

‘THE LIFE AND THE LIGHT’: THE INFLUENCE OF SAINT SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN ON THE TEACHING OF SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS

PORPHYRIOS GEORGI

*Saint John of Damascus Institute of Theology
University of Balamand, Lebanon*

Two saints, Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas, played a crucial role in reviving Patristic theology during the period preceding the Great Captivity of Constantinople. Both monastic writers are known as the theologians of the Uncreated Light and promoters of Hesychasm, and they remain among the most prominent spokesmen for Orthodox theology until our times. Even though three hundred years separate them, one finds in the writings of Saint Gregory an organic continuity with Saint Symeon's teaching. This article explores Palamas' reception of the New Theologian's theology and the relation between the teachings of these two leading figures of Christian spirituality.

During the period of cultural revival preceding the Great Captivity of Constantinople,¹ there arose in the Church two theologians who renewed Patristic Theology. Their names were Symeon the New Theologian (+1022) and Gregory Palamas (+1359). Originating from Asia Minor, they were both educated in the aristocratic environment of Constantinople and the imperial court before choosing to follow the monastic path. Symeon departed to Studion Monastery while Gregory went to Athos, the Holy Mountain. Around three hundred years separate these two leading figures of Christian spirituality. Nevertheless, one finds in the writings of Saint Gregory an organic continuity of Saint Symeon's teaching. Both monastic writers are known as the theologians of the Uncreated Light and promoters of Hesychasm, and they remain till our present time among the most prominent spokesmen for Orthodox theology.² The time in which Palamas lived was a critical moment in the history of Eastern Christianity, a phase of political, cultural, and theological turmoil and travail.³ Within the vibrant Byzantine setting of the fourteenth century, and as he

¹ J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, A History of Development of Doctrine 2: The Spirit of Eastern Christendom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 252–54.

² Δ. Κουτρομπή, *Ἡ ἐπικαιρότης τοῦ Ἱηγουρίου Παλαμᾶ: Ἡ Χάρις τῆς Θεολογίας* (Ἀθήνα: Δόμος, 1995), 157–69; F. Georgi, *Ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ: Ἡ ἐσχατολογία τοῦ ἁγίου Ἱηγουρίου Παλαμᾶ* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Μπαμπουνάκη, 2010).

³ For the historical and intellectual framework of the Hesychastic controversy, see P. Lemerle, ‘Le Tomos du concile de 1351 et l'horismos de Matthieu Cantacuzène’, *REB* 9 (1951): 55–64; A. Papadakis, ‘Gregory Palamas at the Council of Blachernae (1351)’, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 10 (1969):

confronted the intellectual elite of the Byzantine Church and society, Saint Gregory found himself having to defend Saint Symeon's approach to Orthodox dogma, theological method, and monastic spirituality.⁴

Contemporary interest in the study of the two writers arose in the fourth decade of the twentieth century, with the writings of theologians like Fr Dumitru Staniloae,⁵ Saint Justin Popovitch,⁶ as well as distinguished scholars of the Russian Diaspora, such as Archbishop Basil Krivocheine,⁷ Archimandrite Cyprian Kern,⁸ Vladimir Lossky,⁹ Fr John Meyendorff,¹⁰ and their contemporaries. Their efforts led to a real abundance of studies on Hesychasm in the second half of the twentieth century.¹¹ On the other hand, opinions within contemporary academic research into Symeon and Palamas remain divergent and controversial, expressing the multiplicity of the backgrounds of their researchers.¹² Among the theological issues raised, one can

333–42; L. Clucas, *The Hesychast Controversy in Byzantium in the Fourteenth Century: A Consideration of the Basic Evidence*, Microfilm, I & II (PhD diss.: University of California, 1975); Δ. Τσάμης, 'Ο Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς καὶ ἡ ἐποχὴ τοῦ', in X. Κοντάκης, ed., *Πρακτικά Θεολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου εἰς τιμὴν τοῦ Ἁγίου Γρηγορίου Παλαμᾶ* (Θεσσαλονίκη: 1985), 51–69; B. Χριστοφορίδης, *Οἱ ἡσυχαστικὲς ἔριδες κατὰ τὸ ἸΔ' αἰῶνα* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Παρατηρητής, 1993); Tsirpanlis C. N., 'Byzantine Humanism and Hesychasm in the Thirteenth & Fourteenth Century: Synthesis or Antithesis, Reformation or Revolution', *PBR* 12:1–3 (1993): 13–23; Δ. Γ. Κουτσούρη, *Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς καὶ ἡ ἀντιησυχαστικὴ κακοδοξία τοῦ ἸΔ' αἰῶνα* (Σροχαλία: Ἀθήνα, 1996); Γ. Μαντζαρίδης, ed., *Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς στὴν Ἱστορία καὶ τὸ Παρόν: Πρακτικά διεθνῶν ἐπιστημονικῶν συνεδρίων Ἀθηνῶν καὶ Λεμεσοῦ* (Ἅγιον Ὅρος: Ἱερά Μέγιστη Μονὴ Βατοπαίδιου, 2000).

⁴ Concerning the intellectual identity of the opponents of Palamas, see the debate between Fathers John Meyendorff and John Romanides: J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, *Patristica Sorbonensia* 3 (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1959); J. Romanides, 'Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics: Part I–II', *GOTR* 2 (1960–61): 186–205, 2 (1963–64): 225–70.

⁵ D. Staniloae, *Viața și Învățătura Sfântului Grigore Palama* (Sibiu, 1938); see also S.L. Toma, 'Ἡ πατερικὴ παράδοσις εἰς τὸ ἔργον τοῦ π. Δημητρίου Στανιλοάε καὶ ὁ σύγχρονος κόσμος' (Θεσσαλονίκη: Πουρναρά, 2007).

⁶ J. Popovitch, *Les voies de la connaissance de Dieu*, trad. Jean Louis Palierne (Lausanne: Age d'homme, 1998).

⁷ B. Krivocheine, 'The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas', *ECQ* 3 (1938): 26–33, 71–84, 138–56, 193–215; id., *Dans la lumière du Christ* (Chevetogne, Belgique: , 1980). See also English translation of this book: id., *In the Light of Christ: Saint Symeon the New Theologian: Life-Spirituality-Doctrine*, trans. Gythiel Anthony (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987).

⁸ K. Kern, 'Les éléments de la théologie de Grégoire Palamas', *Irénikon* 20 (1947): 6–33, 164–93. See also his elaborate study on the anthropology of Saint Gregory Palamas: *Antropologia sv. Grigoriia Palamy* (Paris, 1950) (in Russian).

⁹ V. Lossky, *Théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient* (Paris: Aubier—Editions Montaigne, 1944).

¹⁰ J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, *Patristica Sorbonensia* 3 (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1959); id., 'Les débuts de la controverse hésychaste', *Byzantion* 23 (1953): 87–120; *Saint Grégoire Palamas et la mystique orthodoxe*, *Maîtres Spirituels* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1959).

¹¹ I. Hausher, *La methode d'oraison hésychaste* (Roma: OCA, 1927); id., *Penthos: La doctrine de la componction dans l'Orient Chrétien* (Roma: OCA, 1944); id., 'Variations récentes dans les jugements sur la methode d'oraison des Hésychastes', *OCP* 19 (1953): 424–28; id., 'L'Hésychasme: Étude de spiritualité', *OCP* 22 (1956): 5–40, 247–85; id., *Nom du Christ et voies d'oraison* (Roma: OCA, 1960).

¹² Π. Χρήστου, ed., *Γρηγόριω Ἀρχιεπισκόπῳ Θεσσαλονίκῃς καὶ ὑπερμάχῳ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας: Πανηγυρικός Τόμος ἑορτασμοῦ τῆς ἑξακοστῆς ἐπετείου τοῦ Θανάτου τοῦ ἁγίου Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Ἡ Ἱερά Μητρόπολις Θεσσαλονίκῃς καὶ ἡ Θεολογικὴ Σχολὴ τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκῃς, 1960); E. Behr Siegel, 'Reflexions sur la doctrine de Grégoire Palamas', *Contacts* 12 (1960): 118–25; D. Stiernon, 'Bulletin sur le Palamisme', *REB* 30 (1972): 231–341; K. Ware, 'The Debate about Palamism', *ECR* 9 (1977):

find some initiatives undertaken by contemporary scholars to situate the two theologians vis-à-vis their preceding patristic heritage.¹³ Numerous other studies have also attempted to examine the relation of Saint Symeon's teaching to that of Saint Gregory;¹⁴ nevertheless, the question of how to analyse this delicate theme remains open.

This article intends to explore Palamas' reception of the New Theologian's teaching on the vision of the Uncreated Light, in what way he was inspired by him, whether or not he imitated and quoted him directly, and to what extent he was creative or renovative in rearticulating Saint Symeon's theology in the fourteenth century.

45–63; R. Synkevitch, *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition II* (XIIIe – XIXe s.), Corpus Christianorum, éd. C. Conticello et V. Conticello (Tunhout Brepols: Centre d'études des religions du livre, 2002), 131–88; X. Σταμούλη, *Άσκησις αὐτοσυνειδησίας: Μελετήματα δογματικῆς θεολογίας* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Τὸ Παλίμψηστον, 2004), 121–61.

¹³ I. Hausherr, *Un grand mystique byzantin: Vie de Syméon le Nouveau Théologien (949–1022) par Nicetas Stéthatos. Texte grec inédit publié avec introduction et notes critiques*, OC 12 (Roma, 1928); H.-G. Beck, 'Symeon der Theologe', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 46 (1953): 57–62; B. Krivocheine, *Le thème de l'ivresse spirituelle dans la mystique de saint Syméon le Nouveau Théologien*, SP 5 (1962): 368–76; T. Spidlik, *Symeon le Nouveau Théologien*, DS, vol. 14 (1990), col. 1387–1401; A. Golitzin, 'Hierarchy versus Anarchy? Dionysius Areopagita, Symeon the New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, and their common roots in ascetical tradition', SVTQ 38 (1994): 131–79; H. Alfeyev, 'The Patristic Background of Saint Symeon the Theologian's Doctrine of the Divine Light', SP 32 (1995): 229–331; A. Golitzin, *Symeon the New Theologian. Life, Times and Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997); H. Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford—New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Δ. Κοντοστεργίου, 'Η Εκκλησιολογία κατὰ τὸν Συμεὼν τὸν Νέον Θεολόγον', Γ.Π. 83 (2000): 987–1048; Γ. Μαρτζέλου, 'Η θέα τοῦ Θεοῦ κατὰ τὸν ἅγιο Συμεὼν τὸ Νεὸ Θεολόγο', in *Διακονία καὶ Λόγος. Χαριστήριος τόμος πρὸς τιμὴ τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Χριστοδούλου* (Ἀθήνα: Ἀρμός, 2004), 129–56; Β. Τσίγκου, *Ὁ ἀνακαινισμὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κατὰ τὴν διδασκαλίαν τοῦ ἁγίου Συμεὼν τοῦ Νέου Θεολόγου* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Πουρναρᾶ, 2006); G. Habra, 'The Source of the Doctrine of Gregory Palamas on the Divine Energies', ECQ 12 (1957–58): 244–52, 294–303, 338–47; J. Meyendorff, *St Grégoire Palamas et la mystique orthodoxe* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1959); G. Florovsky, 'St Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers', in id., *Collected Works I*, 105–20; L. H. Grondijs, 'The Patristic Origins of Gregory Palamas' Doctrine of God', SP 5 (1962): 323–28; J. Nadal, 'La critique par Aquinados de l'hermeneutic patristique de Palamas', *Istina* 3 (1974): 297–328; G. Mantzarides, 'Tradition and Renewal in the Theology of Saint Gregory Palamas', ECR 1–2 (1977): 1–18; A. (De) Halleux, 'Palamisme et Tradition', *Irénikon* 4 (1975): 479–95; G. Patacs, 'Palamism before Palamas', ECR 2 (1975): 125–36; A. J. Sopko, 'Palamism Before Palamas and the Theology of Gregory of Cyprus', SVTQ 23 (1979): 139–47; Δ. Μπακάρου, 'Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς καὶ τὸ κήρυγμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας', Γ.Π. 64 (1981): 64–68; J. (Van) Rossum, *Palamism and Church Tradition: Palamism and its Use of Patristic Tradition and its Relation to Thomistic Thought* (New York, 1985); J. Garrigues, 'Retour aux sources palamites à la lumière d'une édition critique', *Istina* 20 (1975): 315–20.

¹⁴ B. Krivocheine, 'Grégoire Palamas ou Symeon le Nouveau Théologien', MEPREO 11 (1963): 205–10 and "Other Chapters": St Gregory Palamas or St Symeon the New Theologian, JMP 4 (1986): 69–72; I. Ἀλφέγιεβ, 'Τὸ πατρικὸ ὑπόβαθρο τῆς διδασκαλίας τοῦ ἁγίου Συμεὼν τοῦ Νέου Θεολόγου καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ περὶ θεώσεως τοῦ ἀνθρώπου', in *Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς στὴν Ἱστορία καὶ τὸ Παρόν: Πρακτικὰ διεθνῶν ἐπιστημονικῶν συνεδρίων Ἀθηνῶν καὶ Λεμεσοῦ* (Ἅγιον Ὅρος: Ἱερά Μέγιστη Μονὴ Βατοπαιδίου, 2000), 95–110.

The Eternal Light, Reign, and Glory of the Holy Trinity

As a starting point, it should be noted that the two theologians in many texts acknowledge the divine and indeed the Trinitarian character of the light revealed to the saints through mystical experience. Saint Symeon states clearly that: 'God is light and the sight of him is like a light. It is therefore at the sight of the light that we understand for the first time that God is'.¹⁵ He affirms also: 'The Father is light, the Son is light, the Holy Spirit is light...Indeed, the three are one light, unique, undivided... God is seen completely as a simple light'.¹⁶ Hence, far from any systematisation of theological discourse and terminology, the eleventh-century New Theologian aims at guiding his disciples spiritually by describing his own personal mystical experience: 'I fell into a trance before your beauty and was struck with amazement, O Trinity, my God. The traits in each of the three are the same, and the three are one countenance (*πρόσωπον*): my God, whose name is Spirit, the God of the universe'.¹⁷

Both theologians distinguish the light that reveals God from the divine essence, identifying it as the *energia* which is common to the three persons of the Holy Trinity. They also identify the vision of light with the manifestation of the divine Reign,¹⁸ Glory, and Beauty of the Triune God. In his twenty-fourth Hymn, Saint Symeon utters, 'Grant me the sight of your face, O Logos, and the enjoyment of your ineffable beauty. Let me contemplate and delight in your vision, the unutterable vision, the invisible vision, the awesome vision. Grant me the telling of at least its energies, if not its essence'.¹⁹ In another text, he clarifies that,

Indeed, there is no other way to know God, if not by seeing the light that emanates from him...the unapproachable glory of his face, the energy and the power of his most Holy Spirit, in other words his light, no one can speak of it, if he does not first see the light itself...and does not know intimately its illuminations and energies.²⁰

He also says: 'We bear witness that God is light, that all those who have been deemed worthy of beholding him have seen him as light, for the light of his glory goes before him and it is impossible that he appears without light'.²¹

Saint Gregory Palamas systematises this teaching on the patristic distinction between energy and essence in God. He clarifies that this divine light and *energy* is

¹⁵ *Theological and Ethical Treaties* V, 278 (SC 129, 100); *Hymn XXIV*, 57 (SC 174, 432; *ibid.*, 103, 436).

¹⁶ *Hymn XXIII*, 3 (SC 174, 412). *Theological and Ethical Treaties VIII*, 104 (SC 129, 208).

¹⁷ *Hymn XXIV*, 251 (SC 174, 244).

¹⁸ The biblical term βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is translated in this paper as 'Reign of God' in order to emphasise the fact that Saint Symeon and Saint Gregory follow their preceding patristic tradition in considering this βασιλεία as an uncreated reality identified with the Energy of God (ἐνέργεια), his presence (παρουσία) and his manifestation (θεοφάνεια) and not as a 'kingdom' belonging to the created realm.

¹⁹ *Hymn XXIV*, 6 (SC 174, 226).

²⁰ *Theological and Ethical Treaties* V, 256 (PG 129:98).

²¹ *Catechesis XXVIII*, (SC 113 and 109, 136).

granted to humanity as the grace of the Holy Spirit, through which God is manifested in the bodies and souls of the saints. This light is therefore called ‘the Reign of God’;²² it is ‘the divinity of God...the beauty and radiance of the divine nature...the natural ray and glory of Divinity’;²³ or ‘the light of the divine Reign’ and ‘the glory of the divine nature’.²⁴ Being uncreated, the light is not separated from the One God and the One Divinity, but is rather ‘distinguished from the divine essence as the glory and radiance of this essence’.²⁵ For this reason, the uncreated divine ‘energy’ and the uncreated divine essence are both considered by Palamas to be ‘Divinity’.²⁶ By quoting authoritative liturgical texts,²⁷ Saint Gregory affirms the divine and Trinitarian character of the light of Christ: ‘Let us ascend to the holy and heavenly mountain, let us see the immaterial divinity of the Father and Spirit shining on the face of the Son’.²⁸

In his theological syllogism, this identification of the light of the Transfiguration of Christ with the Reign of God is accentuated.²⁹ He describes the light as the ‘pure Reign of God’ and the ‘benediction that transcends time’, as ‘it would be absurd to believe that the Reign of God had a beginning and that it is limited by centuries and ages’.³⁰ He explains that ‘the Reign of God, his simplicity, his unlimitedness, his authority, his life are attributes of God (*προσόντα τοῦ Θεοῦ*)’, divine features that transcend time. However, even though they are ‘eternal and co-eternal with God’, they are not his nature but proceed from his nature and are related to it.³¹

The Christocentric Character of Theophany

Another common focal point attested to by both theologians is the Christocentric character of the manifestation of the Uncreated Light. According to the two saints, the divine Trinitarian light is revealed through the Incarnation of the Son of God. Saint Symeon notes that Christ ‘came into this world to enlighten all those in the world, the ones sitting in darkness...not with borrowed light, but with light from his own glory and his divinity’.³² Nonetheless, his insistence on the central role of Christ

²² Δ’ Λόγος Ἀντιρρητικός 22, 57, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 3, 284; see also: Maximos Confessor, *Κεφάλαια θεολογικά καὶ οἰκονομικά* 2, 88 (PG 90:1168AB).

²³ *Κεφάλαια* ἑκατὸν πενήκοντα 147, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 5, 256.

²⁴ Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Γ’, 1, 23, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 635.

²⁵ Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Β’, 3, 66, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 598–99.

²⁶ Διάλεξις ὀρθοδόξου μετὰ Βαρλαμίτου 27, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 2, 190; see also: Β’ Λόγος Ἀντιρρητικός 5, 14, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 3, 95.

²⁷ The second troparion of the ninth ode in the Canon of the feast of Transfiguration, composed by Saint John Damascene.

²⁸ Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Γ’, 1, 16, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 629.

²⁹ *Κεφάλαια* ἑκατὸν πενήκοντα 146, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 5, 116.

³⁰ Γ’ Κατὰ Γρηγοῦ 25, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 4, 335; See also: Maximos Confessor, *Κεφάλαια θεολογικά* 2, 86 (PG 90:1165AB).

³¹ Α’ Κατὰ Γρηγοῦ 29, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 4, 252.

³² *Theological and Ethical Treaties XIII*, 266 (SC 129, 418).

in revealing God does not hinder the Trinitarian dimension of the manifestation of divine light. The New Theologian says: 'Even at night, in the heart of darkness, I see Christ...opening the heavens for me, Christ himself who condescends and reveals himself to me with the Father and the Spirit, Light thrice holy, One in Three, Three in One. Certainly, they are the Light, the Three are the One Light'.³³ Saint Symeon clarifies: 'By his manifestation, he grants them the Holy Spirit in person and then, by the Holy Spirit, he himself with his Father abides inseparably with them'.³⁴

Appealing to some theological tools from traditional Christological terminology, Saint Symeon notes that Christ 'appears personally and substantially (ἐνυπόστατος καὶ οὐσιωδῶς) in the Light'.³⁵ He states that 'the God, who has two natures united in one person, has made a double being of me. Having made me double, he has given me two names. By nature I am a man, by grace I am a god...see what a union by grace with him represents: in a manner which is sensible and intelligible, essential and spiritual'.³⁶ Consequently, the transcendent God manifests himself in the Incarnation of Christ and grants the saints the experience of his appearance. 'For it is he, the super-essential Uncreated One, who became flesh and appeared to me as one created, deifying me entirely'.³⁷

Salvation is expressed by Symeon in a specific Christocentric terminology. However, the spontaneous poetical style that characterises his mystical language keeps emerging and imposing itself in his texts. The same theological truth is expressed by Saint Gregory in a more refined and normative theological language where the experience of the vision of light is based hermeneutically on a systematic interpretation of the Christological doctrines of the Third, Fourth, and Sixth Ecumenical Councils. Palamas refers to the traditional Christological formulations in his teaching on the permeation of the life-giving grace and light of God in human reality. This theophany, prepared in the Old Testament and realised in the Incarnation of the Son of God, is the result of the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ in the one eternal Person of the Logos.³⁸ According to Saint Gregory, the manifested light of Christ 'is...the archetypal beauty of the Logos of God, the radiance and glory of his divinity, which naturally shines from his divine nature and has become the glory common to the divine nature and the divinely-assumed human nature of Christ'.³⁹ This has been made possible through Christ's uniting in his one person (ὑπόστασις) both divinity and humanity. For this reason, Palamas quotes Saint Makarios of Egypt, who calls the light 'the glory of the Spirit',

³³ *Hymn XI*, 35 (SC 156, 234).

³⁴ *Theological and Ethical Treaties V*, 422 (SC 129, 110).

³⁵ *Theological and Ethical Treaties X*, 887 (SC 129, 322). See also: *Hymn 7*, 25 (SC 156, 210).

³⁶ *Hymn XXX*, 451 (SC 174, 370).

³⁷ *Hymn LII*, 46 (SC 196, 202). See also *Hymn XIII*, 48 (SC 156, 260); *Theological and Ethical Treaties II*, 238 (SC 122, 146).

³⁸ Δ' Λόγος Αντιρρητικός 22, 57, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 3, 284. See also: Maximos the Confessor, *Κεφάλαια θεολογικά καὶ οἰκονομικά* 2, 88 (PG 90:1168AB).

³⁹ Δ' Κατὰ Γρηγοῦ 1, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 4, 341–42.

being the common light of the persons of the Holy Trinity.⁴⁰ He also relies on Saint John the Damascene to assert that the glory that advances from the divine nature in a natural manner became through the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ common to the human body.⁴¹

In this context, the redeeming act of Christ is interpreted by Saint Gregory within the framework of the theology of light. Accordingly, the fall of Adam is represented as his separation from Beauty and Light, and as the alienation from the divine 'form' (*μορφή*) and the original destiny of humanity. Adam, before the transgression, partook of the divine radiance, which attired in splendour his bodily nakedness, rendering it incomparably beautiful. 'Man rejected light, corrupted his resemblance to the highest light, and wore darkness as a tunic. But Christ, who is naturally good and merciful, condescended in his compassion towards the fallen one, reviving him, and renewing his blackened icon.'⁴² He asserts: 'The Logos of God, in his clemency, assumed the nature of man which had become naked and deprived of divine radiance, due to the transgression of the commandment of God. He had mercy on the ugliness of this nature and revealed it to his disciples in its most shining form on Mount Tabor.' Thus, Christ manifested the glory that was granted to human nature and what man, who lives in the likeness of Jesus Christ, shall become.⁴³

Deification as Union with Light

According to both theologians, the major fruit of the vision of the divine light is union with divine radiance (i.e., deification). Through the vision of the light of Christ, the saints, united to the will, energy, and radiance of the Holy Trinity, become gods by grace. Symeon mentions clearly that the call of the faithful is to become like gods, possessing all of God's glory within. He implores the Lord, 'But you, O Light, shine upon them, shine that in seeing you they truly believe that you are the true light and that you will make like yourself the ones to whom you are united as light'.⁴⁴ Christ grants man deification through union with his light and glory. 'O compassionate One, give me the glory which the Father has given you so that, having become like you as all your servants, I may become god according to grace and may remain with you continually, now and always and unto the ages of ages'.⁴⁵ Symeon says: 'The Son of God...gives the grace of the Spirit, that is, divinity,

⁴⁰ 'Υπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Β', 3, 21, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 557. See also: Gregory Nazianzus, *Λόγος* 40, 6 (PG 36:365A); Makarios of Egypt, *Περὶ ἀγάπης* 21 (PG 34:925C).

⁴¹ Β' Κατὰ Γρηγοῶ 32, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 4, 340. See also: John Damascene, *Ἐκδοσις ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως* 3, 15 (PG 94:1057B).

⁴² Β' Λόγος Ἀποδεικτικός 9, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 85–86.

⁴³ *Κεφάλαια ἑκατὸν πενήκοντα* 66, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 5, 73; *Ὁμιλία ΙΣΤ'*, 38, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 6, 203.

⁴⁴ *Hymn XXXIV*, 103 (SC 174, 436).

⁴⁵ *Theological and Ethical Treaties V*, 458 (SC 129, 112).

to the Saints; it flows from the nature and essence of his co-eternal Father'.⁴⁶ The New Theologian further explains that the entirety of the psychosomatic existence of the human being is involved in the union with divine light: 'How strange a marvel, my flesh, that is, the essence of my soul, indeed, of my body, partakes of the divine glory. It shines with divine radiance'.⁴⁷ Consequently, the divine light abides in man like the flames in the burning bush: 'You see in yourself the abundant grace of the Holy Spirit, enlightening and transforming the depths of your heart into a sun...you clearly observe that the miracle of the bush is taking place in your heart, your soul burning in union with the inaccessible fire but without being consumed, as your soul is freed from all passion'.⁴⁸

A major component of the teaching of both theologians is their identification of the grace of deification acquired in the vision of the eternal light with man's appropriation of divine life. The saints partake in divine life in the present age, becoming sons and heirs of God. Saint Symeon says, 'Blessed Lord, you are the One who placed in my heart the light of your commandments and planted in me the Tree of Life. You made me into another Paradise'.⁴⁹ He argues that,

He is called light, he who is above any light, because he revives us; he is called life, he who is above any life, because he makes us live. He is called garment, because he surrounds us entirely with his radiance, because he shrouds and makes us warm with the glory of his divinity. Thus, we say that we put on Christ, the One who cannot be grasped and is absolutely impalpable.⁵⁰

Symeon beseeches Christ: 'Your light encompasses me. It is life-giving, O my Christ, for to see you is the source of life, and your life is the Resurrection'.⁵¹ In another prayer he entreats God: 'Do what is profitable for my wretched soul, because you alone are God, the Lover of mankind, uncreated, unending, all-powerful, the life and the light of all who love you and are so loved by you, O Lover of mankind'.⁵² He teaches, 'Let us also in the Holy Spirit be taken up spiritually to the true life of the third heaven, or better, to the very heaven of the Holy Trinity'.⁵³

In complete harmony with the teaching of Saint Symeon, Saint Gregory Palamas asserts that the pure-hearted perceive and taste the eternal divine light in this present age, assimilating, through the vision of God, the uncreated deifying energy. Saint Gregory explains that, 'the saints do not only see, but they are also affected by

⁴⁶ *Theological and Ethical Treaties I*, 10, 129 (SC 122:260).

⁴⁷ *Hymn XXX*, 263 (SC 174, 358). See also *Theological and Ethical Treaties XI*, 83 (SC 129:334).

⁴⁸ *Catechesis XVIII*, 293 (SC 104, 288). See also *Hymn XL*, 6 (SC 174, 484); *Hymn I*, 135 (SC 156, 168).

⁴⁹ *Hymn LXVII*, 1 (SC 196, 120).

⁵⁰ *Theological and Ethical Treaties VII*, 361 (SC 129, 182).

⁵¹ *Hymn LI*, 1 (SC 196, 184).

⁵² *Hymn XLVII*, 76 (SC 196, 126).

⁵³ *Theological and Ethical Treaties III*, 559 (SC 122, 430).

the radiance of God'. They are united to the divine energy, since 'the energy of God and of the saints is one'.⁵⁴ The Archbishop of Thessaloniki asserts that the vision of the divine light 'grants eternal life',⁵⁵ and the pure in heart assimilate through this vision the uncreated divine energy.⁵⁶ In this context, Palamas elaborates the Patristic concept of 'true life' (*ὁντος ζωή*).⁵⁷ He explains that 'true life' is the common and eternal life of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, and that the gift of 'true life' is the communion of man with God and his participation in the eternal divine life through the grace of the Holy Spirit. This Trinitarian divine life was granted to human nature by the Incarnation and redemptive act of the Logos of God. Thus, man is called to be receptive to the uncreated grace of the Holy Spirit, which enriches and transfigures his existence and actualises in his being the gift of divine adoption.⁵⁸

Saint Gregory clarifies that the 'life and light', which the Holy Spirit grants to another person, is not separated from him. Thus, the Holy Spirit, being himself Life, transmits life to those who participate in him. He says,

This light is eternal life, which is also granted to the one who is deified, without being separated from God. Thus, Paul would say, 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me' (Gal 2:20). Maximos also says about Paul that 'he was living the divine and eternal life of the One who had made his abode in him.' And Basil the Great said that 'the life which the Holy Spirit grants to another hypostasis is not separated from him..., thus he has life in him, and those who partake in him live in a godly manner, having acquired a divine and heavenly life.' This is the life which he (St Basil) calls... 'spiritual and eternal movement,' and he says that the one who partakes in it, albeit 'ashes and earth', shall become a saint.⁵⁹

Elsewhere in his writings, Saint Gregory asserts,

For the Holy Spirit possesses life in himself, and those who participate in him will live in a godlike manner, having attained to a divine and heavenly form of life, for the Glory of the divine nature is, above all, divine life in the saints and their partaking in every blessing.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ *Πρὸς Γαβριῶν 17, Συγγράμματα*, vol. 2, 344–45; Basil of Caesarea, *Περὶ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος* (PG 52:826); Gregory Palamas, *Πρὸς Δαμιανὸν 9, Συγγράμματα*, vol. 2, 465; Gregory the Theologian, *Λόγος 28* (PG 36:29A).

⁵⁵ *Ὁμιλία ΚΓ' 11, Ὁμιλίες*, 270.

⁵⁶ *Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Γ'*, 1, 33, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 646.

⁵⁷ *Γ' Λόγος Ἀντιρρητικός 6, 13, Συγγράμματα*, vol. 3, 170–71; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Λόγος 30 θεολογικός 4, 21* (PG 36:132B); Basil of Caesarea, *Ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν αἴτιος τῶν κακῶν ὁ Θεός* (PG 31:345A).

⁵⁸ F. Georgi, *Ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωή*, 55–143.

⁵⁹ *Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Γ'*, 1, 38, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 651. See also: Maximos the Confessor, *Περὶ ἀποριῶν* (PG 91:1144BC). Basil of Caesarea, *Ἀνατρεπτικός ἀπολογητικὸς Εὐνομίου 5* (PG 29:772B).

⁶⁰ *Λόγος Ἀντιρρητικός 2, 7, 18, Συγγράμματα*, vol. 3, 98; Basil of Caesarea, *Κατ' Εὐνομίου 5* (PG

Light and the Knowledge of the Hidden God

According to both theologians, apophaticism is the attitude manifested in the theology of the human person facing the transcendence of God. In orienting his being towards the Holy Trinity, man does not speculate. Rather, he is transformed. Thus, the manifestation of the divine mystery enriches his existence. Saint Symeon expresses this in his characteristic spontaneous and poetical language:

I do not have the strength to look at you, and yet I am unable not to do so. Your beauty is inaccessible; your splendour has no equal. Who has ever seen you or could see you completely, my God? Truly, what eye has the power to contemplate the All? What mind is able to grasp or understand the One who transcends everything? What intelligence could make itself co-extensive to his totality and contemplate the One who encompasses all beings and completely fills all these in an incomprehensible manner, and always finds himself entirely outside?⁶¹

On the other hand, one encounters in the rigorous traditional theological discourse and terminology of Saint Gregory expressions like, ‘sensed and beyond—sense...unapproachable, immaterial, deifying, eternal, radiance of the divine nature, the glory of divinity, the majesty of the heavenly reign’ and ‘light of the world to come’.⁶² It is ‘the limpid and unsetting light’,⁶³ ‘indescribable...not only transcending the senses, but also transcending the intellect (νοῦς)’.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, the two Hesychast theologians explain that through the union with the uncreated light, the apophatic way of theology is exceeded, since the vision of the divine light is the unique knowledge which examines the depth of God, and does not prohibit his cognition.⁶⁵ Symeon says,

Indeed, how can language fathom or express in words ‘the things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard’, things beyond the mind of man? In truth, it is not possible. And if indeed, bearing the God who grants us this, we possess all these things inwardly, we are no more unable to either measure it with our intelligence or express it in words.⁶⁶

The New Theologian clarifies that God in an act of condescendence reveals Himself to Man:

29:772B).

⁶¹ *Hymn XLII*, 74 (SC 196, 42).

⁶² Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζόντων Γ', 1, 22, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 634.

⁶³ Β' Λόγος Ἀντιρρητικός 8, 24, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 3, 24.

⁶⁴ Β' Λόγος Ἀντιρρητικός 3, 10, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 3, 91–92.

⁶⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Περὶ βίου Μωυσέως* 2 (PG 44:376D–377A).

⁶⁶ *Action de grâces I*, 232 (SC 113, 324).

You yourself, invisible to all, untouchable, impalpable, appeared to me and seemed to purify my mind, to enlarge the vision of my soul. You allowed me to see your glory more and more. Or rather, you waxed and grew larger as the darkness receded. I discovered that it was you who were about to come near and approach, like the visible things we experience...You, the Unmoving One, the Immovable One, increased; you were taking form, You who are without form.⁶⁷

The New Theologian describes that,

Indeed, just as a blind man, upon recovering his sight progressively, sees the human contour and gradually represents to himself what it is—not that the shape changes; rather, it is the vision in the man's eye that sees the shape more clearly, its traits impressing themselves on his vision, imprinting themselves upon the intellectual part of the soul and the memory as is on a tablet—so you made yourself be seen after purifying my mind completely by the light of your Holy Spirit...You then carried me out of the world...You became resplendent. You made yourself be seen wholly, and I saw you clearly.⁶⁸

Thus, Saint Symeon stresses that it is the role of the Holy Spirit to grant this vision to man: 'Among us, who is able to see him through his own efforts and strength, unless he sends his Holy Spirit to give health, vigour and power to our weakened nature; unless he enables man to contemplate the divine glory which is his?'⁶⁹

Palamas also insists on the fact that, in the illumination of the Holy Spirit, not only does man proceed to the knowledge of God, but God himself draws near to man and reveals himself to him. The divine light allows man to see what transcends him in a fashion that exceeds the capabilities of the human being. And just as the intellect, when united with the senses in an unutterable manner, shows man, symbolically and sensibly, things that are perceivable, a similar thing happens when the senses and the intellect are united with the grace of the Holy Spirit: 'they shall see the invisible light spiritually and are rendered similar to him eternally'.⁷⁰ God grants the saints to see beyond the capacities of vision, 'the light and God who is revealed therein'.⁷¹ Saint Gregory confirms that this light is 'neither sensitive nor noetic, but spiritual and divine', and that it transcends all creatures. For this reason, it is submitted neither to the senses nor to the noetic faculty but is perceived by the spiritual power, which is also beyond all the faculties of perception, and which is

⁶⁷ *Action de grâces II*, 196 (SC 113, 346).

⁶⁸ *Action de grâces II*, 208 (SC 113, 346).

⁶⁹ *Hymn XLII*, 120 (SC 196, 46).

⁷⁰ Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων B', 3, 50, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 582–83.

⁷¹ Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων B', 3, 56, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 590; Gregory of Nyssa, *Περὶ βίου Μωυσέως* 2 (PG 44 :376D–377A).

granted only by the grace of the Holy Spirit to pure noetic natures.⁷² While Saint Symeon states in his most simple words, ‘Christ is the simple light, the one who has his light shining in his mind is said to have the Mind of Christ’,⁷³ Saint Gregory explicates that this is how the Apostles on the Mountain witnessed ‘the preamble of his *Parousia*’ since ‘they were deemed worthy to be granted (spiritual) eyes’.⁷⁴

‘The Light and the Life’ of the Age to Come

The eschatological implications of the vision of the uncreated light are stressed in the writings of Saint Symeon. The partial experience and knowledge of divine realities in the present age awaits a greater fulfilment in the age to come: ‘I may share your glory and the joy of your blessings, O Word, even now, as in an enigma, a foreshadowing, a mirror; and then later, may I know you and I have been known’.⁷⁵ The vision of the uncreated light procures man with the token of life eternal. Right from this present time, man is called to taste the bliss of eternity,⁷⁶ for the eternal glorification of the saints of God starts and is manifested in the present age:

For those who believe in him, Christ will become all this and even more, beyond enumeration, not only in the age to come, but first in this life and then in the world to come. Though in an obscure way here below, and in a perfect manner in the Reign, those who believe see clearly nonetheless and receive as of now the first-fruits of everything they will have in the future life. Indeed, if they do not receive on earth everything that was promised to them, they do not have any part of the foretaste of the blessings to come, their higher hope being set on the hereafter. However, it is through death and the Resurrection that God in his foresight has given us the Reign, incorruptibility, and the totality of life eternal. Given these conditions, we unquestionably become partakers of the good things to come, that is, incorruptible, immortal, sons of God, sons of the light and of the day, inheritors of the Reign of Heaven, since we carry the Reign within.⁷⁷

The completion of the divine promises takes place in the Second Coming, when the light of Christ will transfigure all created natures:

⁷² Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζόντων Γ', 2, 14, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 668.

⁷³ *Catechesis XXXIII*, 55–57.

⁷⁴ Κεφάλαια ἑκατὸν πενήκοντα 146, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 5, 117; see also: Basil of Caesarea, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς 44 Ψαλμὸν* 5 (PG 29:400CD).

⁷⁵ *Hymn XL*, 92 (SC 174, 492).

⁷⁶ *Catechesis II*, 416 (SC 96, 277).

⁷⁷ *Theological and Ethical Treaties X*, 697 (SC 129, 308).

At that moment, he, the God and Lord of the universe, will shine from the glory of his divinity. This will also be the moment at which the literal sun is darkened by the brilliance of the Lord and will become invisible, just as the stars now fade before the sun and are seen no more. And it is only he who will be both day and God, the One who at present is invisible to your eyes. He who lives in unapproachable light will reveal himself as he is. He will fill all things with his own light and for all the saints he will become the day of eternal joy, without waning or end, but entirely unapproachable and invisible to the slothful and the sinners...Indeed, since during their present life such people had no desire to see the light of his glory—a sight resulting from their purification—or to introduce it wholly into themselves, he will be justly unapproachable to them in the future.⁷⁸

Saint Symeon further declares that, 'When the book of the conscience of the saints will be opened...Christ God, presently hidden in them, will shine, as he shone forth from the Father before all ages. Then the saints will be like the Most High.'⁷⁹ He also states, as he praises God,

You, Christ, are the Kingdom of Heaven. You, Christ, are the land promised to the meek...You are Gladness, you are happiness; and your grace, O God, will shine in all the saints like the sun, will shine among them and they will shine brightly, to the degree of their faith, their asceticism, their hope and charity, their purification and illumination, by your Spirit, O God.⁸⁰

Throughout his theological controversies, Saint Gregory Palamas goes beyond Saint Symeon in accentuating the eschatological dimension involved in the experience of the vision of light. He uses definitive eschatological language, attesting at the same time to the uncreated and common Trinitarian character of the light. He calls it 'the holy, unsucceedable, unsetting, beginningless and eternal light, the beauty of the age to come and the glory of God the Father'.⁸¹ He describes this same light, revealed to the saints in prayer, as 'the light of the future and perpetual age' and 'our common hope'.⁸² He also clarifies that we should commune, starting from the present life, with the 'heavenly light and the promise of the ultimate benedictions', and that on the Day of Judgment 'while the condemned shall be sent to the outer darkness, the righteous shall find comfort in this light that transcends this world'.⁸³

⁷⁸ *Theological and Ethical Treaties X*, 20 (SC 129, 260).

⁷⁹ *Theological and Ethical Treaties I*, 12, 285 (SC 122, 292).

⁸⁰ *Hymn I*, 132 (SC 156, 168).

⁸¹ *B' Λόγος Ἀντιρρητικός 7, Συγγράμματα*, vol. 3, 89.

⁸² *Πρὸς Δανιὴλ Αἴνου 18, Συγγράμματα*, vol. 2, 390; *Δ' Λόγος Ἀντιρρητικός 18, 49, Συγγράμματα*, vol. 3, 277–78.

⁸³ *Γ' Κατὰ Γρηγοῤῥᾶ, 24, Συγγράμματα*, vol. 4, 335; Basil of Caesarea, *Ὁμιλία εἰς τὴν ἐξαήμερον 2, 5* (PG

One encounters in the texts of Saint Gregory expressions like the ‘light of the world to come’,⁸⁴ ‘light of the divine Reign’, and ‘beauty of the future age’.⁸⁵ It is described as ‘the essential and eternal majesty of God’,⁸⁶ ‘the pledge of the future promise, the grace of adoption, the deifying gift of the Spirit...light of the hyper-inexpressible glory which becomes seen by the saints, enhypostatic (ἐνυπόστατος) light, uncreated, ever being from the ever being, revealed to the ones who are deserving and through him revealing God, now partially but in a most fulfilled manner in the future age...’,⁸⁷ ‘the light that stays eternally with the saints, the glory of the divine nature, the beauty of the future and unending age, the unbeginning and un-succeeded Reign of God...the substance (ὕποστασις) of the future goods’.⁸⁸ While stating that, ‘The Son of God, at the end of time, shall come in the glory of the Father and the Holy Spirit, since one is the glory of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit’,⁸⁹ Palamas asserts that the light, with which Christ shone on Mount Tabor—thus ‘showing the beauty of the age to come’⁹⁰—is nothing but the same light which will shine at the Second Coming of the Lord. For this reason, he names the Transfiguration of Christ the ‘preamble of the last manifestation of light’. He adds that Christ will abide eternally with his saints and will grant them the uninterrupted ‘un-setting day’, which ‘derives from his eternal light’.⁹¹ This ‘limpid and un-setting light’⁹² was manifested to the three disciples on Mount Tabor and granted them ‘eternal life and the Reign that never ends’.⁹³ This experience can be justified only by the fact that ‘they acquired the power and the grace of the age to come’.⁹⁴

Both the New Theologian and Palamas reproduce the teaching of Saint Gregory the Theologian and Gregory of Nyssa concerning the unending progress in the contemplation of God. Saint Symeon affirms that:

Indeed, over the ages, the progress will be endless, for a cessation of this growing toward the end without ending...would be nothing but a grasping at the ungraspable. The One on whom no one can be satiated would then become an object of satiety. By contrast, to be filled with him and to be glorified in his light will cause unfathomable progress, an undefined beginning. Just as those possessing Christ who took form in them stand near the one who

29:40–41). See also: Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Γ΄, 1, 39, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 651–52.

⁸⁴ Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Γ΄, 1, 22, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 634.

⁸⁵ Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Γ΄, 1, 23, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 635.

⁸⁶ Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Γ΄, 3, 9, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 687.

⁸⁷ Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Γ΄, 1, 6, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 620.

⁸⁸ Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Β΄, 3, 54, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 586–87.

⁸⁹ Β΄ Λόγος Ἀντιρρητικός 7, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 3, 89.

⁹⁰ ΣΤ΄ Λόγος Ἀντιρρητικός 10, 24, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 3, 402.

⁹¹ Δ΄ Κατὰ Γρηγορίαν 6, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 4, 344.

⁹² Β΄ Λόγος Ἀντιρρητικός 8, 24, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 3, 24.

⁹³ Ὁμιλία ΚΓ΄ 11, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 6, 270.

⁹⁴ Β΄ Λόγος Ἀντιρρητικός 3, 10, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 3, 91–92.

shines in the inaccessible light, so does the end become a principle of glory in them, or—to explain my thought more clearly—in the end they will have the beginning, and in the beginning the end.⁹⁵

He adds: ‘Perfection is endless. Even there, the beginning is the end’.⁹⁶

In his turn, Saint Gregory describes the experience of the vision of the light and indicates that the progress of the saints in the vision of God is infinite in the future age, and similar to that of angels. He refers to ‘a desire and longing of those who attain this vision’ which does not stop, because ‘the received grace drives them towards the greatest reception’, and God ‘bestowing himself is infinite and he grants generously and abundantly’. The sons of the age to come advance in the vision of God, receiving ‘grace upon grace’ (John 1:17) and they ascend ‘the indefatigable ascent’.⁹⁷ The continuous and uninterrupted knowledge of God as experienced by the angels, and as shall be experienced by the saints in the age to come, is a continuous progress ‘in the most apparent vision in the unending age’. Nevertheless, man never sees the entirety of divinity,⁹⁸ for the unceasing ascent is the substance of eternal life,⁹⁹ and this vision of the light and the life of Christ grants ‘eternal life and the Reign that never ends’.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

The above parallelism between the thoughts of Saint Symeon the New Theologian and Saint Gregory Palamas cannot but confirm the common aspect of the mystical experience of the saints of God. Obviously, there exist differences between the two theologians in verbalising their experiences, whether linguistically or methodologically; we believe that this is due to the nature of the historical circumstances and needs that distinguished each of their eras, as well as to the personality and talents granted by the Holy Spirit to each one of them. While Symeon remained to the end of his life an abbot, a Hesychast monk, and a poet of divine *eros*, Gregory had to leave the silence of his hermitage, face turbulent political crises, play a crucial role in the theological debates of his time, and become the Archbishop of Thessaloniki.

There is no doubt that Saint Symeon contributed in inspiring and orienting the teaching of Saint Gregory, especially the inherent structure of his theological thought. However, Palamas did not quote Symeon extensively, and this was because he was defending Symeon’s teaching, which came into question during the Hesychastic

⁹⁵ *Hymn I*, 180 (SC 156, 172). See also: *Hymn XX*, 13 (SC 174, 110).

⁹⁶ *Hymn XXIII*, 519 (SC 174, 222).

⁹⁷ Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Β΄, 2, 11, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 517.

⁹⁸ Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Α΄, 3, 17, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 427; Gregory of Nyssa, *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴν Ὁμιλίαν* 4 (PG 44:684).

⁹⁹ Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων Γ΄, 1, 39, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 1, 651.

¹⁰⁰ Ὁμιλία ΚΓ΄ 11, *Συγγράμματα*, vol. 6, 270.

Controversy, by referring to the writings of the most authoritative Church Fathers. Nonetheless, one cannot help but notice the extent to which Saint Gregory borrows concepts and notions from Saint Symeon's writings. Hence, he presents his teaching and school of prayer and ascetism as the legitimate continuation of the Orthodox Patristic Tradition. Saint Gregory's insistence on the concept of 'true life' experienced in the union with the uncreated light revives Saint Symeon's teaching on God, Man, Redemption, Divine Grace, and Salvation. This very same insistence remains primarily functional in revealing the dynamic character of Patristic theology and how it directly touches human life and existence.

Finally, one cannot but remark that the efforts deployed by Saint Gregory Palamas and his contemporary Hesychast theologians provided the teachings of Saint Symeon with a normative character. What is most intriguing in the comparison of the systematic terminology of Saint Gregory with the poetic language of Saint Symeon is how far Symeon's discourse is branded with spontaneity, and how the formulations he uses remain approximate. This freedom in theological language and expression probably renders the New Theologian one of the most creative monastic writers and poets of his time and a genuine forerunner of our modern age.