

DIVINE LIGHT AND PARTICIPATION IN THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE HYMNS OF ST. SYMEON, THE NEW THEOLOGIAN

Abstract

The study examines the theme of divine light and communion within the context of the glory of God as depicted in the hymns of St. Symeon the New Theologian. It investigates how the motif of light functions as an uncreated energy that reveals, transforms, and facilitates the creature's entry into Trinitarian communion (*theosis*). Beginning with an analysis of the hymn texts—particularly *Hymns 2–12, 14–16, 26–34, and 44–49*—the research combines a philological and hermeneutical approach with a clear perspective rooted in mystical experience. The methodology incorporates both synchronic and diachronic analysis, lexical examination of key terms (*φῶς, δόξα, μετουσίωσις* etc.), and liturgical-pastoral contextualization. The findings demonstrate that in St. Symeon, light is not merely a symbolic metaphor, but an active, Trinitarian energy conveyed sacramentally through the Eucharist and realized via ascetic practices and monastic life. The Eucharist inaugurates and renews communion; asceticism shapes the receptive capacity; and mystical language—including metaphors, antinomies, and questions—serves as a hermeneutical strategy. The study highlights a theandric anthropology, wherein the body is called to deification while maintaining its distinct identity, and where apatheia results from the cooperation of effort and grace. In the historical dialogue with Palamism, a continuity is identified: Symeon offers experiential data that Palamas later formalized doctrinally through the essence–energies distinction; however, the anachronistic application of subsequent terminology should be avoided. The implications are both theological and pastoral, affirming experience as an epistemic source, emphasizing the necessity of pastoral criteria for discernment, and underscoring the importance of balancing poetic mystical language with conceptual rigor in contemporary energy



REV. IOAN CHIRILĂ

Faculty of Orthodox Theology
“Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca
ioan.chirila@ubbcluj.ro

theology. The conclusion underlines the doctrinal and practical value of Symeon's legacy for theology and the life of the Church.

Keywords

Light, Communion, Theosis, Eucharist, Divine energies

Introduction

The theme of divine light and communion in the glory of God embodies the theological and mystical focal point of the hymns of St. Symeon the New Theologian. In these poetic-liturgical compositions, light transcends mere metaphor, representing a theandric reality—an energetic, uncreated manifestation of the Divinity that emanates toward the creature, facilitating ontological communion between the created and the Creator. From the earliest hymns to the most recent, St. Symeon regards light as a means of revelation, as a space for encounter and transformation. Through this process, humanity is led from the darkness of sin, sealed with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and incorporated into a shared union with divine glory. The intrinsic connection between light and communion is rooted in the fact that light is not an external phenomenon, but rather a gateway that introduces the creature into the life of the Trinity through deification (*theosis*). The Eucharist and monastic asceticism serve as the sacramental and moral frameworks within which this communion is actualized. Accordingly, this study seeks to elucidate how the motifs of light and communion in divine glory are articulated in the hymns, the theological and mystical significance ascribed to them, and how they challenge or redefine the boundaries of religious experience in the late Byzantine context.

Beginning with the work's central idea, we will develop multiple lines of analysis that collectively delineate a theological and practical portrait of the Symeonian concept of light and communion. Firstly, we will emphasize the ontological nature of the light in St. Symeon — it is not merely a moral or poetic image, but a reality intrinsic to God as a mode of divine self-disclosure, representing an implicit distinction between what remains inaccessible within the divine essence and what overflows into creation as energies or uncreated glory, through which God manifests Himself as a giver of life and presence. Secondly, we will explore the dynamics of communion—in particular, how the encounter between humanity and this light becomes feasible within the concrete experience of faith—highlighting the significance of the Eucharist as the

sacramental point of encounter, as well as the importance of spiritual disciplines such as fasting, prayer, tears, humility, and monastic asceticism in purifying the eyes of the heart and enhancing the capacity to receive and retain the outpouring of grace. A third aspect concerns the Trinitarian dimension of the Symeonian vision, with the light understood as a unique divine presence that manifests in the three Persons; this experiential Trinitarianism shapes how the believer perceives and relates to God. Next, the anthropological dimensions will be examined, focusing on the transformations experienced by the body, soul, and will when in contact with the light—from the notion of deification of the limbs and sanctification of the body to the attainment of incorruptibility—including provocative assertions where Christ's presence is affirmed even within the most intimate aspects of the self. The social-pastoral dimension of the experience will also be addressed, particularly the transition from personal piety to the mission of the illuminated, emphasizing the role of the model monk, who, through his life, serves as a lampstand, guiding others toward the light. Lastly, the analysis will consider Symeon's theological language; the employment of antinomies, rhetorical questions, and other stylistic devices is not merely literary figures but deliberate hermeneutic strategies—methods through which the mystery is preserved, the reader is challenged, and the mystical experience is transmitted (Krivocheine 1997, 229).

Contemporary research regarding St. Symeon the New Theologian has undergone a notable revitalization through the publication of critical editions and modern translations of his hymns, as well as via theological and historical-liturgical commentaries. In our research, we will primarily employ the Greek critical editions and Romanian translations of his hymns^[1], catecheses, and ethical discourses, alongside Dumitru Stăniloae's commentaries and annotations (2017), monographic analyses by Basile Krivocheine (1997) and Ilarion Alfeyev (2010), and several additional studies concerning St. Symeon personality and mystical contributions (Ică Jr. 1997, 2001, 2002; Teșu 2004; Chirilă et al. 2021; Dușe 2023-2024). Furthermore, we will consult works on Saint Gregory Palamas for theological contextualization (Tomoioagă, 2015; Calvário, 2018; Chirilă et al., 2019), studies on mystical hermeneutics, and comparative mysticism to evaluate the dimensions of Saint Symeon's thought.

Methodologically, this study will employ hermeneutic tools such as synchronous reading (transversal thematic analysis) and diachronic reading (examining the evolution of the motif of light in the Symeonian corpus). We will also use a hermeneutic approach to the liturgical and pastoral contexts to emphasize the hymns' practical role.

Our primary goals include: a) exploring how light functions as a uncreated energy in Symeonian theology; b) clarifying the link between personal experiences of light and traditional forms of communion like the Eucharist and sacramental life; c) identifying anthropological elements supporting the idea of body deification; d) situating the Symeonian contribution within the patristic discourse on divine energies and essence; and e) offering interpretations to support contemporary pastoral work and mystical studies.

This study aims to establish a framework for the systematic investigation of how light, as uncreated energy, and participation in God's glory shape not only the poetic themes of St. Symeon's hymns but also a lived doctrine with significant theological, ascetic, and anthropological implications. The work strives to contribute coherently to the comprehension of a fundamental aspect of Orthodox mysticism and to foster meaningful dialogues between patristic studies and contemporary theology.

The Hymns of St. Symeon and Its Role in Liturgical Practice

St. Symeon the New Theologian articulates in his writings a testimony to an internal transformation that emanates directly from monastic existence and personal mystical experience (Ică Jr. 2002, 5). His hymns are not merely abstract treatises but serve as confessional narratives: the progression from an initial state characterized by sin to profound repentance, culminating in the purification of the heart and ultimately culminating in the worthiness of luminous visions, is depicted as a coherent and verifiable spiritual journey within his own life. The presence of a spiritual advisor — St. Symeon the Eloquent^[2] — is consistently identified as a critical formative element. The ascetic discipline, the canon of prayer, and the criteria for evaluating mystical experiences are all situated within the authority of a living spiritual tradition. Contextually, St. Symeon operates within the framework of late Byzantine asceticism, asserting connections to the earliest Christian witnesses (e.g., St. Stephen^[3] and the Apostle Paul) and patristic authors, thereby affording his testimonies canonical legitimacy and continuity with tradition. His theological lexicon — abundant in Trinitarian imagery, apophaticism, and terminology associated with glory and light — reflects a patristic sensibility: the experience is portrayed as a personal encounter with the Persons of the Trinity, rather than as doctrinal speculation, integrating spiritual practice with theological reflection (Chirilă et al. 2021: 5–18).

St. Symeon's Hymns are at the crossroads of poetry, confessional prayer, and mystical teaching. They do not seek to establish systematic doctrines but aim to share lived experiences validated through ascetic practice. Their lyrical style allows the author to depict inner states with vivid imagery, while the confessional format transforms reading into an active participation. Readers are not just given theories but are invited to engage in repentance, weeping, and ecstasy. Symeonian rhetoric features powerful oppositions: light versus creature, fire versus grass, body versus the unseen. These contrasts are not mere stylistic devices but ways to express the paradox of theandric: how the uncreated influences the created, and how grace can transform nature without nullifying it. Rhetorical questions (*Hymn 6*) provoke wonder by suspending rational explanation and opening space for revelation^[4]. Concise images—like the 'immaterial arrow', 'luminous garment', or 'red-hot iron'—embed ephemeral feelings into memory (*Hymns 5, 30, and 44*). The stylistic variety reflects the author's multiple aims. Some texts use clear poetic meters (e.g., *Hymn 5*, versified), while others adopt a prosodic, confessional, and dialogic tone (*Hymns 4–6, 10–12*), tailored to the pastoral purpose of exhortation, warning, comfort, or visionary storytelling. This variation signifies a dual role: conveying mystical truths directly and guiding practitioners in ascetic discipline.

From an epistemological point of view, St. Symeon often uses autobiography, making his personal experiences a basis for confirming divine 'knowledge.' Descriptions of visions, body tremors, and feelings of 'going out of oneself'^[5] (*Hymn 11*), as well as the loss and rediscovery of light (*Hymns 12 and 29*), are not just symbolic but serve as proof of mystical truth. These experiences lend authority to the theological claims: the author's statements are testimonies to encounters with the Light (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2021a, 79–81).

St. Symeon's hymn captures a deeply sacramental perspective, viewing the Eucharist not just as a symbol or an act of remembrance but as both a means and an actual site of sharing in divine glory. In *Hymn 2*, the author states that through Holy Communion, 'the human body and blood are mixed with the divine Body and Blood,' making the human form 'transparent and luminous' (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 58). This portrays an ontological transformation rather than a symbolic one, as further argued in *Hymn 2*. *Hymn 7* emphasizes the union achieved through the Eucharist^[6], suggesting that liturgical communion imparts divine nature to the believer, facilitating real participation in the Trinitarian life. *Hymn 26* stresses the importance of a proper inner disposition—repentance, faith, trembling—to ensure the participation is genuine,

embracing the light of life rather than remaining superficial. Dumitru Stăniloae's pastoral-theological viewpoint interprets these images by positioning the Eucharist as 'the most direct means' of *theosis* according to St. Symeon, serving to prepare, trigger, and sustain human transformation in grace (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2017, 282–7, note 69). Consequently, these hymns weave liturgical practice into the salvation narrative, in which Eucharistic participation serves both as a cause and a sign of communion with divine light and glory.

Lexicon and Imagery of Divine Light at St. Symeon

St. Symeon employs a precise, technical, yet poetic vocabulary to articulate his mystical experience. Terms like *φῶς* ('light'), *δόξα* ('glory'), and *πνεῦμα* ('Spirit') convey deep realities beyond simple images: light as an active divine manifestation, glory as an overflow, and the Spirit as a means of communication. Concepts such as *μέθεξις* / *ἐνθεωσις* ('participation', 'deification') illustrate their impact on the human soul, while *λέπτειμα* / *διαύγεια* evoke 'transparency' and 'radiance' in the illuminated being. The second hymn formula – 'The One Light of the Holy Trinity divided in an undivided manner into Three'^[7] – serves as a theological core, affirming divine unity and its distinct Personhood without confusing essence and manifestation. *Hymns* 33 and 34 expand this lexicon: 'The Father is Light, the Son is Light, the Holy Spirit is Light,'^[8] showing that 'light' functions as an active divine energy, the medium of divine encounter—not just a metaphoric image (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 199–200). Dumitru Stăniloae emphasizes the uncreated, active nature of light in St. Symeon, indicating that these terms point to a transformative divine presence rather than mere contemplative images.

Symeonian imagery is rich in visual and thermal metaphors that concretise the experience of grace. Terms such as 'immaterial arrow,' 'fire,' 'sun,' 'lamp,' or 'luminescent garment' recur frequently to translate the phenomenon of uncreated light into images accessible to feeling. Thus, *Hymn* 5 describes the light as 'an immaterial arrow shot from the Immaterial'^[9], an image that suggests both something originating from a transcendent source and the transformative force through which it pierces and deifies. In other places, the light is likened to a hidden sun or a mantle that cloaks the being, signaling the transfiguration of the body and heart in the presence of divine glory (cf. *Hymns* 7 and 49)^[10]. In *Hymn* 30, St. Symeon explicitly intertwines the metaphor of fire with that of light: divine fire burns and purifies, and light opens the sight and understanding, so that inner illumination becomes simultaneously cleansing and

enlightening (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 185)^[11]. Dumitru Stăniloae observes that this semantic proximity between fire and light reflects a theology in which passionate purification and cognitive-mystical revelation are inseparable moments of deification. Symeonian metaphors do not merely decorate discourse but form a practical language: they guide the seeker in recognising and learning to receive grace (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2017, 320–48, note 522).

St. Symeon consistently uses antinomies as a hermeneutic tool to explore divine mysteries. Opposites such as light/darkness, created/uncreated, vision/unchanged, and body/unsensed are not merely stylistic devices but represent the ontological shifts brought about by grace. By highlighting these contrasts, the author shows that encountering the Uncreated Light is not a mere moral change but a profound ontic transformation: darkness turns into light, the created is penetrated by the Uncreated, and rational sight gives way to an ‘unchanged’ perception that surpasses the senses. *Hymns 2* and *12* express this apophatic tension: the light is ‘known in an unknown way’ and ‘as much as it wills,’ maintaining the divine mystery while acknowledging its manifestation in being (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 60). Similarly, the rhetorical questions in *Hymn 6* shift the theological statement into active wonder: questions like ‘How do you make men gods... how do you enclose the heart in light?’ do not seek argumentative answers but point to an epistemic limit—reason cannot fully explain grace; only experience can reveal it (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2011, 67). Therefore, antinomy and questioning serve complementary roles: one frames the paradox of the divine-human relationship, the other fosters the contemplative attitude essential for receiving the light (*Hymns 2, 6, and 12*).

St. Symeon the New Theologian explains that the light is not just a neutral phenomenon or a simple moral metaphor, but the very means by which God is perceived, inherently linked to the Trinity. The phrase from *Hymn 2* – ‘The One Light of the Holy Trinity, divided in an undivided manner into Three’ – does not suggest multiple essences but shows that God’s energetic presence is unified yet expressed through the lives of each Person. Therefore, the light acts as a medium through which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit reveal and act, while maintaining the unity of Divinity. *Hymn 11* describes this trinitarian experience explicitly: perception begins with seeing the Holy Spirit’s light; within this light, the Son appears; and those who see the Son can, in a limited way, also ‘see’ the Father (cf. Jn 14:9). This process is not a chain of logical steps but a description of how grace transforms perception: the Holy Spirit opens the way,

the Son appears in the light, and the Father is recognized through the entire revelation (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 77). *Hymn 12* emphasizes that true trinitarian vision depends on the condition of the person's heart: it must be pure, humble, and simple (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 1977, 67) with 'clear eyes of the mind.' St. Symeon does not regard sight as an automatic gift but as the result of spiritual purification and grace received; thus, human virtues such as repentance, humility, and purification are essential for experiencing the divine Light in its trinitarian fullness (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 79–83). For St. Symeon, genuine faith, sacramental life, and spiritual cleansing are necessary for truly perceiving Divinity in its grace-filled, trinitarian form.

St. Symeon describes the experience of light as a dynamic process. Initially, the light appears externally as a manifestation, then it penetrates the soul, 'piercing' the limbs and transforming the entire being. *Hymn 29* depicts the light entering the cell, descending inward, and producing a radical effect — the leaving of oneself, ecstasy, and the loss of usual measures, indicating a direct encounter with grace^[12]. Conversely, *Hymn 16* highlights how the light quenches the desire for the divine as it fills all the members, fulfilling the spirit's longing (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 98–9). This process is not merely visual: seeing is accompanied by strong emotions (longing, tears, consolation) and moral shifts (repentance, humility, surrendering the will). In Symeon's view, the light is not purely abstract but involves perception, sensitivity, and ethics, transforming the person's identity in a theandric sense.

Participation in the Glory of God—covering the Eucharist, monasticism, and ascetic disciplines

St. Symeon considers the Eucharist a central sacrament where true encounter with divine illumination occurs—not merely as a symbolic act but as a profound ontological union. In *Hymn 2*, he depicts this union as the human body and blood merging with the divine, becoming transparent and luminous (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 58). This reflects a shift in being: the human element, infused with Christ, turns into a conduit of light, allowing divine glory to pass through. Similarly, *Hymn 7* states that through communion, believers 'become a partaker of His nature,' emphasizing real participation in divine life, which sanctifies and inspires deification. For Symeon, the Eucharistic impact is both personal—transforming the soul and body—and relational—reconfiguring humanity within the Church community (Lossky 1995, 136). The emphasis lies in describing the lived experience rather than abstract theology.

The transparency and radiance of the shared body serve as visible signs of divine work (Teșu 2004, 171). The Eucharist is also a source and means of ongoing grace, not an isolated event but a liturgical core that energizes spiritual life, repentance, and the purification of the heart. Ultimately, the Eucharist is at the heart of salvation, where divine and human communion is experienced, and believers, through the reception of the Body and Blood, carry divine light within to transform themselves (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 68–70).

St. Symeon emphasizes the Eucharist as the core of the mystical and sacramental experience. For him, Holy Communion isn't just a symbolic act or a memory but a genuine encounter with the luminous Divinity that leads to transformation. The imagery from *Hymn 2*, which states that 'the human body and blood are mixed with the divine Body and Blood, and the former becomes transparent and luminous,' suggests an ontological change — human matter, when receiving Christ's presence, becomes capable of reflecting and transmitting the uncreated Glory, thus becoming the 'garment' where grace is revealed. This perspective rejects viewing the Eucharist as merely symbolic; instead, communion is the means through which humans actively participate in the divine nature and partake in the divine energy that illuminates and sanctifies (*Hymn 7*).

The Eucharistic role is closely tied to salvation. Through incarnation, sacrifice, and resurrection, Christ elevates His humanity, 'pneumatized, deified,' into the Trinity's fold. The Eucharist then reveals and shares this divine state with believers. St. Symeon often refers to 'body' and 'blood' to highlight the real presence and its transformative power, not merely symbolic but affecting the receiving person. Dumitru Stăniloae notes that in St. Symeon's teachings, the Eucharist is the most direct means of conveying grace to human nature, serving as the central moment in the process of *theosis* (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2017, 81–3, nota 69).

The link between vision and sacramental communion is also explicitly shown in *Hymn 11*, where the experience of vision stems from the same source as the divine light that manifests through sacraments in the Church. Therefore, the Eucharist serves as a 'sacrament of encounter'—a liturgical setting where 'the eyes of the heart' can see the light, and the body is adorned with grace's glory. Symeon highlights that approaching the chalice requires a genuine inner attitude—humility, fear of God, repentance, purity—so that one can receive the gift fruitfully rather than for judgment (*Hymns 26*^[13] and 32). Hence, liturgical and moral preparation are integral to the Eucharistic experience.

While the Eucharist grants light, truly receiving it requires a purified heart and a life aligned with grace.

For St. Symeon, monastic life is not a social option or merely a cultural ideal, but a fundamental existential choice: a way of ordering your entire being so that it becomes welcoming and receptive to divine light. In *Hymn 3*, the monk is depicted as ‘unmixed with the world and speaking ceaselessly only with God; he is watched as he watches, loved as he loves, and becomes light’^[14] — a formulation that emphasises the dialogical nature of contemplative life: the monk is not an isolated solitary, but a living witness to the presence of God, someone who, being filled with light, becomes himself a lampstand for others.

St. Symeon describes monastic life—comprising the cell, ascetic practices, and obedience to the spiritual father—as an effective pedagogical and healing framework (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 1999, 338). The cell is not a place of escapism but a safeguard: it shields the ‘eyes of the heart’ from worldly noise and temptations, fostering an environment where spiritual perception becomes sharper (*Hymn 28*)^[15]. Obedience influences the will, validating it under the spiritual father’s authority; ascetic practices such as fasting, silence, tears, and renunciations serve as practical means to purify the heart, enabling it to receive grace. *Hymns 4* and *5* explicitly highlight these practices: fleeing worldly distractions, cultivating humility, crying over sins, and maintaining silence—all to ‘cleanse the eyes of the heart’ to perceive the divine light. Dumitru Stăniloae observes that monastic discipline, through its strict rituals, forms a ‘geography of the heart’ where one can encounter and dwell with God.

Paradoxical, yet essential for Symeonian anthropology, grace growth leads to humility: the more a monk shines in the light of the Spirit, the more his conscience claims modesty and repentance. This dynamic — the light that generates humility, and humility that fosters the growth of communion — is emphasised in *Hymns 3* and *14* and marks the spiritual maturity of the called one. At the same time, monastic life is not understood as ascetic individualism: the disciple–spiritual father relationship, the liturgical community, and personal example create mutual formation and fellowship in the glory of God, so that the holiness of one becomes a light for many (Alfeyev 2010, 51).

From the Symeonian view, ascetic practices are more than mere acts of will or exercises; they are active means by which grace becomes accessible and effective in an individual’s life (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001b, 144). In *Hymns 4–6, 8, and 32–34*,

St. Symeon outlines a coherent set of spiritual disciplines: sincere repentance, tears as a heartfelt piercing, the cutting of the will, fasting, silence both inward and outward, remembrance of death, spiritual courage (manliness), humility, and obedience to a spiritual father. These practices are not merely listed but are directly linked to the ability to ‘see’ the Light: *Hymn 4* advocates for ‘pure humility, free of hatred’ and ‘the gift of tears,’ which are essential for opening the heart’s eyes to God’s light. *Hymn 5* employs an ergonomic image of asceticism’s efficacy: when effort is sincere and intense, the light acts like ‘an immaterial arrow’ that penetrates and transforms the recipient—illustrating the active interplay between human effort and divine grace. Thus, the focus is on the cooperation of human freedom and grace: ascetic effort alone does not create the light but fosters receptivity (St. Symeon the New Theologian 2001a, 62–66).

Tears hold a central role, with pure crying serving as a sign of repentance that appeals to divine mercy and prompts inner change. *Hymns 15* and *16* highlight the cycle of comfort, crying, and deepening repentance. Dumitru Stăniloae notes that crying opens the heart to grace, and the comfort from God encourages further longing and purification^[16]. Fasting, silence, and the suppression of the will act as ‘sharpenings’ of the soul by diminishing sensory distractions and passion’s dominance, thus enabling a clearer internal choice for God. *Hymn 8* shows how practicing good through commandments habituates the soul to the light, while *Hymn 9*^[17] shows how this light brings about apathy—where passions no longer hold sway. Therefore, the Symeonian ascetic practice significantly influences the human being: shaping the will, recalibrating sensitivity, and developing a tangible ability to receive and hold the transformative light—not as a merit, but as a cooperative response to divine grace.

St. Symeon’s hymns depict participation in divine glory as a comprehensive, sacramental, and transfigurative process, where the Eucharist, monastic life, and ascetic practices are interconnected elements of a unified spiritual pedagogy. For St. Symeon, Holy Communion is more than a symbol; it is the source and actual place of communion, initiating, renewing, and continuously maintaining the luminous grace within the soul of the worthy (*Hymns 2* and *7*). Monastic life offers the right existential environment for this gift: the cell, persistent prayer, spiritual guidance, and asceticism foster an inner discipline that guards the ‘eyes of the heart’ and boosts the ability to preserve the light (*Hymns 3* and *28*). Ascetic practices—such as deep repentance, tears, voluntary severance, fasting, silence, and remembrance of death—are not only moral virtues but essential tools that cleanse and refine sensitivity, will, and understanding,

preparing the soul to receive grace and sustain participation (cf. *Hymns* 4–6, 8, and 15). The collection clearly diagnoses human nature as spiritually blind and imprisoned by passions but also offers practical remedies—ascetic effort, humility, and communion—to restore the individual to life in Christ (cf. *Hymns* 26, 32–34, and 46–48).

The deification of the body at St. Simeon

Symeonian anthropology emphasizes the unity of the person through a theandric perspective. While man remains created with his individual personality, he becomes a site of ontological transformation through grace, which affects not only the soul but also the body. In hymns (notably 2, 9, 15, 28, 29, 30, and 44), St. Symeon portrays the body not merely as a sensitive support but as a limb that participates in divine life. The body can appear ‘transparent,’ ‘radiant,’ and ‘clothed in light’—often through Eucharistic communion (*Hymn* 2) or mystical visions (*Hymns* 11 and 29). This ‘deification of the body’ affirms the created identity rather than suppressing it. The language used by Symeon points to participation graced by divine grace, not absorption into the divine essence (*Hymn* 15). From an existential standpoint, this transformation results in apatheia: the divine light enables mastery over passions and reshapes the will’s freedom (*Hymn* 9). As a ‘pneumatized’ body, it remains morally responsible; holiness does not justify excess but calls for humility and obedience. Contemporary scholars (Krivocheine 1997; Alfeyev 2010) emphasize the link between this anthropology and the tradition of *theosis*: experiencing grace practically grounds the theology of deification, highlighting the body as the locus for encountering luminous Divinity.

St. Symeon frequently resorts to visual and tactile images to capture the transformation of the body under the action of divine light, thus operating a profoundly corporeal anthropology. At the centre of this imagery is the formulation from *Hymn* 2: through Communion, ‘the human body and blood are mixed with the divine Body and Blood, and the former becomes transparent and luminous’ — a statement that involves two essential interpretative directions. On the one hand, it emphasises a real, not merely symbolic, communication between the two ‘bodies’ – Christ’s presence in the Sacrament is not abstract but effectively contacts the human matter, and on the other hand, the image signals a perceptible change in the subject – the body, clothed in grace, becomes ‘transparent’ to the unseen reality, capable of receiving and manifesting light, that is, becoming a medium for a presence that transcends the strictly material plane. The same dynamic is evident in *Hymn* 28, but from a practical and existential perspective.

There, St. Symeon recounts how the one who has seen the light withdraws into his cell and asks to be allowed to die before God, wishing to maintain communion with that grace-filled state; in this experience, the body is compared to 'grass' — a biblical image expressing human fragility — yet, as grass receiving the light, it gains a transfigurative life: the body remains a body, but is penetrated and transformed by the divine presence. The metaphor of grass (cf. Is 40:6–7) thus emphasises the continuity of human nature in the process of deification: not annihilation, but transformation (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 175–6)^[18].

The 15th Hymn pushes imagery to a provocative limit by asserting that, through grace, even the 'indecent' parts of the body can become signs of Christ's presence. The phrase 'Christ becomes like the indecent organ' has sparked debate, but within Symeon's context, it functions as a mystical hyperbole meant to illustrate that grace covers all aspects of humanity without replacing their created nature. Dumitru Stăniloae sees this as a way for mystical theology to emphasize the universality and depth of grace: deification doesn't erase the creature but transforms it from within, making the body an active element in divine life.

Christ is not divided, not partitioned, but is entirely present in each of the faithful until the very depths of each one's being. St. Symeon goes so far as to demonstrate this fact, showing that even the reproductive organ [*balanon*] is irradiated by God's grace. These words that Christ would become 'like an unseemly organ' in the sense of being filled with His grace have probably caused a huge wave of polemics and heated disputes. However, St. Symeon shows that the one who has clothed himself in Christ, who has received the luminous garment of grace over his entire body, will not be ashamed of those words nor be disturbed. Because Christ unites or mingles with each member of our body. Speaking at this level, with an enlightened mind, he no longer considered bodily aspects. But those who did not understand him, and perhaps still do not, wondered how it could be that Christ is thought of in relation to unseemly members. Those who have kept their old garment and only a small patch of it (cf. Mt 9:16) and have added a new piece to it, naturally do not understand this. They have not fully clothed themselves in the luminous garment, and therefore they feel ashamed when they hear such statements. To offer them an alternative that would make them think without any sexual connotation, the author suggests imagining Christ in the womb of His Mother, and then where He passed to come into the world; then to realise that He became man like us, a perfect man and a perfect God. Therefore, they should not be

distressed by what he says. And, to reinforce this with a more contemporary example from his time, St. Symeon mentions his spiritual father, St. Symeon the Eloquent, who was not ashamed to see someone else naked. This is because he

had Christ entirely, and he himself was entirely Christ, and all his members and the members of anyone else, in part and altogether, he saw as Christ, and therefore he remained unmoved, uninjured, and unperturbed, as one who himself was entirely Christ, and saw all the baptized and those clothed in Christ as Christ himself. (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 90–3)

St. Symeon clarifies that *apatheia* (ἀπάθεια in early Christian tradition) doesn't mean a lack of feeling but rather a state in which passions no longer control the individual. In his hymns, this isn't seen as psychological numbness but as an active victory of inner life: the heart stays alive, sensitive, and capable of love and compassion, yet it is no longer driven or enslaved by desires and degrading impulses. *Hymn 9* vividly illustrates this ultimate state of the light witness: the 'rapt' person in the light is detached from worldly attachments, lifted above material concerns, and becomes apathic; he acts 'as if he has a dead body in the sense that he still has a soul in the body, but he will be dead to passions' — highlighting that the body remains but is no longer ruled by passion (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 73–4).

This *apatheia* manifests not only internally but also externally through behaviour: resisting worldly temptations, controlling thoughts and impulses, and maintaining moral stability amidst temptation. St. Symeon uses technical imagery to illustrate this transformation. *Hymns 34* and *44* depict the metaphor of iron heated in a fire to show how grace leaves its mark on the individual. Just as heated iron retains the fire's qualities without blending with it, the illuminated person preserves their created nature while adopting the properties of grace—such as purification, generosity, and *apatheia* (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 248). This suggests that *apatheia* is an 'acquired property': feelings, emotions, and perceptions remain, but are transfigured so passions no longer dominate life. In Symeonian theology, *apatheia* results from a cooperative effort between ascetic practice and grace—a form of positive freedom that preserves the created self and elevates it to divine participation.

From St. Symeon to St. Gregory Palamas – Experiential Continuity and Doctrinal Formulation of the Uncreated Light

The connection between Symeonian mysticism and later Eastern theology, especially Palamism, offers a valuable perspective for understanding the continuity of experiential knowledge and the evolution of Orthodox thought. The comparison is organized into three levels. First, the prefigurative elements in the hymns—such as uncreated light as a revealing energy (*Hymns* 2 and 33), the growing experience of the Trinitarian vision (*Hymn* 11), and the anthropological conditions of perception (*Hymns* 12 and 34)—constitute a body of ideas that St. Gregory Palamas would later develop. Second, similarities and differences are considered at a methodological level: St. Symeon works within a mystical, poetic, and experiential framework (St. Nicholas of Stithatos 2003), using images and autobiographical elements, while St. Gregory provides a methodological and theological framework, notably the essence-energies distinction (Calvário 2018, 227–34). The Symeonian vocabulary (*φῶς, δόξα, μετουσίωσις*) foreshadows but does not explicitly define the Palamite distinctions. Third, their influence on contemporary theology of the energies is twofold: St. Symeon affirms grace as an epistemic experience, and Palamas provides the doctrinal framework to preserve this experience from conceptual distortion. Modern scholarship (Krivocheine 1997, Alfeyev 2010) appreciates their complementarity—Symeon offers experiential insights, Palamas formulates doctrinal clarity, and their ongoing dialogue enriches present-day theological reflection.

Central to the Symeonian hymns is the belief that God reveals Himself not as a simple idea, but through an uncreated ‘light’ that permeates and transforms creation. *Hymn* 2’s line — ‘The One Light of the Holy Trinity, divided in an undivided manner into Three’ — is more than an aesthetic image; it is a theological statement: the light represents the divine energy by which the Godhead is revealed, without confusing its essence with creation. Consequently, the light serves as the active expression of divine presence, the medium through which the relationship between Creator and creation is articulated. This view highlights God’s dynamic and communicative nature, showing that He is not only transcendent but also reveals Himself through an uncreated manifestation.

Hymn 11 describes how the Trinitarian revelation is experienced as a gradual journey: initially, the Spirit’s light opens the inner eyes, revealing the Son, and those who ‘see’ the Son can, within their limits, access the Father. This progression — Spirit,

Son, Father — is not an abstract hierarchy but a vivid account of how God's divine manifestations are perceived in mystical life. This perception is participatory, meaning the believer is not just an observer but a transformed person who responds through repentance, humility, and sacramental communion. From a doctrinal view, these Symeonian insights lay the groundwork for the later Palamite ideas on uncreated energies. They support the idea that encountering God is a real and effective experience, with epistemic value for grace. The mystical language of St. Symeon also maintains necessary apophaticism — the light is known 'in an unknown way' — highlighting the limits of conceptual language and emphasizing the role of sacraments and ascetic practices for genuine perception.

In his hymns, St. Symeon emphasizes an uncreated light that is active rather than passive, continually pouring out upon the creature and transforming it. Imagery such as the 'immaterial arrow' in *Hymn 5* highlights the dynamic and powerful nature of this experience: the light does not merely appear but penetrates and changes the recipient. *Hymn 30* explores the connection between fire and light, indicating that the energy emitted serves both to purify and illuminate. The focus is that this divine energy, though uncreated, can be communicated — a grace-filled, personal transfer that enables the creature to participate in divine life. This image serves as a practical theology of energies, foreshadowing themes from the mystical realm that Palamas later formalized (Chirilă et al. 2019: 221–30).

Unlike speculative writings, St. Symeon highlights the concept of direct encounter: the light is perceivable and tangible within the body and soul. It induces trembling, a sense of departure from oneself, ecstatic states, and psychophysical effects that demonstrate the real nature of the encounter (*Hymns 11* and *29*). *Hymn 11* describes how the vision of the light progresses through an embodied journey, while *Hymn 29* details its entry into the cell and its existential impact. This experiential aspect of divine knowledge — 'seeing' and 'feeling' grace — underpins Palamas' later argument for the distinction of energies: since the experience of grace has observable and reproducible properties within the Church's life, it cannot simply be dismissed as symbolism or illusion (Sf. Grigorie Palama 1977, 263–372).

St. Symeon does not pursue elaborate philosophical theories, but his writings consistently reflect a distinction: Divinity remains 'hidden in its essence,' inaccessible to pure reason, yet it 'shines everywhere' through its glory and manifestations (*Hymns 12* and *33*). This dual point suggests a functional separation: what humans can access

is not the absolute core but its revealing energies, the rays of glory conveying divine presence without confusing it with the essence itself. Consequently, St. Symeon presents an experiential and interpretative model of a practical distinction between ‘what God is in Himself’ and ‘how God reveals Himself,’ laying the groundwork for later definitions of uncreated energies, while still preserving an apophatic and mystical approach (Stăniloae 1993, 65–78).

St. Symeon recognizes these truths and boldly addresses the Lord Christ, praying that the omnipresent, eternal, and glory-revealing God might allow him to see Him as if through a mirror (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 1996, 39). This highlights the paradox of perceiving divine light: one sees God’s glory yet does not see Him fully, for no mortal can gaze upon God’s face and live (cf. Ex 33:20). Dumitru Stăniloae explains that God’s light and glory are inseparable from His essence; we see Him in it, but it is not identical to His core. This indicates that divine essence and divine energies are distinct—an insight more explicitly developed by St. Gregory Palamas. Interestingly, St. Symeon, about three centuries earlier, sensed this distinction, suggesting that when humans see divine light, they encounter God as if facing a mystery (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2017, 472–8, note 802).

The gap between St. Symeon’s mystical-experiential project and St. Gregory Palamas’s systematic approach exists on multiple levels, each emphasizing a distinct aspect of theological discourse within Orthodoxy.

a) St. Symeon remains primarily a witness to an experience: his discourse is narrative, confessional, poetic. Metaphors, antinomies, and rhetorical questions are tools intended to awaken in the reader the inner state corresponding to the reception of grace, not to construct a theoretical framework. Palamas, on the other hand, appears as a systematic theologian: he introduces and refines philosophical and theological notions (essence, energy, uncreated) to articulate a coherent doctrinal defence of authentic mystical experience in the face of objections. Thus, St. Symeon provides phenomenological data; St. Palamas transforms them into theological argumentation.

b) St. Symeon speaks using language of light, glory, and grace, which carry theological significance but remain metaphorical and fluid. He does not adopt a formal methodological approach to differentiate essence and energies within a philosophical framework. Conversely, Palamas catalogs and establishes specific terms that support a juridical-dogmatic dialogue: the distinction between essence and energies becomes a tool for clarification and defence. Consequently, the analogies between them should

be viewed with subtlety: St. Symeon offers the experiential substance, while Palamas provides the doctrinal structure essential for legitimizing that experience.

c) Symeonian hymns serve as spiritual guidance material, including prayers, ascetic exhortations, and testimonies aimed at shaping spiritual life. These support the Church's practice. Palamas, on the other hand, engages in apologetics and systematic theology, addressing theological and political debates of his era. He provides a doctrinal framework to safeguard mystical experience within the church's institutional structure. Ultimately, the difference is not one of fundamental opposition but of function: St. Symeon as an experiential forerunner and Palamas as a systematic theologian—both are complementary in the development of Eastern theology.

In Eastern tradition, the reception of St. Symeon balances experiential admiration with the need for doctrinal explanation. His texts serve as living records of encounters with the uncreated light: some view them as genuine evidence of mystical experience that require theological validation; others find the extreme expressions (like in *Hymn 15*) unsettling. St. Gregory Palamas, centuries later, introduced the essence–energies framework to legitimize and safeguard the Symeonian experience, clarifying how God truly acts in creation without confusing His essence with His manifestations (Tomoioagă 2015, 142–53).

Conclusion

The study reveals that the concepts of light and communion in God's glory form the core of St. Symeon the New Theologian's hymns, in which light is understood as an uncreated energy that manifests, purifies, and transforms created beings. Analysing the hymns shows that for St. Symeon, light is the direct expression of the Trinitarian presence: it reveals itself gradually (Spirit → Son → Father), is sacramentally experienced in the Eucharist, and is practiced in daily life through asceticism, repentance, and monastic discipline. Therefore, communion is more than just a theological idea; it functions as a sacramental and formative process shaping the person.

The study's main contributions include: (1) emphasizing the energetic-ontological nature of light in St. Symeon's teaching—a form of prefigurative theology of energies expressed through mystical language; (2) explaining how the Eucharist, monastic life, and ascetic practices form a cohesive pedagogy for receiving and preserving light; (3) presenting a theandric anthropology where the body is called to deification while

maintaining its identity; (4) examining mystical language—such as metaphor, antinomy, and question—as hermeneutical tools that validate experience and uphold the mystery.

This study has several implications for contemporary theology: (a) it reaffirms the legitimacy of mystical and sacramental experiences as sources of knowledge; (b) highlights the need for a hermeneutic that is attentive to the poetic language of tradition while maintaining conceptual clarity; (c) stresses the importance of pastoral criteria—such as humility, moral fruits, and stability—in evaluating mystical phenomena; and (d) underscores the value of the Symeonian model in ecumenical dialogue regarding participation in divine life.

Overall, the Symeonian legacy continues to serve as a crucial resource: offering ongoing data on how the Church engages with the Light and prompting theology to express this encounter with doctrinal and pastoral care.

Notes

[1] In this research, we will primarily use the translation of hymns by Ioan I. Ică Jr. published by Deisis Publishing House in Sibiu (2001).

[2] The experience of witnessing divine light and the significance of Symeon the Eloquent, St. Symeon's spiritual father, are central themes in *Hymn 18* (see also Krivocheine 1997, 15). This hymn can be considered propaedeutic regarding divine light, as it explains what the light is, its effects on the observer, and how the act of seeing it occurs (Sf. Symeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 111).

[3] In Hymn 11, St. Symeon recalls a vision of God, linking it to the experiences of Deacon Stephen and the Apostle Paul. He aims to situate himself within a tradition preserved over time, showing that he has encountered something like what early righteous Christians experienced. At the start of the hymn, St. Symeon asks whether the God who once ascended to heaven and remains hidden now chooses to reveal Himself to sinners. He seeks an answer, recalling Deacon Stephen's testimony of seeing heaven open and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand (Acts 7:56). St. Symeon also reports having had this divine vision multiple times, witnessing Christ in Light alongside the Father and Holy Spirit, even during the night and in darkness (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 76).

[4] The author employs an antinomic style, using interrogations to shed light on divine mysteries. Instead of explaining God's work logically, he asks how God accomplishes these deeds, revealing that God acts, works within each person's life, and guides believers toward perfection, while leaving the answers open. Among these questions, the most representative ones for our theme include:

How do you make men into gods / how do you turn darkness into light? / How do you bring out of hell, / how do you make mortals incorruptible? / How do you draw darkness towards light, / how do you hold night in your fist? / How do you envelop the heart in light, / how do you transform the whole?

From these, we can derive clear assertions: God transforms men into gods, turns darkness into light, pulls the soul out of hell, renders mortals incorruptible, draws darkness to light, holds night in His fist, enshrouds the heart in light, and changes the entire being. Yet, framing these as questions preserves a mysterious aspect of these truths (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2011a, 67).

[5] St. Symeon describes an ecstatic experience where he became stiff, his body trembling as he struggled to withstand the power of the divine glory. This compelled him to retreat into the darkness of the night, where he was before the vision. He then regained clarity, seeking safety within himself. During those mystical moments, he believed he had left his body and forsaken reason. Yet, afterward, he understood that he had not lost God when seeking refuge; even within his own body, he could find the One who gives life to all. (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 77).

[6] Hymn 7 expresses the author's amazement at the following paradox: he can worship God within himself and yet see Him so far away; he feels Him working within him but locates Him in heaven; He shines in his material heart in an immaterial way. And he immediately notices that he is marked by a pain now that he sees His shining light within him. It is that pain and longing to grasp Him as fully as possible, to quench his thirst for Him. And even if he can never fully be satisfied, he finds that it is enough to see Him, to feel Him. And this is made possible through Communion, through the Eucharistic act in which he unites with God and becomes a partaker of His nature. Through Holy Communion, the believer is given divine nature; through this wondrous Mystery of the Church, the distant are united: human nature and divine nature. (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 68–70).

[7] In *Hymn 2*, St. Symeon highlights various aspects of the uncreated divine light. Using a language full of antinomies, he explains 1) that angels and humans share the same uncreated glory or light; 2) that this Light belongs to all three Hypostases of the Holy Trinity; 3) that we come to know God only through it; and 4) that this knowledge is limited to what God chooses to reveal. St. Symeon clearly states that it concerns

The One Light of the Holy Trinity, divided in an undivided way into Three, which is One in Three manifestations, known in an unknowable way, as much as it will; for it is impossible for a creature to fully know the Creator as He knows Himself through His nature. However, all angels and created beings see and understand with the mind through grace, not by grasping, but by understanding as much as the Light wills to reveal. (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 60).

[8] The *Hymn* 33 opens with the statement, ‘Light is the Father, Light is the Son, Light is the Holy Spirit.’ St. Symeon then highlights that the three Persons of the Trinity are one Light—fully present in each Person and collectively. God is seen as a simple Light, yet within this unity, the Three Hypostases are distinguishable yet perfectly united. They illuminate the world in this unified way, reflecting mankind created in their image and likeness. By manifesting the divine image within, humans share in the light of the Uncreated Being, enabling them to transcend passions and move from darkness into light (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 199–200).

[9] After highlighting these ascetic practices that the monk must submit to, it shows towards the end whether he will succeed in purifying himself through them: he will see the Divine Light, which is ‘an immaterial arrow shot from the Immaterial.’ From God radiates the Divine Light, which, piercing the believer, deifies him. (Sf. Symeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 65–6).

[10] Divine light transforms and enlightens man, making him transparent and immaterial. The individual becomes like a lampstand that radiates light around him, connected to the spiritual Sun—the One who is the Sun of righteousness, the Upper East, and the Light of the world. Dumitru Stăniloae explains that the spiritual man ‘becomes the subject of the light he receives,’ but this subject also recognizes that the light comes from an infinite source. He sees Christ clearly yet also sees Him united with himself—like a window illuminated by the sun, appearing with another sun but not merging with it. The supreme Sun, aware of itself, makes man conscious of the light that enters and spreads within him, as a secondary subject emanating from the primary Subject from whom the light originates (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2017, 486–92, nota 825).

[11] Similar to natural fire, divine fire provides light. Its illumination reflects on both the soul and body of the worthy individual. The fire purifies by burning away sins, ignites the soul, and lights it up, enabling union with the Creator. Therefore, the roles of fire and light are intertwined, with both being vital for the process of deification (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 185)

[12] The hymn’s opening seems to vividly catch us in a moment of discovery by St. Symeon: ‘Where do you come from?’ he wonders aloud. ‘How do you enter my

tightly secured cell?’ He finds it strange that this presence is foreign and beyond understanding. Yet, suddenly, this luminous presence fully enters him, shining like a full moon, leaving him speechless and unthinking, my God. He recognizes that You are the one who enlightens those in darkness (Lk 1:78-79), and he is transported beyond himself and language, witnessing a miracle that surpasses all creation, nature, and speech. This vision unfolds as the monk, isolated in his cell in prayer, suddenly sees a light initially outside him. At a certain point, it enters his soul, elevating him to a higher spiritual level. He feels as if he is leaving his body and material self behind. During these moments, words and reasoning fade as he enters a realm of vision, gaining the certainty of faith—knowing, deep in his soul, that He is God, the Savior. (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 178).

[13] In the Eucharist, Christ is genuinely present, but the right attitude is essential before the chalice. Those approaching Him should be trembling and deeply repentant, recognizing their sinful nature and sincerely believing in Jesus Christ. Faith will light their hearts and lead them out of darkness and death (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 164–5).

[14] St. Symeon centres the third hymn around the image of the monk, emphasizing his calling and the heights he can attain. Notably, the hymn illustrates that

the monk remains unmixed with the world, constantly communicating only with God; he is observed by God, loved in return, and becomes an indescribably shining light. As he is glorified, he appears to grow poorer, and having become familiar with God, he seems like a stranger.

The meaning of the monk becoming a light is not explicitly explained by St. Symeon. Dumitru Stăniloae points out that this relationship with God is active—when the monk loves God, he also feels loved, and this love—felt and demonstrated—serves as a light that illuminates both the loved and the lovers (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 61, nota 40).

[15] St. Symeon was deemed worthy to see the true light, the Creator of all lights. He realized that sunlight is merely a faint reflection of the divine light that flowed from God at the beginning of creation, before the celestial bodies were formed, or that radiated from Christ during the Transfiguration (Pașca-Tușa, Trif, Popa-Bota 2021: 153-7). This understanding led him to retreat into his cell, seeking communion with the Lord. Now, he regrets all those days when he only enjoyed the visible light, unaware of the life-giving divine light. Once it was revealed to him and shone through his entire being, he understood that He is truly ‘a God

of all, a God whom no one of the people of the world has seen' (1 Tim 6:16; Jn 1:4); for He exists outside the world, beyond light and dark, beyond air, mind, and sensation. Seeing Him, St. Symeon was lifted above sensation itself. No one has seen God's essence; He manifests Himself through His glory as light, clarifying the relationship between God's unseen and seen aspects. (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 173).

[16] Dumitru Stăniloae observes – from a philosophical perspective – that there is a passage through internal theses and antitheses:

when I distance myself from God, I weep. But the weeping brings me God's mercy, which consoles me. This causes me to weep differently, a weeping of compassion for His mercy. However, this also makes me see even more clearly my unworthiness, which brings me to weep with dissatisfaction with myself. And, being in this state of deep lamentation, God examines me and envelops me in His light. And, full of wonder, I begin to weep again because I see more clearly my impurity.

Thus, we observe that the ascetic must, in his longing for God, be constantly marked by repentance and humility. "God, says Saint James the Apostle, resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jam 4:6). This fact is also highlighted within this hymn. The heart of a person who is constantly humble and open-hearted will be examined by God and illuminated. (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2017, nota 153).

[17] The *Hymn* 9 of St. Symeon reveals a paradox: the light is visible physically, yet it isolates the witness from worldly concerns. It elevates him beyond materiality and sinful inclinations, granting apatheia by showing that everything worldly is insignificant compared to God's eternal gifts. St. Symeon illustrates that such a high level of apatheia causes a person to behave as if dead—retaining a soul but being unaffected by passions. The divine light that fills him prevents him from falling out of love with God and from allowing any passionate thoughts to take root in his mind (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 73–4).

[18] Man's duty is to pray fervently and maintain the flame of longing for God within his soul. If this fire burns, he must stay alert, because laziness can extinguish it. When active, this fire inspires ongoing repentance and tears, as man yearns for eternal joy and wishes to attain it quickly. Although it is a flame, it does not consume the 'herbaceous being' (Is 40:6-7) of man; instead, it unites with it, preserving rather than destroying it (cf. Ex 3:2). St. Symeon emphasizes this in the seventh prayer before Holy Communion, describing it as a fire he partakes in with wonder:

Rejoicing and trembling, I partake of the fire; being dry grass myself, and—a strange miracle!—I am cooled without burning, like the ancient bush which, though aflame, was not consumed.

His sense of awe prompts a profound question: how can the Almighty God unite with man, yet allow him to retain his being while undergoing change? St. Symeon asks:

Christ, my God, how do You mingle with the grass with Your entire divine being, my God, You who dwell in a light utterly unbearable? How, remaining unchanged and entirely unapproachable, do You preserve the being of the grass and, while transforming it, keep it unchanged? The grass becomes like the light, which is You, the Light, united without confusion, transformed without change.

This question hints at an answer, yet its form maintains the mystery of God's work with man. Reflecting on this helps us understand the concept of man becoming deified—becoming God through grace (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 175–6).

References

Alfeyev, Ilarion. *Sfântul Symeon Noul Teolog și tradiția ortodoxă*. Translated by Ioana Stoicescu and Maria-Magdalena Rusen. București: Sofia, 2010.

Calvário, Patrícia. "Theosis and the Metaphysics of Light of Gregory Palamas." *Analele Universității București* 67.1 (2018): 227–34.

Chirilă, Ioan, Stelian Pașca-Tușa and Bogdan Șoptorean. "St. Symeon the New Theologian and His Personal Experience of Seeing the Divine Light." *Icon of Faith. International Journal of Interdisciplinary Scientific Research* 1 (2021): 5–18.

Chirilă, Ioan, Stelian Pașca-Tușa, Adrian Mărincean and Bogdan Șoptorean. "The divine light. The sight and experience of it in Gregory Palamas theology." *Astra Salvensis* 13 (2019): 221–30.

Chirilă, Ioan, Stelian Pașca-Tușa. "Saint Sophrony Sakharov's Vade Mecum towards the Divine Light." *Religions* 14.1(69) (2023): 1-12.

Dușe, Ioan Călin. "Sfântul Simoen Noul Teolog – un model pentru creștinii de azi." *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Theologia Graeco-Catholica Varadiensis* 1-2 (2023-2024): 111–46.

Ică, Ioan I. jr., "Lumina liturgică a teologului luminii lui Hristos." In *Cuviosul Nicodim Aghioritul, Slujba, Acatistul și Lauda Sfântului Symeon Noul Teolog*. Sibiu: Deisis, 2002.

Ică, Ioan I. jr., “Sfântul Symeon Noul Teolog și provocarea mistică.” In Sf. Symeon Noul Teolog, *Scrieri I. Discursuri teologice și etice*. Translated by Ioan I. Ică jr. Sibiu: Deisis, 2001.

Ică, Ioan I. jr., “Teologie și spiritualitate la Sfântul Symeon Noul Teolog.” *Mitropolia Ardealului* 3 (1987): 23–42.

Krivocheine, Basile. În lumina lui Hristos. Sfântul Symeon Noul Teolog (949-1022). *Viața – Spiritualitatea – Învățătura*. Translated by Vasile Leb and Gheorghe Iordan, București: Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1997.

Lossky, Vladimir. *Vederea lui Dumnezeu*. Translated by Maria Cornelia Oros. Sibiu: Deisis, 1995.

Pașca-Tușa, Stelian, Claudia-Cosmina Trif and Ioan Popa-Bota. “The Iconic Representation of the Taboric Light.” *European Journal of Science and Theology* 17.2 (2021): 151–167.

Sf. Grigorie Palama. “Despre sfânta lumina.” In *Filocalia*. Vol. 7, Translated by Dumitru Stăniloae, 263–372. București: Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1977.

Sf. Symeon Noul Teolog. “Cele 225 de capete teologice și practice.” In *Filocalia*. Vol. 6. Translated by Dumitru Stăniloae. București: Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1977.

Sf. Symeon Noul Teolog. “Erosurile imnelor dumnezeiești.” In *Imne, Epistole, Capitole*. Translated by Ioan I. Ică jr., 31–302. Sibiu: Deisis, 2001a.

Sf. Symeon Noul Teolog. *Cateheze*. Translated by Ioan I. Ică jr. Sibiu: Deisis, 1999.

Sf. Symeon Noul Teolog. *Discursuri teologice și etice*. Translated by Ioan I. Ică jr. Sibiu: Deisis, 2001b.

Sf. Symeon Noul Teolog. *Imnele iubirii dumnezeiești*. Translated by Dumitru Stăniloae. București: Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2017.

Sf. Symeon Noul Teolog. *Țelul vieții creștine*. Translated by Arhimandrit Paulin Lecca și Veniamin Milov. București: Ed. Anastasia, 1996.

St. Nichita Stithatul. *Viața Sfântului Symeon Noul Teolog*. Translated by Ilie Iliescu. București: Herald, 2003.

Stăniloae, Dumitru. *Viața și învățătura Sfântului Grigorie Palama. Cu patru tratate traduse*. București: Scripta, 1993.

Teșu, Ioan. “Experierea luminii dumnezeiești la Sfântul Symeon Noul Teolog.” In *Analele Științifice ale Universității „A.I. Cuza” din Iași* (Secțiunea Teologie). Tomul IX (2004): 149-73.

Tomoioagă, Florin T. “The vision of Divine Light in Saint Gregory Palamas’s Theology.” *Acta Teologica* 35.2 (2015): 142–53.