI : 133

<sup>tttt</sup> THEODORET OF CYRUS  
The ecclesiastical history  
Book IV: CHAPTER X: Of the heresy of the Messalians.  
AT this time also arose the heresy of the Messalians. Those who translate their name into Greek call them Euchitae.  
They have also another designation which arose naturally from their mode of action. From their coming under the influence of a certain demon, which they supposed to be the advent of the Holy Ghost, they are called enthusiasts.  
Men who have become infected with this plague to its full extent shun manual labour as iniquitous; and, giving themselves over to sloth, call the imaginations of their dreams prophesyings. Of this heresy Dadoes, Sabbas, Adelphius, Hermas, and Simeones were leaders,

enthusiasts, those "shun manual labor as iniquitous; and, giving themselves over to sloth, call the imaginations of their dreams prophesyings... alleging that neither good nor harm came of the divine food (communion)...That no benefit accrues to the recipients of Holy Baptism, and that it is only by earnest prayer that the indwelling demon is driven out, for that every one born into the world derives from his first father slavery to the demons just as he does his nature; but that when these are driven away, (they believe that the opposing spirit retreats, and the grace of the Holy Ghost supervenes), then come the Holy Ghost giving sensible and visible signs of His presence, at once freeing the body from the impulse of the passions and wholly

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and others besides, who did not hold aloof from the communion of the Church, alleging that neither good nor harm came of the divine food of which Christ our Master said "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood shall live for ever."

In their endeavor to hide their unsoundness they shamelessly deny it even after conviction, and abjure men whose opinions are in harmony with their own secret sentiments.

Under these circumstances Letoius, who was at the head of the church of Melitine, a man full of divine zeal, saw that many monasteries, or, shall I rather say, brigands' caves, had drunk deep of this disease. He therefore burnt them, and drove out the wolves from the flock.

In like manner the illustrious Amphilochius to whom was committed the charge of the metropolis of the Lycaonians and who ruled all the people, no sooner learnt that this pestilence had invaded his diocese than he made it depart from his borders and freed from its infection the flocks he fed.

Flavianus, also, the far famed high-priest of the Antiochenes, on learning that these men were living at Edessa and attacking with their peculiar poison all with whom they came in contact, sent a company of monks, brought them to Antioch, and in the following manner convicted them in their denial of their heresy. Their accusers, he said, were calumniating them, and the witnesses giving false evidence; and Adelphius, who was a very old man, he accosted with expressions of kindness, and ordered to take a seat at his side. Then he said "We, O venerable sir, who have lived to an advanced age, have more accurate knowledge of human nature, and of the tricks of the demons who oppose us, and have learnt by experience the character of the gift of grace. But these younger men have no clear knowledge of these matters, and cannot brook to listen to spiritual teaching. Wherefore tell me in what sense you say that the opposing spirit retreats, and the grace of the Holy Ghost supervenes." The old man was won over by these words and gave vent to all his secret venom, for he said that no benefit accrues to the recipients of Holy Baptism, and that it is only by earnest prayer that the in-dwelling demon is driven out, for that every one born into the world derives from his first father slavery to the demons just as he does his nature; but that when these are driven away, then come the Holy Ghost giving sensible and visible signs of His presence, at once freeing the body from the impulse of the passions and wholly ridding the soul of its inclination to the worse; with the result that there is no more need for fasting that restrains the body, nor of teaching or training that bridles it and instructs it how to walk aright. And not only is the recipient of this gift liberated from the wanton motions of the body, but also clearly foresees things to come, and with the eyes beholds the Holy Trinity.

In this wise the divine Flavianus dug into the foul fountain-head and succeeded in laying bare its streams. Then he thus addressed the wretched old man. "O thou that hast grown old in evil days, thy own mouth convicts thee, not I, and thou art testified against by thy own lips." After their unsoundness had been thus exposed they were expelled from Syria, and withdrew to Pamphylia, which they filled with their pestilential doctrine.

riding the soul of its inclination to the worse; with the result that there is no more need for fasting that restrains the body, nor of teaching or training that bridles it and instructs it how to walk aright. And not only is the recipient of this gift liberated from the wanton motions of the body, but also clearly foresees things to come, and with the eyes beholds the Holy Trinity."

It is obvious that St. Symeon did not say that there is no benefit from the Holy Baptism; he said that we could lose its benefits by our sins, and we have to go into a second baptism which is much more laborious that involves repentance and many tears. And after receiving Grace one might easily lose it through sloth and lack of spiritual labor including fasting as well, and meticulous fulfillment of all the commandments of the Lord, in Humility and in Spiritual knowledge. For St. Symeon there is no equivalent good to the good that comes from Holy Communion for the one who knows what he is communing with. The Grace of the Holy Spirit is never said to be sensible (to the five senses of the body) but and nevertheless is in full conscious awareness of a spiritually alive soul. Conscious awareness being not related to the five senses is related to the spiritual sense that our orthodox spirituality relate to the "enlightenednou". And at last but not least the apophatic literature that St. Symeon has left for us is far from alleging that the Holy Trinity or the essence of Grace could be conceived, understood or approached neither by the senses nor by the mind, or by any soul, ever in this life or in the life to come. Therefore not embracing fully the teaching of St. Symeon in fear of messalianism is an unforgivable mistake and a direct sin against the Holy Spirit who has spoken through St. Symeon and who has warned us from leading lukewarm lives and from losing the benefits of our baptism and not making enough efforts to regain them fully.

## **Symeon Defense and his Audacious Prayer for Newness in Life**

No one could defend the authenticity of St. Symeon with the genuine Orthodox fathers better than Symeon himself. I have chosen to translate the following text that includes a very audacious prayer; this text summarizes his teachings and justifies them in linking them to the Fathers of the past, Bearers of God:

“What all Christians know, therefore: Christ does not lie, He is true God; to those who show proof of love for him by observing the commandments, according to the profession of faith, it is evident, He manifests Himself, as said Himself; by His manifestation he gives them the Holy Spirit in person and then, by the Holy Spirit, he and the Father are inseparably with them. As they are (bearers of the Holy trinity inside them), they say nothing of their own funds, and he who claims the contrary confirms equivalently that a man can know what is proper to man and that men can know in the same manner what is proper to God; otherwise, he deals with them, as with a sum of liars and tellers of tales, **those who speak by the Holy Spirit**, saying they are not taught by Him, but they teach to others under their own reasoning, things they have neither seen nor heard. On the contrary we should know that, if they decide in accordance with the **Fathers of the past, Bearers of God**, it is clear that they speak in turn in the same Spirit; and those who do not believe or even accuse them, sin against He who speaks for them.

You have been taught, my dear, that the kingdom of heaven is inside of you, if you wish that all eternal good are in your hands. Hasten yourself to see, grasp and get into yourself the good held in reserve, and take custody, while imagining possessing them, not to be deprived of everything; mourn, prostrate yourself; as the former blind of the past, say now you too:

**"Have mercy on me, Son of God, and open for me the eyes of the soul, so that I see the light of the world that You are, God, and that I also**

become son of the divine day; do not leave me , as unworthy, a stranger to Your divinity, oh Good. Show Yourself to me, Lord, so that I know that You loved me for having kept, Lord, Thy divine commandments. Send the Comforter, O Merciful, on me too, so that He Himself teaches me what concerns You and what is Yours, O God of the universe. Let shine on me the true light, O merciful, so that I see Your glory, the one that You had before the world was, with the Father. Remain, as you said, in me too, so that I become in my turn worthy to remain in You, and knowingly that I will then enter into You and that I knowingly possess You in me. Deign, O invisible, take shape in me, so that seeing Your inaccessible beauty, I bear Your image, O heavenly, and I forget all things visible. Give me the glory that was given to You, O merciful, by the Father, so that, like You, like all your servants, I became god according to the grace and that I am continuously with You now and always and for the endless centuries. Amen."

Yes my beloved brother, believe and be confident that this is so, and that this is our faith. It is what constitutes — believe it, brother — to reborn, to be renovated and to live in Christ. Don't you hear **Basil the Great** saying in his exhortation for the feast of Lights: "Don't you desire, man, to see yourself becoming young, from the old that you are?" And **Paul**: "If someone is in Christ he is a new creation; the past is past, see, everything has become new." What do you understand by "everything"? Tell me, say it! Is it the sky that changed, or the earth? So it is the sun or the stars or the sea or something visible, which became new very recently? No, you cannot say it, because it is for us, and because of us, that he said that. **We were dead, and we are back to life; corruptible, and are going incorruptibility; mortals, and we are transported in immortality; terrestrial, and we become heavenly; carnal born of the flesh, and we become spiritual generated and created again by the Holy Spirit.** So then this is the new creation in Christ, brothers. This is what **is accomplished and is realized every day among the faithful** and true elected; and, communing with all these good, **partly**, as we have often said, as long as they are in the body, they do so (commune) **consciously**; moreover, they also hope (trust) to receive them, as an inheritance, after the death, in a

wholeness and **certainty**, that is **entering fully in the fullness of the good which they had shared at present.**”uuuuu

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uuuuu Que tous les chrétiens le sachent donc : le Christ ne ment pas, il est Dieu véritable ; à ceux qui font preuve d’amour envers lui par l’observation des commandements, selon la profession de foi, il se manifeste, ainsi qu’il l’a dit lui-même; par sa manifestation il leur donne l’Esprit-Saint en personne et ensuite, par l’Esprit-Saint, lui-même et le Père demeurent inséparablement avec eux. Tels qu’ils sont, ils ne disent rien de leur propre fonds, et celui qui prétend le contraire affirme équivalamment qu’un homme peut savoir ce qui est propre à l’homme et que les hommes peuvent savoir de la même manière ce qui est propre à Dieu ; et sinon, il traite en somme de menteurs et de diseurs de fables ceux qui parlent par l’Esprit-Saint, en disant qu’ils ne sont pas enseignés par lui, mais qu’ils enseignent aux autres, en vertu de leurs propres raisonnements, des choses qu’ils n’ont ni vues ni entendu dire. Au contraire il faut savoir que, si ces derniers se prononcent en accord avec les pères d’autrefois porteurs de Dieu, il est évident qu’ils parlent à leur tour dans le même Esprit ; et ceux qui ne les croient pas ou même les accusent, pêchent contre celui qui parle par eux’.

Tu as donc appris, mon cher, que le royaume des cieux est intérieur à toi, si tu le veux, et que tous biens éternels sont dans tes mains. Empresse-toi donc de voir, de saisir et d’obtenir en toi les biens tenus en réserve et prends garde en t’imaginant les posséder de ne pas être privé de tout ; gémis, prosterne-toi ; comme l’aveugle autrefois , dis maintenant toi aussi :

**« Aie pitié de moi, Fils de Dieu, et ouvre-moi les yeux de l’âme, afin que je voie la lumière du monde que tu es, Dieu, et que je devienne moi aussi fils du jour divin ; ne me laisse pas, comme indigne, étranger à ta divinité, ô bon. Manifeste-toi toi-même à moi, Seigneur, afin que je sache que tu m’as aimé pour avoir gardé, Maître, tes divins commandements.**

**Envoie le consolateur, ô clément, sur moi aussi, afin qu’il m’enseigne lui-même ce qui te concerne et ce qui est tien, ô Dieu de l’univers. Fais briller sur moi la lumière véritable, ô miséricordieux, afin que je voie ta gloire, celle que tu avais avant que le monde fût auprès de ton Père. Reste, comme tu l’as dit, en moi aussi, afin que je devienne à mon tour digne de rester en toi et que sciemment j’entre alors en toi et que sciemment je te possède en moi. Daigne, ô invisible, prendre forme en moi, afin qu’en voyant ta beauté inaccessible, je porte ton image, ô céleste, et que j’oublie toutes les choses visibles. Donne-moi la gloire que t’a donnée, ô miséricordieux, le Père, afin que, semblable à toi comme tous tes serviteurs, je devienne dieu selon la grâce et que je sois avec toi continuellement, maintenant et toujours et pour les siècles sans fin. Amen.»**

Oui mon frère bien-aimé, crois et sois persuadé qu’il en est ainsi et que telle est notre foi. C’est en cela que consiste — crois-le, frère — de renaître, d’être rénové et de vivre dans le Christ. N’entends-tu pas Basile le Grand dire dans son exhortation pour la fête des Lumières<sup>1</sup> : ((Ne désires-tu pas, homme, te voir devenir jeune, de vieux que tu es ?) et Paul: « Si quelqu’un est dans le Christ, c’est une création nouvelle ; le passé est révolu, voyez, tout est devenu nouveau ».

Qu’entend-il par ((tout)) ? Dis-le moi, dis-le! Est-ce le ciel qui a changé, ou la terre ? Alors, c’est le soleil, ou les astres ou la mer ou quelque chose de visible, qui est devenu nouveau tout récemment? Non, tu ne peux pas le dire, car c’est pour nous et à cause de nous qu’il a dit cela. Nous étions morts et nous revenons à la vie; corruptibles, et nous passons à l’incorruptibilité ; mortels, et nous sommes transportés dans l’immortalité ; terrestres, et nous devenons célestes ; charnels nés de la chair, et nous devenons spirituels, engendrés et créés à nouveau par l’Esprit-Saint.

Voilà donc ce qu’est la nouvelle création dans le Christ, frères. Voilà ce qui s’accomplit et se réalise chaque jour chez les fidèles et élus véritables ; et, communiant à tous ces biens partiellement, comme nous l’avons dit souvent, tant qu’ils sont dans le corps, ils le font de manière consciente ; de plus, ils espèrent aussi les recevoir en héritage après la mort en toute plénitude et certitude, c’est-à-dire en entrant pleinement dans la plénitude des biens auxquels ils ont eu part à présent.

Théologiques et Ethiques V, 418-479

# Epilogue

## **True Orthodoxy vis-à-vis renewed non Orthodox movements**

Moreover, it is vain to make any approach between St. Symeon and any of the Protestant Evangelical Renewals or with most of the Pentecostal Movements, for the main reason that the so called Renewal, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches do not agree among themselves on the same and exact spirituality, and for the simplest reason that the divergence starts from the very fact that none of those Protestant schools believes in Saints or in sanctification preserved through synergic asceticism, where the Lord is the sanctifier and we are the sanctified by our associated toil with His Holy Spirit (actualizing full Sanctification and thus Sainthood and Holiness in this life), because for those Churches Adam's fall is irrevocable and the fallen body (passions) is incurable; which is fundamentally in opposition to all the spirituality of St. Symeon the New Theologian, who calls to the actualization of Salvation and to full Sanctification and Holiness in this life and in this body<sup>vwww</sup>, for the simplest reason that Christ is not a prophet for the things to come, but God in person who actualizes salvation for those who pledge allegiance to Him and receive from Him the Holy Spirit fully in this life.

This is what makes of St. Symeon an authentic Orthodox Father who calls for Renewal, Rebirth experience or second Baptism in the Holy Spirit, and even more of all of that, to get hold of the pledge that assures our betrothal to Christ, teaching us

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<sup>vwww</sup> The proof that the Grace sanctifies the souls as well as the bodies of our saints, is in numerous graces and miracles that we receive from the Lord through their intercessions and from the smells of uncreated perfumes that emanate from their pieces of bones that we venerate during the celebration of their memorials, and this is another exclusive proof available to the faithful according to the Orthodox faith.

how to guard it watchfully in conscious awareness, and also to start tasting the firstfruits of our already started eternal life — in the Kingdom of God that is within us as the Lord said it is — while still Down-Here in this body, all within the authentic and exclusive spirituality of the Orthodox Church.

Therefore the terms “Rebirth Experience”, “Assurance of Salvation”, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” and “Conscious Awareness of Grace” contained in the title and throughout this thesis do not carry with them the implications as understood by many Christians in the West where the above terms have become a sort of religious jargon.

The above terms are presented here as understood through the exclusively Orthodox experience of St. Symeon, an experience that extends back to the days of our fathers Bearers Of God and to our Lord and His Apostles and would go on with those who fuel it with renewed pledged allegiance to Christ, constant renunciation of the Devil’s pomp, constant rejection of the lust that is in the world and constant discipline and subjection of the passions of the flesh through compunction, tears and repentance amounting to the joy of the “Heavenly Bride and His Kingdom”.

In reality there is implied in this work a truthful invitation for all, to reconsider their spiritual experiences in the light of the biblically rooted teachings of the authentic Orthodox Fathers as recapitulated by St. Symeon the New Theologian.