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**THE MYSTIC OF THE HEART IN THE THEOLOGY OF ST.
SIMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN (X-XI C.)**

*“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls”
(Matt. 11: 29)*

At the core of the theology of St. Simeon The New Theologian stands the study of the purification of the heart, the silence (hesychia), the light in Christ, the attention and the degrees of prayer, as well as the theosis of man in his striving for perfection not only in the future, but also in the present life. The mystical experience in the context of the Orthodox faith is a way to knowledge of God, through the personal participation of man, by means of will, through conscious ascension and a synergetic relationship with Christ and intention of a spiritual transformation and likeness of God.

For St. Simeon light is the most faithful way of expressing God and His energies, and the heart is precisely the place where He is depicted, not bodily, but bodiless and „as it is appropriate to God“¹. In the language of mystic theology he speaks of „illumination“ and „contemplation of light“ and of „the mysterious interlocution of The Holy Spirit“². The representation of Christ in the heart is an all-encompassing spiritual event, a theosis, a charismatic gift resulting from the personally experienced life in God.

Mysticism in Eastern Christianity is not a gnoseological isolation and insularity in the individuum, but a living connection to the living God, an eschatological experience of faith, restoration of the image of man in Christ, into the sacraments of the Church through the grace of The Holy Spirit.

¹ Свети Симеон Нови Богослов, *ТВОРЕНИЯ*, Vol. 2, *Слова и Божествени Химни*, translated from New Greek to Russian from Bishop Theophan, the Recluse of Vysha, Руски Атонски манастир “Свети Панталеймон” (1892), Православно отечество, 2017, Слово 57, 503.

² *Ibid.*, Слово 25, 209.

Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemman reminds that Christianity is not just a doctrine, but a discovery of a fact that people did not know earlier, a message of the new life given to man³, a new privity, a fact based on the Revelation.

The relation between theology, faith and spirituality is important and unconditional and presupposes a personal charismatic experience, mystical knowledge of God and sacramental life in The Holy Church. That is exactly the kind of spiritual experience to which St. Simeon attests. Undoubtedly he is one of the great mystics of the X-XI century, whom the Eastern Church deservedly called a „New Theologian“, along with the names of such theologians as St. John the Apostle and Theologian and St. Gregory of Nazianzus (Patriarch of Constantinople) with whom he is related in spirit.

St. Simeon (949-1022 AD) is the third great theologian honored with this knowledge of God, as evidenced by his words, but also taught through his personal spiritual life. In the epistles of Reverend Simeon, as well as in the letters of the holy Fathers of Hesychasm, the idea is clear that Orthodoxy is a true therapeutic way to heal the sick and injured soul after the Fall, and the means of achieving this goal are the preservation and purity of the mind and of the heart, which is the „invisible eye of the soul“.

The theology of mysticism after the IV-V century AD, in the words of Protopresbyter John Meyendorff is fully associated with the mysticism of the heart as a concern for human entirety⁴. Man is created perfect, but that state does not coincide with his ultimate goal which is an improvement in Christ to the degree of deification – theosis (θέωσις). In the Byzantine tradition this is a warning of purification from any images outside the heart.

St. Simeon, as a prominent representative of monastic circles during the late Byzantine period, fully adheres to the tradition of Christology and he is an interpreter of the idea of deification (theosis), continuing the experience of St. Macarius of Egypt and St. Maximus the Confessor⁵.

He describes the blessed condition of all those who have resembled Christ by grace in the present life. „Blessed are those who have approached the divine light, and have entered into it, and have joined with it, and have become the whole light (...)“.

„Blessed are they who see that the garb of their soul is bright-luminous, for it is Christ, because they will continually be filled with unspeakable joy“⁶. „Blessed are those whose invisible eye of the soul is always open and who at the time of each of their prayers see the light, for they have become equal in honor to the angels. And if they are such while they are still in the present life, while

³ Прот. А. Шмеман, *Въведение в богословието*, Велико Търново 1998, 8, NetLibrary, (e-book).

⁴ Прот. Й. Майендорф, *Византийско богословие // Монашеско богословие*, София 1995, 93, NetLibrary, (e-book).

⁵ Прот. Й. Майендорф, *Христологията в късна Византия* <https://dveri.bg/component/com_content/Itemid,100522/catid,281/id,19024/view,article/>(accessed May 09, 2018).

⁶ Свети Симеон Нови Богослов, *ТВОРЕНИЯ*, Vol. 1, Слово 57, *op. cit.*, 501.

they are still connected by the flesh, what will they be after the Resurrection, after they perceive that spiritual and incorruptible body (...)”. „Blessed is he who sees that in him is depicted Christ - the light of the world⁷“.

For Reverend Simeon light is the most faithful way of expressing God, and the place of this depiction is neither „in the face, nor in the chest,“ or in any other part of the body, but in the heart. „In our heart, He is depicted, and not bodily, but bodiless, and as is appropriate to God⁸“. „God is light and gives of His light to those with whom he associates, according to the measure of their purification. And then the extinguished cresset of the soul, the dark mind knows that it has kindled and shines because it is occupied by divine fire⁹“.

God of light rewards everyone who has been honored with Grace of Spirit. The inner purification of the whole man begins from the mind, passes through the heart, as the most important organ, and hence the purification of the whole soul with all its senses. The heart is a symbol of the throne on which God sits.

In Orthodox theology there is no other part of the body that characterizes the whole person as well in his psychosomatic hypostasis as the heart. The human heart is a core, a holy vessel, the place of a meeting between man and God, but also a center of evil thoughts and of every evil. *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”* (Jer.17:9).

St. Simeon calls for continuous purification of the heart, through tears of repentance, with prayer and life in the sacred mysteries of The Holy Church. He, himself, through the Grace of The Holy Spirit, was honored to participate daily in Eucharistic life in Christ by shedding constant tears and residing in repentance and prayer.

His is the prayer before the Holy Communion „Receive, my Christ, a prayer of profane lips and of a vile heart“. For St. Simeon, Eucharistic Communion is an eschatological experience and anticipation of the Kingdom of God.

It is obvious that the theological writings of St. Simeon The New Theologian are not just theologically minded, but active residence in the grace, a knowledge of God through the light of enlightenment, by the constant whelming of the heart. God says that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us,¹⁰ and yet „*blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven*“ (Matt. 5:3).

Humility, when it is carried out with repentance and tears, leads to the depth of humbled mind. The Holy Scripture teaches us to „*praise God in our hearts*“ (Eph. 5:4) and that the most important task of the Christian is constantly to purify his heart from sin.

The first step is the purification of the mind and its healing. Praying with attention attunes the „intelligent soul“ to the knowledge of God. „*(...) a broken and a contrite heart, O God thou will not despise*“ (Ps. 51:17, KJV)¹¹. That

⁷ *Ibid.*, 502.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Слово 57, 502.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Слово 25, 209.

¹⁰ See (Luke 17:21, KJV).

¹¹ See Библија, изд. Светия Синод на БПЦ, София 1993, (Пс. 50:19).

breaking, recalls Reverend Simeon, quoting the psalmist, is primarily a heart-break in the mind, and then in thought, which is invisible. And here, through apophatic means he adds „the invisible is offered to The Invisible“¹².

St. Simeon's Educational Epistles are distinguished by the subtle poetics of speech, but at the same time express his personally experienced mystical life. No one word of this high disquisition is a result of earthly wisdom, but of a prayerful ascension to God, of residing of His Divine Light in Logos, of the depiction of The Invisible in the deepest heart, invisible to no one but to God Himself, through the bath of the tears the saint has shed continually. Whoever has reached such a degree of purification can recognize the luminous light within him, The Imagined Christ within himself „as in the mirror is visible the light of the candlestick“, but „not only seemingly and without essence, (...) but in him is seen Christ as light, and essence, invisibly visible and unachievably achievable, in image without image and in appearance without form“¹³.

Reverend Simeon speaks of „acquiring of heart“ through the love of God, through the divine fire, which is the fire of God's love. The constant study of self, in the so-called „humble mind“, attune the soul to humility and multiplies the gifts of The Holy Spirit. God rests in such a „humble and broken heart“.

The phenomenology of the spirit, the mystic knowledge of God, asceticism and truth of the man as unified psychosomatic hypostasis - called to transfiguration and divinity, in a dialogical and eschatological meeting with God, in the new way of existence in Christ through the grace of The Holy Spirit¹⁴. That is the faith of St. Simeon. On the tenet he opposes the experience of the mystic divine communion with God and personal encounter with Christ in the sacred life of The Holy Church¹⁵.

By „sealing with Christ's seal in the heart“ it becomes clean again and that is when man contemplates God. „When he becomes such, God inhabits him and becomes for him everything he desires and even more than desired“, says St. Simeon in Word 65¹⁶.

There is no shorter way to God than through prayer. It is a meeting-conversation, a synergy through the grace of The Holy Spirit between the soul ascending to God and God descending to man, who is searching for meaning. St. Simeon speaks of a caution and sobriety, and also of the „third image of prayer“, in which are „few who reside“. And more that this image is marvelous, and he who has been honored to reach that level of divine communion with God has become godlike. „God became man so that man might become a god“ says St. Athanasius the Great¹⁷.

¹² Свети Симеон Нови Богослов. *ТВОРЕНИЯ*, Vol. 1, Слово 8, *op. cit.*, 75.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Слово 57, 503.

¹⁴ Свилен Тутеков, *Антропологични и еклесиологични ороси на мистическото богопознание у св. Симеон Нови Богослов*, Телогикон, Годишник на центъра по систематическо богословие на Православния Богословски Факултет на ВТУ, Vol. I, (Велико Търново 2012). NetLibrary. (e-book).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Свети Симеон Нови Богослов. *ТВОРЕНИЯ*, Vol. 1, Слово 65, *op. cit.*, 572.

¹⁷ St. Athanasius, *Oratio de incarnatione Verbi*, PG 25,192.

Divine knowledge, the wisdom of Logos and the abyss of innermost contemplations of mind, that is where humility and abstinence from all passions lead. Then comes that „benign change“ and rising in God’s love.

St. Simeon implores us to study ourselves, to go into the depth of our soul, in our deepest heart and to see what we have acquired, and again through apophatic symbolism, he asks, „think well, if the light in you is not darkness“? And more, „go in, and find out whether you don’t think that you have that which you have not acquired yet¹⁸“.

Often referred to as a representative of Hesychism in Byzantium before St. Gregory Palamas, Reverend Simeon follows Eastern monastic tradition by enriching it with his personal mysticism. All Eastern theology during this period is largely Ishist.

Hesychasm is a focus of the mind in the heart, in prayer that continually repeats „Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner“¹⁹. In a state without imagery and of detachment from creation and everything earthly, the mind connects with the heart and merges with the divine light, with Uncreated Grace and Energy of God. Hesychia is not inaction, but an extraordinary action of inconspicuousness and silence. In this state of deification (theosis) man becomes one with God²⁰.

St. Simeon sees in the example of holy men who have lived on earth and have been granted this gift, the opportunity for every one to receive the same gift in life, right here in the present, but also in the future life at the Second Resurrection. Reverend Simeon clarifies that The Kingdom of God belongs to the whole man as far as he has reached the highest degree of perfection in Christ and has been adored. The Kingdom of God is within us. If we want to breathe the air of immortality, we must enter inside ourselves, in our heart, in The Kingdom of God. Outside of us is the air of time, the air of transitivity and corruption, outside is „a foreign side“ says St. Nicholas Velimirovich (Zhitsky) in his “Prologue of Ohrid”. The true action of faith is an act of love and activity of the heart, which requires spiritual attention and perseverance. The Holy Fathers of the East often use the term „invisible wrestle“ to describe the struggle with thoughts suggested from outside. St. Simeon also speaks of „suffering of heart“²¹, and of the “three ways of attention and prayer”. In his Third Word, he talk of Christ’s seal and the tears, in Word 9 he speaks about purification of the mind, in Word 15 – about the prayer with spirit, in Word 17 - about „the broken and humble heart“ in Word 20 - about love as „the head of the law“ and in the Word 35 - about stripping the „old man“ and „dressing in the New Adam“.

The Words of Reverend Simeon are entirely in the spirit of Christology. In Word 38 he says „every one of us must understand that he is Adam so that he can be like Christ“ although „to believe in God, we have to be baptized²²“.

¹⁸ Свети Симеон Нови Богослов, *Творения* Vol.1, Слово 59, *op. cit.*, 512.

¹⁹ That prayer is so called “Prayer of the Heart” (Карδιακή Προσευχή)

²⁰ Митр. Йеротей Влакос, *Духовни ориентири за съвременното общество*, София 2017, 83-98.

²¹ Свети Симеон Нови Богослов, *ТВОРЕНИЯ*. Vol.2, Слово 78, *op. cit.*, 47.

²² *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, Слово 30, 239.

St. Simeon renders great attention to prayer into the heart in Word 68. Guarding the heart during the prayer, the residence of the mind within the deep heart and hence its ascension to God, „heart silence“, attention and sobriety, „this is all“ says St. Simeon. „Work thus while tasting The Lord“. This taste is the action of grace in the humble heart. Then, one will not want to be separated from this hearty place, and in Peter’s words he will say, „...*It is good for us to be here*“ (Matt. 17:4).

According to St. Simeon, a man who is honored with these „divine gifts“ is cleansed of evil thoughts and becomes pure in his entirety, living without cares and dying for all things on earth, even for that which is blessed, not just vain. Pure conscience in everything, perfect obedience, attention in the heart not in the head, spiritual fight with evil thoughts, silence of mind.

In the Actionable and Theological chapters, St. Simeon speaks of „ascending“ and „flourishing“ in the contemplation of God, of dispassion also called „new wine poured into a vessel“, that the body of man is „a temple of The Holy Spirit“ and that we are called „to become the companions of God’s nature, to be *“children of light”* (Eph. 5:8), because when a man is baptized with The Spirit, he becomes pure in his entirety.

The way of mystic knowledge of God is the path of purification and ascension like Moses, who ascends Mount Sinai to meet God. In psychosomatic of a human personality, the will, as aspect is an important part. The theologian-mystic, uniting himself with God, accepts His will into him, puts it in his heart and thus builds into himself a new spiritual personality. With regard to will in mystical perception, it can be said that it is in the ideality of its nature through co-communion with mysticism and bringing it into a state of „goodwill²³“.

The mystical theology of St. Simeon The New Theologian is completely infiltrated by „the mystery of salvation“. It is that which is connected with the Incarnation and whose ultimate purpose is deification of man by integration of the human nature with the nature of God. Because of him the Church’s handing (οἰκονομία, oikonomia) and the descending of The Son of God has been committed, so that through faith in Christ and through the observance of His commandments we can become partakers of His divine nature and Kingdom²⁴.

Conclusion

An extremely charismatic church writer and functionary, shimonk and theologian, Reverend Simeon left a remarkable writing heritage. He is the author of many theological and devotional chapters of moral, exegetic, catechistic and ethical discourses, teaching words, thankful messages, divine hymns („Hymn of Divine Love“), unique prayerful outpourings, (prayer “Receive, my Christ, a prayer of profane lips and of a vile heart”), („The Three Ways of

²³ Прот. Павел Аникиев, *Психология мистического восприятия (по преп. Симеону Новому Богослову)*> https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Pavel_Anikev/psihologija-misticheskogo-vosprijatija-po-prep-simeonu-novomu-bogoslovu/>(accessed May 10, 2018).

²⁴ Архиепископ Василий (Кривошеин), *Преподобный Симеон Новый Богослов*, Москва 1995, 255.

Attention and Prayer“), of theological and philosophical treatises („Dialogue with the Scholastics“), as well as of the explanations of The Holy Scripture. Some of the works of St. Simeon are autobiographical and reveal one unique mystical experience, dressed in poetic form.

While the Words expose primarily his teachings on the Light in Christ, that the salvation is attainable here, on earth for those who reside in the Grace of The Spirit and accept the Kingdom of God, about love, about the bath of tears and purification of the heart; Hymns are expression of the saint's personal life, revealing his deep inner side and sacramental living experience.

Often his writings have a confessional character in which the Reverend describes the unusual revelations he has attained through the Grace of The Holy Spirit, accompanied by grateful and reverent lyrical outbursts.

Despite conflicts in which he has been involved in life, St. Simeon resists the attacks and creates a large number of followers and students. St. Simeon was never accused of deviation from the dogmas of The Orthodox Church or of heresy. The main debate has been waged against those who denied the possibility of a direct vision of God. According to St. Simeon, The Kingdom of God is attainable in present life and belongs to the whole man who has reached the highest degree of perfection in Christ, and the heart is the place of the encounter between man and God.

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МИСТИКА СРЦА У БОГОСЛОВИЈИ СВЕТОГ СИМЕОНА НОВОГ БОГОСЛОВА
(X-XI в.)

У светоотачкој традицији Источне Цркве, као и у радовим а Светог Симеона Новог Теолога, јасно је наглашена исцељујућа улога православља. Начини исцељења су пре свега очишћењем ума и срца који су по речима Светог Симеона Новог Богослова „невидљиво око душе“.

Примарно у доктрини Св. Симеона је идеја прочишћења срца, тиховања (исихије) у Христу, изразито усмерење на молитву као и обожење у садашњости и будућности. Мистично искуство у контексту православља је стаза познања Бога кроз лично уосећавање и синергију са Христом, што води до преображења верника. У језику мистичне богословије Бог се обраћа просветљењем и контемплацијом светла као и прихватањем Светога Духа. Приказивање Христа у срцу је духовни догађај, теозис, харизма као резултат личног уосећавања Бога.

Св. Симеон подсећа на познање срца и љубав према Богу кроз ватру срца, ватру која је Бог, визију Невидљивог. У богословији Св. Симеона Новог Богослова могуће је сагледати својеврсни антрополошки приступ према свим верницима који су у спознају Господа кроз прихватање Светог Духа. У настојању да се доживи Божанска визија интегрисана је у потпуности људска природа.

