

ST. SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN AND HIS TEACHING ON THE THEOSIS

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INTRODUCTION

St Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) was one of the most distinguished mystical writers in the Byzantine tradition. His major ideas are rooted in Orthodox spirituality and his teaching in many ways corresponds to the teaching of preceding Fathers. In his writings we encounter a refreshingly empirical and simple style of mystical writing on the topic as difficult but also as important as theosis – the purpose of human's life. St. Symeon remains close to his experience describing it vividly and honestly in his many writings pulling the reading into the realm of divinity. Thus he was given the title "New Theologian", like two other earlier saints: John the Apostle (the first "Theologian") and Gregory of Nazianzus (the second "Theologian"). This title has not been given to many as it reflects his deep theological insights. Symeon's writings, including his hymns, discourses, and catechetical talks, have been highly influential in Orthodox Christianity. Symeon's theology is deeply mystical, emphasizing personal experience with God. He wrote extensively about his own mystical experiences, describing the divine light and the transformative presence of the Holy Spirit, as an intimate and personal union with God is achieved through the work of the Holy Spirit. He believed that direct and personal experience of God's presence is possible for every Christian. Symeon the New Theologian's focus on theosis was driven by his desire to emphasize the personal and experiential aspects of Christian spirituality, challenging his contemporaries to seek a deeper, more intimate relationship with God. His writings and teachings continue to inspire those in the Orthodox tradition to pursue holiness and union with God. In our journey to God few offer better source material than St. Symeon.

WHAT IS THEOSIS?

Theosis, also known as divinization or deification, is a central concept in Orthodox Christian theology that refers to the process of becoming united with God or attaining likeness to God and it is considered the true purpose of human

life. [7] The term "theosis" comes from the Greek word *θέωσις*, meaning "becoming god-like." Theosis is personal communion with God "face to face." [Gen 32:30] It derives from Christ's teachings, Him as the fulfillment of the messianic dream of the Jewish race; [Cf. Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Isaiah 53; Acts 1:6; 2:16-36; 1 Peter 2:6-8] His mission to connect us with the Kingdom of God [Mark 1:15] – a Kingdom not of this world. [Romans 14:17] When Jesus said, "You are gods," [Jn 10:34] "be perfect, just as your Father in Heaven is perfect," [Mt 5:48] or "the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father," [Mt 13:43; cf Ex 34:29-35; Lk 9:28-36] this is to be taken literally. Further Biblical evidence for this can be found in [Leviticus 11:44-45; 20:7-8]; [Deuteronomy 18:13; Psalms 82:1,6; Romans 6:22; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:2-4] (becoming "partakers of the divine nature"), [John 17:21-23] (Jesus prays for believers to be one with Him and the Father). Theology is far more than knowledge about God acquired through academic study. Christianity is a living faith, founded on revelation born of the Holy Spirit, [John 16:13; Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 2: Matthew 13:43; cf Exodus 34:29-35; Luke 9:28-36; 10:13] giving those counted worthy intimate experience of the Triune God and of spiritual realities. [Cf. Acts 9:3-7] All attempts to understand Christ's message from a purely rational standpoint will remain partial and incomplete. [1Corinthians 2:9]

The examples of Maximos the Confessor and Symeon the New Theologian are especially instructive on this point, for they illustrate the depth and breadth of the Orthodox confidence that the idea of theosis is an eminently Biblical theme. Maximos discovers the idea of theosis nearly everywhere while Symeon the New Theologian appeals to a broad array of Biblical texts when he expounds the doctrine of theosis (1 Cor 6:15; Col 3:1; Titus 2:13) [8].

Theosis is the Pearl of Great Price [7] alluded to by Christ. [Mt 13:45-46] It can become a present reality for those who are willing to tread the path, and so it is not exclusively an after-death experience. With Theosis death is transcended. [Cf. Mark 9:1; John 4:14; 8:51; 11:25-26; Romans 5:21; 2 Timothy 1:10] St. Paul alludes to this when he says, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." [Galatians 2:20] Theosis as our life's purpose is declared in the first chapter of the Holy Bible, when the Holy author tells us that God created man "in His image and likeness." From this we discover the great love the Triune God has for man: He does not wish him simply to be a being with certain gifts, certain qualities, a certain superiority over the rest of creation, He wishes him to be a god by Grace. [7] Externally, man seems to exist in a purely biological way, like the other living beings, the animals. Of course, he is an animal, but "an animal... which is in the process of Theosis through its inclination towards God," in the words of St.

Gregory the Theologian man is the only being that is distinguished from all else in creation, because he is the only one which can become a god.

Thus God gave certain gifts only to man in order to complete him as an icon of God. These gifts are: [7] a logos related nous, conscience, and individual sovereignty, i.e. freedom, creativity, eros, and the yearning for the absolute and for God, personal self-awareness, and anything else which puts man above all other living beings in creation and makes him a man and an individual, everything that makes man a person. These are the charismata by which we are formed “in His image”. Having been endowed “in His image,” man is called upon to be completed “in His likeness.” This is Theosis. The Creator, God by nature, calls man to become a god by Grace. The charismata that form us “in His image” were given to man by God in order that he may reach so high and through them he may attain a likeness to his God and Creator; so that he may have not only an external, moral relationship, but a personal union with his Creator. It could sound very ambitious for us even to say or think that our life’s purpose is to become gods by Grace, however, neither the Holy Bible nor the Church Fathers have hidden this from us. Thus we are told by the Gospel, by the Tradition of the Church, and by the holy Fathers, that the purpose of our life is not just that man should become better than he is, more moral, more just, more righteous, more self-controlled, more mindful; and while all these must happen, but none of them are the great purpose, the ultimate purpose for which our Maker and Creator created man.

Theosis involves a transformative process whereby a person, through the grace of God and the practice of virtues, becomes more and more like God. It is not about becoming God in essence but participating in God's divine (uncreated) energies. Orthodox theology teaches that the Incarnation of Jesus Christ—the Word becoming flesh—is the pivotal event that makes theosis possible. By assuming human nature, Christ opened the path for humanity to participate in the divine life. For our journey of Theosis Christ is our model and guide. It is a dynamic and continuous process of becoming more like Christ, reflecting the image and likeness of God more fully in one's life. The process of theosis involves cooperation (synergy) between divine grace and human free will. While God's grace initiates and sustains the transformation, individuals must actively participate through the process (by prayer, repentance, sacramental and liturgical participation and the ascetic practices). The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in theosis. It is through the Holy Spirit that believers receive divine grace, which enables them to grow into union with God.

One of the profound Church Fathers in this regard was Saint Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022). His teachings and writings had a profound impact on the development of Orthodox spirituality and the understanding of theosis.

LIFE OF SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN

Symeon was born in Galatia (Paphlagonia), in what is now Turkey. His parents, Basal and Theophana, were Byzantine provincial nobles. St. Symeon received only the basics of a primary Greek school education until he was about eleven years old. He was educated at Constantinople. He finished his secondary education at the age of 14 in the court of the two brother emperors Basil and Constantine Porphyrogenetes. His father prepared him for a career at court, and for a certain while the youth occupied a high position at the imperial court. When he was fourteen, he met the renowned Elder Symeon the Studite (also known as Symeon the Pious) at the Studion Monastery, who became Symeon's spiritual father and had a significant influence on his spiritual development and emphasis on inner experience and the pursuit of holiness. Although he wanted to enter the famous monastery of the Stoudion at the age of 14, his spiritual father had him wait until he turned 27. This mentorship reinforced Symeon's belief in the possibility and necessity of direct communion with God. The Elder recommended to the young man the writings of Saint Mark the Ascetic (March 5) and other spiritual writers. Symeon read these books attentively and tried to put into practice what he read. One of his elder's advice was, "if you desire to have always a soul-saving guidance, pay heed to your conscience and without fail do what it will instil in you". [10]

Symeon remained in the world for several years preparing himself for the monastic life under the Elder's guidance. Having love for spiritual beauty, and the guidance of the Elder, he tried to acquire it. During the day, he cared for the needs of people living in the palace of Patricius. [11] St. Symeon occupied himself with the management of a patrician's household and possibly entered the service of his emperor as a diplomat and a senator. While 'busy in the world' he also strove to live a monk's life in the evenings. At night, his prayers grew longer and he remained praying until midnight. Once, as he was praying in this way, a most brilliant divine radiance descended upon him and filled the room. He saw nothing but light all around him, and he was not even aware of the ground beneath his feet. It seemed to him that he himself became light. Then his mind rose upward to the heavens, and he saw a second light brighter than the light which surrounded him. Then, on the edge of this second light, he seemed to see Saint Simeon the Pious. (Discourses XXII.) [12]

Seven years after this vision, at the age of twenty-seven [11] Saint Simeon entered the monastery - the Monastery of Stoudios in Constantinople. There he increased his fasting and vigilance, and learned to renounce his own will.

Because of the increased discontent in the monastery, Saint Simeon was sent to the Monastery of Saint Mamas in Constantinople. There he continued his spiritual practices and attained to a high spiritual level. Around the year 980, Saint Simeon was made igumen of the monastery of Saint Mamas and continued in this office for twenty-five years. He repaired and restored the monastery, which had suffered from neglect, and also brought order to the life of the monks. The strict monastic discipline, for which Saint Simeon strove, led to great dissatisfaction among the brethren. Once, after Liturgy, some of the monks attacked him and nearly killed him. When the Patriarch of Constantinople expelled them from the monastery and wanted to hand them over to the civil authorities, Saint Simeon asked that they be treated with leniency and be permitted to live in the world.

About the year 1005, Saint Simeon resigned his position as igumen in favor of Arsenius, while he himself settled near the monastery in peace. There he composed his theological works, portions of which appear in the *Philokalia*. The chief theme of his works is the hidden activity of spiritual perfection, and the practice against the passions and sinful thoughts. He wrote instructions for monks: "Theological and Practical Chapters," "A Treatise on the Three Methods of Prayer," (in Vol. IV of the English *Philokalia*) and "A Treatise on Faith." Moreover, Saint Simeon was an outstanding church poet. He also wrote "Hymns of Divine Love," about seventy poems filled with profound prayerful meditations.

The sublime teachings of Saint Simeon about the mysteries of mental prayer and spiritual struggle have earned him the title "the New Theologian." It is important to mention that these teachings were not the invention of Saint Simeon, but they had merely been forgotten over time.

Some of these teachings seemed unacceptable and strange to his contemporaries, which led to conflict with Constantinople's church authorities, and Saint Simeon was banished from the city. He withdrew across the Bosphorus and settled in the ancient monastery of Saint Makrina. The saint peacefully fell asleep in the Lord in the year 1021. During his life he received the gift of working miracles. Numerous miracles also took place after his death; one of them was the miraculous discovery of his icon. His Life was written by his cell-attendant and disciple, Saint Nicetas Stethatos.

Due to Symeon's personal experiences, theological perspectives, and the spiritual environment of his time, Theosis was of pivotal importance for him.

Having had a profound personal mystical experiences of the divine light and presence of God, which were central to his life and teachings, Symeon's theology was deeply rooted in the belief that the ultimate purpose of human life is union with God. He viewed theosis as the fulfillment of the biblical promise that humans can become partakers of the divine nature (2Peter 1:4).

He emphasized that theosis was not an abstract concept but a lived reality, achievable through God's grace and personal spiritual effort, and achievable for anyone who desires it and is willing.

THEOLOGY OF SAINT SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN: THEOSIS

Symeon perceived theosis as a deeply personal, transformative process that involves a direct and experiential union with God. Symeon emphasized that theosis is not merely an intellectual or doctrinal concept but an experiential reality. He believed that true knowledge of God comes through personal, direct encounters with the divine presence. He described his own mystical experiences of seeing the divine light and being enveloped in God's presence, which he saw as evidence of theosis.

One of the central themes in Symeon's perception of theosis is the experience of the divine light. He believed that seeing the uncreated light of God was a manifestation of theosis. This divine light is seen as both a symbol and a reality of God's presence and glory, revealing God's nature to the soul in a transformative way. Symeon taught that theosis involves the transformation and purification of the whole person. This process requires repentance, humility, and ascetic practices to purify the heart and mind. The aim is to cleanse oneself of passions and sins to become a vessel receptive to God's grace. The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in theosis. Symeon believed that it is through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that believers are sanctified and transformed into the likeness of God. He often spoke of the Holy Spirit as the agent of illumination, guiding and empowering believers on their journey towards union with God. Since when the Holy Spirit comes upon us he "regenerates you [and] changes you from corruptible to incorruptible, from mortal to immortal, from sons of men into sons of God and gods by adoption and grace." [8]

Symeon emphasized the cooperative (synergistic) nature of theosis. While divine grace initiates and sustains the process, human effort is necessary to respond to and cooperate with this grace. Spiritual practices such as prayer, fasting, and participation in the sacraments are essential to open oneself to God's transformative work. Participation in the sacramental life of the Church, especially the Eucharist, is vital for theosis. Symeon saw the sacraments as means through which divine grace is imparted to believers. The Eucharist, in particular,

is seen as a profound encounter with Christ, nourishing the soul and drawing the believer into deeper communion with God. Continuous prayer, particularly the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"), is central to Symeon's understanding of theosis. This practice helps maintain constant awareness of God's presence and fosters a state of inner stillness and openness to divine grace, as a way to continually invoke God's presence and aid in the journey toward theosis. Thus his emphasis on the experiential knowledge of God helped shape later Orthodox spirituality, including the Hesychast tradition, which focuses on inner stillness and continual prayer as means to continually focus on God and open oneself to divine grace. Symeon believed that theosis is not reserved for monks or the spiritually elite but is accessible to all Christians. He encouraged all believers to seek this transformative union with God. His writings stress that every person, regardless of their state in life, can attain theosis through sincere effort and reliance on God's grace.

And attaining theosis means attaining the Kingdom of God (Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ—Basileia tou Theou) The Kingdom of God means, the "Rule of God," and also the "Ruling power of God;" although all pervading and ever-present, it is spiritual and beyond all sensible and intelligible categories. The Kingdom of God also refers to our participation in the divine life of the Holy Trinity, making the chosen person through Grace what God is by nature. (The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are synonymous.) St. Symeon the New Theologian describes it in the following way, "for those who become children of light and sons of the day to come, for those who always walk in the light, the Day of the Lord will never come, for they are already with God and in God." [7]

THEOLOGY OF SAINT SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN: DIVINE LIGHT

In some ways Symeon's personal message was very much a continuation and development of that of his predecessors, he followed and practiced Church Traditions and teachings of church Fathers. What distinguishes Symeon from the majority of other church Fathers is his autobiographical approach to mystical themes, in particular his openness in description of his own visions of the divine light. All the elements of Symeon's doctrine are traditional, but the particular emphasis that he gives to specific themes is highly personal. Symeon's contemporaries were not entirely unjust when claiming that none of the great Fathers before Symeon had spoken so explicitly about himself and his personal experience. [9]

Moreover, among the ascetical writers, Symeon was the first to emphasize the central place of the Eucharist in one's spiritual journey towards union with

God. He was the first to place the vision of the divine light as the main goal of one's ascetical struggle. He was the first to speak of dispassion and deification in such an experiential manner. Symeon's mystical theology is perfectly in harmony with preceding and subsequent Fathers of the Eastern Church, yet he is one of the most personal writers Christian tradition has ever known. The vision of God as light is definitely the most characteristic component of Symeon's mysticism. This theme is touched upon in almost all of his poetical and prose works, and the terminology related to it is much more developed in him than in any other Byzantine writer of the preceding period. Dozens of pages in his writings are devoted to the descriptions of his visions of the divine light: while all these descriptions are fully original and independent of any other literary source. [9]

For Symeon the divine light is not an angel or any created being or phenomenon[5] but the divine light is God Himself in His revelation to the human person. 'Your light is You, O my God', he says in one of his hymns. [5] The light which Symeon describes is not a physical or material phenomenon: it is characterized as 'immaterial', [5] 'simple, formless, altogether non-composite, bodiless and inseparable'. [5] Using apophatic expressions, Symeon emphasizes that the divine light is beyond any categories of matter or form, as well as beyond human speech and understanding: it is 'like a treasure which is ineffable, unspeakable, without quality or quantity, without image or matter or form, which is formed in overwhelming beauty, which is all simple as the light that transcends all light'. [5] The divine light, Symeon says, is invisible to one's bodily eyes, [5] but is seen with the intellect or rather with what Symeon calls 'the eye of the intellect', [5] 'the noetic eye of the intellect', [5] 'the intelligible eyes of heart', [5] 'the eyes of the soul', [5] 'the intelligible eyes of the soul', [5] etc. When speaking of the transformation of the soul by the light, he employs the language of 'embracement' by the light or 'immersion' in it:

*God becomes for those who are worthy
like a divine and luminous pool,
embracing them all ...
the divine Spirit ... ,
being Himself light without sunset,
transforms all those in whom He lives
into light ... [5]*

The experience of Symeon shows that the whole of human nature, including the intellect, the soul and even the body, is transfigured by the divine light. This is one of the central ideas of Symeon, which he constantly returns to. When you see the divine light, he says, 'your body shines, and so does your soul, for your

soul then ... becomes as resplendent as God Himself'. [5] Symeon writes that when seeing the divine light, 'thought that he himself became light'. [3] Elsewhere Symeon describes how he contemplates his own beauty when seeing the divine light:

*He shines in my poor heart,
illumining me from every side by His immortal radiance,
lightening all my members by His rays ...
I partake of His light, I participate in His glory,
and my face shines as the face of my Beloved,
and all my members become light-bearing.
I become then more beautiful than the most beautiful ... ,
and much more precious than all visible things ...*[5]

Symeon widely employed the traditional image of the sun: he speaks of the vision of God as the sun, of the sun shining in his heart, of the sun shining in his hands, of the intelligible sun, the sweet sun, the inaccessible sun, the sun without sunset, the dazzling sun, of the sun's disk, the sun's rays, the sun's beauty, of the supra-solar light. [9]

In Symeon's mysticism; he describes how divine fire purifies the soul and makes it full of light and radiance:

God is fire: and He came to send fire on the earth [Lk 12:49] ... If [this fire] is lit in someone, it grows in him until it becomes a great flame and reaches heaven ... The burning of the soul that is inflamed by it does not occur in an unconscious manner ... , but in full assurance and knowledge ... Having entirely purified us from stain of passions, [this fire] becomes our food and drink, illumination and joy within us, and it makes us light by participation ... When the soul ... is united with the divine and immaterial fire ... , then the body as well becomes by participation the fire of this divine and unspeakable light. [6]

THEOLOGY OF SAINT SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN: CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS TEACHINGS

We could characterize Symeon's spiritual practice and theology like this: He placed great importance on the role of the spiritual father (or elder) in the process of theosis. He believed that a wise and experienced spiritual guide is essential for providing direction, correction, and encouragement on the spiritual journey. The relationship between the disciple and the spiritual father is one of deep trust and obedience, facilitating the disciple's progress in the spiritual life. Symeon advocated for what he termed a "living theology"—a theology that is not merely speculative or academic but is lived out in personal experience and practice. He criticized those who focused solely on intellectual knowledge of God without

striving for personal holiness and direct experience of God's presence. For Symeon, repentance (metanoia) is a continuous process, not a one-time act. He taught that constant repentance and a spirit of humility are essential for the soul's purification and progress in theosis. This ongoing repentance helps to maintain a sense of dependence on God's mercy and grace, preventing spiritual pride. Symeon had a profound Eucharistic theology, viewing the Eucharist as a central means of receiving divine grace and participating in the divine life. He believed that frequent reception of the Eucharist was crucial for spiritual growth and transformation, as it is the primary way Christ enters and transforms the believer. Symeon taught that the path to theosis involves both inner and outer struggles. Inner struggles include combating sinful thoughts, desires, and passions through prayer and ascetic practices. Outer struggles may involve enduring trials and tribulations in the world, which can also serve to purify the soul and draw it closer to God. Symeon emphasized union with Christ as the heart of theosis, involving a deep personal relationship with Christ. Central to Symeon's understanding of theosis is the concept of divine love. He taught that the ultimate goal of theosis is to be filled with God's love and to love others with the same love that God has for humanity (**Love as the Fulfillment of Theosis**). This love transforms the believer, making them more like God, who is love. Symeon was critical of those who outwardly appeared pious but lacked inner transformation and genuine love. He called for an authentic, heartfelt faith that goes beyond mere external observance of religious duties. He urged Christians to seek true inner change and to manifest the fruits of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Symeon was particularly insistent that it was accessible to all believers, not just monks or the spiritually elite. He taught that every Christian, regardless of their state in life, could attain theosis through sincere repentance, prayer, and openness to God's grace. Next important key element in his teaching was detailed articulation of the synergistic relationship between divine grace and human effort, **highlighting the active role individuals must play in their spiritual transformation**. He emphasized that while God's grace is essential, human cooperation through repentance, ascetic practices, and continuous prayer is equally necessary.

THEOLOGY OF SAINT SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN: RECEPTION OF HIS TEACHINGS

While Symeon's emphasis on theosis and experiential knowledge of God profoundly influenced later Orthodox spirituality, particularly the Hesychast movement in the 14th century, which emphasized inner stillness (hesychia) and the Jesus Prayer as pathways to experiencing divine light, the reception of Saint

Symeon the New Theologian's theology was mixed, reflecting both admiration and controversy. Within his monastic community and among his close followers, Symeon's teachings were embraced with enthusiasm. His emphasis on personal mystical experience and the transformative power of divine grace resonated deeply with those who sought a more intimate relationship with God. Symeon faced significant opposition from some ecclesiastical authorities. His critiques of clerical formalism and his emphasis on personal spiritual experience were seen as challenges to the established church hierarchy and practices. A notable conflict occurred with Stephen of Nicomedia, an influential church figure who opposed Symeon's views and his emphasis on the direct experience of God. This led to Symeon's temporary exile and periods of tension within the church. Despite the controversies during his lifetime, Symeon was eventually canonized as a saint by the Orthodox Church, reflecting a long-term recognition of the value of his contributions to Christian spirituality. Symeon was honored with the title "New Theologian," distinguishing him alongside John the Apostle and Gregory of Nazianzus. This title signifies the high regard in which his theological insights were ultimately held. Over time, the broader Orthodox Christian community has come to appreciate Symeon's insights into theosis. His teachings are now considered integral to the tradition, emphasizing that true knowledge of God comes through both doctrinal understanding and personal, mystical experience. In the context of medieval Byzantine society, where the church played a central role in all aspects of life, Symeon's insistence on personal spiritual experience challenged prevailing norms. This context partly explains the initial resistance to his ideas. Symeon's critiques of formalism and his calls for genuine spiritual renewal aligned with broader reform movements within the church, which sought to revive authentic Christian spirituality.

Symeon's teachings had a particularly strong impact and influence namely on Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), an Archbishop of Thessalonica and a prominent theologian in the Byzantine Empire, who later on built upon Symeon's teachings on theosis. He is particularly known for his defense of Hesychasm, a mystical tradition that emphasizes inner stillness (*hesychia*) and the contemplative prayer known as the Jesus Prayer. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica, is perhaps the most significant theologian to build upon Symeon's teachings. Palamas developed the concept of "Hesychasm," which emphasizes the direct experience of God's energies through prayer and contemplation. His theological defense of hesychastic spirituality drew heavily on Symeon's emphasis on theosis as a transformative encounter with divine light.

Another large impart that Symeon's teachings had was with Nicodemus the Hagiorite (1749-1809), also known as Saint Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, who was a monk and theologian who contributed significantly to the spiritual renewal of Orthodox Christianity in the 18th century. His works, particularly the *Philokalia* (a collection of spiritual writings), emphasized the practical methods of achieving theosis through asceticism, prayer, and the purification of the heart. Nicodemus's writings popularized the teachings of earlier hesychastic theologians, including Symeon the New Theologian, and provided practical guidance for spiritual growth and union with God. He helped to disseminate Symeon's teachings on theosis to a broader audience. Nicodemus often referenced Symeon's insights in his own writings on asceticism, prayer, and the spiritual life.

Among those deeply influenced by Symeon's teachings on theosis was also Seraphim of Sarov (1754-1833), Russian Orthodox monk and mystic, who further developed the concept of theosis in the context of Russian Orthodox spirituality. He emphasized the acquisition of the Holy Spirit through prayer, fasting, and a life of repentance as the path to union with God. Seraphim's famous teaching on acquiring the Holy Spirit ("Acquire the Spirit of Peace and a Thousand Souls around You Will Be Saved") reflects his understanding of theosis as a communal and transformative journey toward spiritual perfection, with emphasis on acquiring the Holy Spirit through prayer, repentance, and the cultivation of inner stillness reflects Symeon's understanding of theosis as a participatory union with God's divine nature.

Pavel Florensky (1882-1937), Russian Orthodox theologian, philosopher, and mathematician who explored the mystical dimensions of Orthodox theology, contributed to a renewed interest in Symeon's teachings among scholars and theologians in the early 20th century. His works, such as *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, delved into the philosophical underpinnings of theosis and its implications for Christian life and thought. Florensky's interdisciplinary approach to theology influenced later theologians and contributed to a deeper exploration of theosis within the broader context of Christian anthropology and cosmology.

These theologians and spiritual writers, among others for example also Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958), have continued to evolve and deepen the understanding of theosis within Orthodox Christianity. They have built upon the foundational insights of Symeon the New Theologian, enriching Orthodox theological discourse and providing spiritual guidance for believers seeking union with God through the transformative power of divine grace.

These figures, among others, have helped to preserve, interpret, and apply Symeon the New Theologian's teachings on theosis within the broader context of Orthodox spirituality and theological discourse. Their engagement with Symeon's writings has contributed to the ongoing development and appreciation of his insights into the mystical journey towards union with God.

THE WRITINGS OF ST SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN

Symeon the New Theologian elaborated his theology through his extensive writings, which include hymns, discourses, and letters.

Symeon was an outstanding poet and composed numerous hymns (Hymns on Divine Love) that express his personal experiences of encountering God and his teachings on theosis. These hymns often describe the soul's journey towards union with God through divine love. Symeon's hymns on divine love express his deep devotion to God and his understanding of theosis as a union of love between the soul and God. These hymns celebrate the joy and fulfillment found in communion with the divine.

Symeon's ethical discourses (ἠθικοὶ λόγοι) provide practical guidance on living a life oriented towards God and spiritual growth. While not exclusively focused on theosis, these discourses touch on themes related to transformation and divine union. While Symeon's theological discourses (θεολογικοὶ λόγοι) delve into deeper theological aspects of theosis, exploring topics such as the nature of divine grace, the role of prayer and repentance, and the transformative effects of encountering God.

Among his writings are also the letters (ἐπιστολαί) addressed to various individuals, including monks and laypeople, often contain pastoral advice and theological reflections related to theosis. These letters reflect Symeon's engagement with practical spiritual challenges and his encouragement of others in their pursuit of divine union.

Symeon wrote several treatises (Treatises on the Mystical Life) that elaborate on the mystical aspects of the Christian life and theosis. These include discussions on the nature of God's presence in the soul, the role of grace in transformation, and the significance of mystical experience in spiritual growth. He also wrote extensively about methods of prayer (On the Three Methods of Prayer) as paths towards experiencing God's presence and participating in His divine nature.

These works collectively provide a comprehensive view of Symeon the New Theologian's teachings on theosis, emphasizing both the theoretical aspects and practical implications of pursuing union with God in Orthodox Christian spirituality.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

True mysticism (living union with God) is unimaginable and impossible outside of tradition. The true mystic is not he who places his personal experience above tradition, but, on the contrary, he whose experience is in agreement with and built upon the long provided experience of the ones who came before him. The historical role of the great mystics of the Church is very often the role of defenders of tradition and renewers of the ideal of living according to the Gospel: this is why they are usually radicals. And it is precisely their radicalism which inspires thousands of ordinary Christians and keeps Orthodox tradition alive.[9] Symeon the New Theologian was exactly such a mystic. His teachings profoundly influenced Orthodox spirituality, emphasizing the transformative power of divine grace and the active role of the believer in the process of becoming united with God. Symeon the New Theologian's contributions to the understanding of theosis highlight the transformative potential of divine grace and the importance of personal spiritual experience in the journey toward union with God. By focusing on theosis, Symeon contributed to a rich tradition of Orthodox spirituality that emphasizes personal transformation and direct experience of God. Symeon's theology is a compelling blend of mystical experience, rigorous ascetic practice, and deep love for Christ and the Church. His teachings continue to inspire those seeking a profound and transformative relationship with God, emphasizing that theosis is both a gift of divine grace and a goal that requires active human cooperation. Symeon the New Theologian's theology, with its focus on experiential knowledge and the transformative union with God, offers a powerful vision of Christian spirituality. It invites believers to move beyond superficial religiosity to a deeper, more personal, and dynamic relationship with God.

His theology continues to inspire and challenge Christians to seek the fullness of life in Christ through theosis. His theology meets a practical need in a Church which today is often afflicted with religious superficiality and barren formalism. As his Apolytikion reads: *"You scattered the dark madness and convinced all men to seek what they had lost, the grace of the Holy Spirit."*

And let's conclude with the words of the great Saint Symeon the New Theologian, may they give us hope, strength and courage on our path of theosis:

**Do not say that it is impossible to receive the Spirit of God.
Do not say that it is possible to be made whole without Him. Do
not say that one can possess Him without knowing it. Do not say
that God does not manifest Himself to man. Do not say that men**

cannot perceive the divine light, or that it is impossible in this age! Never is it found to be impossible, my friends. On the contrary, it is entirely possible when one desires it" (Hymn 27, 125-132).

When a man walks in the fear of God he knows no fear, even if he were to be surrounded by wicked men. He has the fear of God within him and wears the invincible armor of faith. This makes him strong and able to take on anything, even things which seem difficult or impossible to most people. Such a man is like a giant surrounded by monkeys, or a roaring lion among dogs and foxes. He goes forward trusting in the Lord and the constancy of his will to strike and paralyze his foes. He wields the blazing club of the Word in wisdom.

(The Practical and Theological Chapters)

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ST. SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN AND HIS TEACHING ON THE THEOSIS

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Abstract

The article presents the life and work of Saint Simeon the New Theologian. The author characterizes the overall contemporary background of life and work of the mentioned ecclesiastical writer. Of his works, the focus is on salvation, which is attainable only through a perfect spiritual life of man. True mysticism (living union with God) is unimaginable and impossible outside of tradition. The true mystic is not he who places his personal experience above tradition, but, on the contrary, he whose experience is in accord with and built upon the long-provided experience of those who came before him.

Key words

Symeon the New Theologian, theology, orthodoxy, spiritual life, salvation