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SAINT SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN AND THE THEOLOGY OF THE DIVINE SUBSTANCE¹

Summary: St. Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022), frequently called “the greatest of Byzantine mystics” has for long been considered as a direct precursor of the fourteenth-century Hesychast teaching on the vision of God, the divine transcendence and immanence. The author of the present study argues that while this assumption is perfectly valid on the spiritual level, it is far from being unproblematic on the doctrinal level. In fact, St. Symeon has taught a doctrine of substantial participation in God, based on a peculiar understanding of the hypostatic union of the divine and human substances in Christ, as well as on a specific Eucharistic doctrine. The paper also investigates the possible patristic, ascetic, and liturgical sources of the doctrine of substantial participation.

Key words: St. Symeon, New Theologian, Byzantine mystics, Hesychast, patristic.

I. INTRODUCTION

(A) *Transcendence and mysticism in Byzantium and the Latin West*

In the present paper I propose to investigate the doctrine of Saint Symeon the New Theologian on the divine Substance and the vision of God, as well as the sources of this teaching. Symeon, frequently called the greatest of Byzantine mystics, lived presumably between 949 and 1022 AD² and was the most influential monastic

¹ It is my pleasant duty to mention here that I read a – much shortened – version of the present paper at the conference “Nikon of Jerusalem: His Times, Personality, and Work,” held on September 7–9 in Podgorica, Virpazar, the Monastery of Vranjina, and the Monastery of Starčeva Gorica. I could participate in this conference upon the kind invitation of His Grace Amfilohije Radović, Metropolitan of Montenegro. Hopefully, a Serbian version of this paper will be published in the proceedings of that conference. I most warmly thank Metropolitan Amfilohije whose remarks were of great help for me to give this study its final shape. I would also like to thank here my friend, Basile Markesinis, for reading the text of the present study before its publication. Without his careful reading a number of mistakes would have remained in it. However, I am solely responsible for any inaccuracies that have remained. Finally, I wish to thank Matthew Suff for having corrected my less than adequate English.

² The currently generally accepted chronology was established by I. Hausherr in the Introduction to his edition of Symeon’s *Life*, written by Saint Niketas Stethatos: HAUSHERR, I.: *Un grand mystique byzantin: Vie de Syméon le Nouveau Théologien (949–1022) par Nicétas Stéthatos, texte grec inédit avec introduction et notes critiques par le P. Irénée Hausherr S. I. et traduction française en collaboration avec*

theoretician and spiritual leader of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. The importance of the question that I want to examine here lies in the fact that the interpretation of divine transcendence and immanence constituted one of the main dividing lines between the Byzantine and Slavic East on the one hand, and the Latin West on the other, at least from the fourteenth century onwards. In the West, there prevailed the Scholastic doctrine, itself of Augustinian origin, of the unicity and indivisibility of the divine Substance, a teaching that considered it inconceivable that there could be any other distinction within God than that of the divine Persons. This doctrine also had the simultaneously epistemological and eschatological corollary that the vision of God, being that of the divine Substance, is reserved for the afterlife. In the while, the Eastern Churches adopted the Hesychast doctrine, according to which in His Substance (οὐσία) God remains incomprehensible and invisible in this world, as well as in the world to come, but can be seen here, as well as in the afterlife, in His Operations (ἐνέργειαι³), which constitute the immanent aspect of God. The Operations reveal themselves to those purified in their heart as a kind of ungraspable, divine, uncreated light. This latter doctrine, as formulated by the great Hesychast theologian, Saint Gregory Palamas, implied, beside the distinction of the divine Persons, another real distinction within God, that between His Substance and His Operations, both constituting God and both being uncreated.

By a curious coincidence, both doctrines were promulgated as official dogmas, one of the Roman and the other of the Constantinopolitan Church, nearly at the same time. The Western doctrine about the substantial vision after death was officially proclaimed in the Papal Constitution of Benedict XII, *De visione dei beatifica et de novissimis*,⁴ issued in 1336, while the teaching of the Hesychasts was accepted at se-

le *P. Gabriel Horn S. I. Orientalia Christiana* vol. XII. 45. Rome 1928, lxxx–xci. Panagiotis Chrestou has suggested an alternative hypothesis (956–1036) in the Introduction to his re-edition of the *Life*, prepared on the basis of four Athonite manuscripts and Hausherr's text: Συμεὼν ὁ Νέος Θεολόγος 19. Βιος τοῦ Συμεὼν ὑπὸ Νικήτα Στηθάτου, Κεφάλαια, Ευχαριστίαι, εἰσαγωγή-κειμενον-μετάφρασις-σχόλια ὑπὸ Παναγιώτου Κ. Χρηστοῦ, καθηγητοῦ πανεπιστημίου. Thessalonike: Paterikai Ekdoseis "Gregorios o Palamas" 1983, 7–27. However, the scholarly community has rejected Chrestou's suggestion and accepted that of Hausherr. The most important criticism of Chrestou's hypothesis was that of GRUMEL, V.: Nicolas II Chrysobérgès et la chronologie de la vie de Syméon le Nouveau Théologien. *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 22, 1964, 253–254. Although Chrestou's alternative chronology certainly cannot be accepted, we have to face the following difficulty in accepting that of Hausherr: while Hausherr's only source was the *Life of Symeon* by Niketas Stethatos, at several points he had to reject the data provided by Niketas and use conjectures. Now his selection criteria for distinguishing between the acceptable and unacceptable data in the same source seem far from being evident. Thus, without being able to suggest an alternative chronology for Saint Symeon's life, here I simply want to point out the hypothetical and speculative nature of the generally accepted theory.

³ The Greek expression ἐνέργειαι is habitually translated by the modern term "energies." I find this misleading, given that the concept of energy, for which the name was coined in recent times from this very Greek word, did not exist in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. As a matter of fact, ἐνέργεια means "operation," "activity," even "realisation." Throughout this paper I shall use the term "divine Operations," given that *operations* was the usual rendering of the Greek expression in Latin theological texts.

⁴ See *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declaracionum de rebus fidei et morum*. 31st edition by H. DENZINGER and K. RAHNER. Barcelone–Freiburg am Breisgau–Rome: Herder 1957, 229–230. The most recent monograph about the debate on the *visio beatifica* is by TROTTMANN, C.: *La vision beatifique. Des disputes scholastiques à sa définition par Benoît XII*. Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, Palais Farnaise 1995.

veral local councils of Constantinople, held in 1341, 1347, and 1351, and was quickly adopted by all the Eastern Orthodox Churches.⁵

The two doctrines assigned quite a different role to mysticism. The Western dogma, proclaiming a radical incognoscibility of God for this life, but allowing for a not less radical cognoscibility of the Creator for the afterlife, pushed all kinds of mystical experience towards the margins of Christian life. As a result of the dogma, mystical experience became considered as a private affair of the soul and God, consisting of signs of favour given by God to the mystic, while God, as He is in Himself, remains hidden and invisible for all the time His lover spends in this world, until the latter becomes, having been purified in the life here below and having cast off at the moment of the death the heavy burden of the flesh, worthy to contemplate “intuitively” the divine Substance.⁶

The Hesychast doctrine, quite on the contrary, promised to those who purify themselves a direct and real participation in God, and a vision of Him through the Operations, already in this life. However, according to this doctrine, this basic ontological situation will not be changed even after death. The blessed receive in eternal bliss precisely that, the first fruits of which they have already enjoyed in this life, just as the damned receive only punishment, the foretaste of which they had already to

⁵ In June 1341, a local council held in Constantinople condemned Barlaam of Calabria, by then the main enemy and accuser of the Hesychasts. It seems that at this meeting primarily questions related to the “Jesus prayer” were treated and the real doctrinal questions were avoided: CHRESTOU, P. K.: Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ Συγγράμματα. Ἐκδίδονται ἐπιμελεῖς Παναγιότου Κ. Χρηστοῦ, Τόμος Β', Thessalonike: 1966 Introduction, 13, and NADAL CAÑELLAS, J.: *Gregorii Acindyni refutationes duae operis. Gregorii Palamae cui titulus Dialogus inter orthodoxum et baarlamicum nunc primum editae curante Juan Nadal Cañellas*. Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca 31. Turnhout: Brepols–Leuven: Leuven University Press 1995, “Introduction”, xxi and note 30. Henceforth Gregory Akindynos assumed the leadership of the anti-Hesychast opposition. In July, another council was held against Akindynos, the result of which is somewhat unclear (CHRESTOU, *op. cit.*, 17–18; NADAL, *op. cit.*, xxiii–xxiv). In the same year a Tome was edited and signed by the patriarch, accepting the doctrines of the Hesychast leader, Saint Gregory Palamas (CHRESTOU, *op. cit.*, 17–19; NADAL, *op. cit.*, xxv). In 1343, another synod condemned Gregory Palamas and accepted the doctrines of Akindynos (NADAL, *op. cit.*, xxvi). In February 1347, when, after a long civil war, the triumphant John Kantakouzenos was about to enter Constantinople, a new council confirmed the Tome of 1341 and condemned Akindynos. The decisions of this council were inserted into the Synodical Tome of 1347 (CHRESTOU, *op. cit.*, 40–41; NADAL, *op. cit.*, xxvii). In May–July 1351, another council was held against the new anti-Hesychast leader, Nikephoros Gregoras. In the next year (1352) six anathematisms against the anti-Hesychast tenets and six eulogies for those who have confessed the Hesychast teachings (with one for Emperor Andronikos Palaiologos, who convened the first Hesychast council in 1341) were introduced into the Synodikon of Orthodoxy, read on the Sunday of Orthodoxy; another, seventh, eulogy was introduced after the death of Saint Gregory Palamas (November 1359) on his name: CHRESTOU, P. K.: Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ Συγγράμματα. Τόμος Δ'. Δογματικὰ πραγματείαι καὶ ἐπιστολαὶ γραφεῖσαι κατὰ τὰ ἔτη 1348–1358. Προλογίει Π. Κ. Χρηστοῦ, ἐκδιδούν Π. Κ. Χρηστοῦ, Β. Δ. Φανουργάκης, Β. Σ. Ψευτόγκας. Thessalonike: P. K. Chrestou 1988, Introduction, 17–18, 36–47.

⁶ Cf. *Benedictus Deus*: “animae sanctorum omnium etc. [...] mox post mortem suam et purgationem praefatam in illis qui purgatione huiusmodi indigebant [...] viderunt et vident divinam essentiam visione intuitiva et etiam faciali, nulla mediante creatura in ratione obiecti visi se habente, sed divina essentia immediate se nude, clare et aperte eis ostendente [...]”: “The souls of all the saints, etc. [...] immediately after their death and after the aforementioned purification in the case of those who have needed such a purification [...] will see and already see the divine Substance by an intuitive, and also face-to-face, vision, without the mediation of any creature in the role of the object seen, but the divine Substance showing itself to them nakedly, clearly and overtly [...].” DENZINGER–RAHNER, *op. cit.* (see note 4), 530, 230.

taste here below. But God remains forever, even in the eternal bliss, unreachable and transcendent because He will never reveal the mystery of His Substance to any creature. In this theological teaching, not lacking in philosophical implications, “Substance” or “Essence” stands for the divine transcendence, while “Operations” stand for the immanence. This doctrine, far from marginalizing the mystical phenomenon, placed it at the very heart of Christian life. According to it, being a real Christian meant to partake in the divine Operations in a “perceptible” – meaning “conscious” in the terminology of the Septuagint – manner,⁷ that is, in a mystical experience.

These are more or less well known facts. It is, however, hardly known that before becoming widely accepted in their own circles, these doctrines had to compete with others in the East and West as well. History is generally constructed backwards and this statement holds *a fortiori* to the history of ideas. Few know, for example, that the Western dogma of the *visio beatifica* was formulated in a controversy with, and a condemnation of, the views of a Pope, John XXII, who himself held eschatological views which were very similar to those of the East, and especially to those of Saint Symeon.⁸ And it seems to me that the fact that Symeon formulated quite a different doctrine on the divine transcendence and immanence from that of Saint Gregory remains almost completely unknown.

(B) Is Saint Symeon a Hesychast avant la lettre?

Due to several coincidences, the name of Symeon has become inextricably linked with Hesychasm. In fact, tradition has attributed to him one of the basic Hesychast treatises, the “Method of the Holy Prayer” (Μέθοδος τῆς ἵερᾶς προσευχῆς),⁹ written, according to the probable hypothesis of I. Hausherr, by one of the teachers of Saint Gregory Palamas, the monk Nikephoros, at the beginning of the fourteenth century. By an irony of fate, this false attribution drew a flood of injuries upon the head of Symeon from the enemies of Hesychasm, like Demetrios Kydones:

The matter of the heresy was not first invented by Palamas, but much earlier the so-called Hesychasts whispered its teachings in secret. This is clear from the fact that ... Symeon, the abbot of the monastery called Xerokerkou, who was labelled “Theologian” by the initiates and initiators of those mysteries, has written in his works many impure and blas-

⁷ Many times, but mainly in the Book of Proverbs, the Septuagint translates the Hebrew words for “knowledge” and “wisdom” (*da'ath* and, more rarely, *hakhma*) with the term *αἴσθησις*, “perception.” See Ex. 28:3, Prov. 1:7, 12:23, 18:15, 24:13–14, etc. The Biblical origin of this term and, thus, of the doctrine of the spiritual senses has been often ignored, and this gave rise to the concept of a “sensual mysticism,” whenever the expression occurs. This holds true for HAUSHERR, I.: *Les grands courants de la spiritualité orientale. Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 1, 1935, 114–138.

⁸ The Eastern parallels for John XXII's doctrines were discussed by GERÉBY, GY.: *A tudás fénye* [The Light of Knowledge]. *Café Babel* 26, 1997/3, 28.

⁹ Edited with an accompanying study by HAUSHERR, I.: *La méthode d'oraison hésychaste. Orientalia Christiana* 36 (IX/2). Roma 1927.

phemous things, but particularly in his “On vigilance and attention” says the following: ...¹⁰

Kydones then quotes a passage of the “Method.” His words show clearly that by the fourteenth century Symeon was already considered as one of the founders of the Hesychast movement. It seems that it was this same attribution that precluded the Bollandist fathers from inserting in the *Acta Sanctorum*, the Life of Symeon by Niketas Stethatos.¹¹ For sure, the attribution of the “Method” to Symeon is no longer accepted by scholars; however, it is still firmly rooted in their *communis opinio* that Symeon was one of the precursors of the Hesychast doctrine of the divine Operations, as it was later defined by Saint Gregory Palamas.¹² An exception to this rule is constituted by a very informative and honest study by the late Archbishop Basil Krivochéine, the man who perhaps understood Symeon more deeply than any other scholar who wrote about him.¹³ Archbishop Basil, at the end of a minute analysis of the term οὐσία, recognises the fact that the statements of Symeon are many times contrary to those of Gregory Palamas and seem to teach a mystical participation in the very Substance of God. However, finally he comes to the conclusion that Symeon does not use “a rigorous and consistent terminology” and “does not develop his arguments in a logical manner.”¹⁴ Archbishop Basil attributes the apparent contradictions in Symeon’s terminology partly to the “paradoxical and antinomical character of the Christian mystery” and partly to Symeon’s “concrete and existential approach” to this mystery.¹⁵ Hieromonk Alexander Golitzin, in his recent excellent study on Symeon,

¹⁰ MIGNE, J.-P.: *Patrologia Graeca*, 154, 840 A, quoted by HAUSHERR, *op. cit.* (note 9), 16 (112).

¹¹ HAUSHERR, *op. cit.* (note 9), 112. Hausherr quotes Combefis who noted the following about Symeon: “is fuerit fons omnis Palamici erroris.”

¹² Such is, for example, the view of HOLL, K.: *Enthusiasmus und Bussgewalt beim Griechischen Mönchtum. Eine Studie zu Symeon dem Neuen Theologen*. Leipzig 1898, 215: “in ihren grossen Zügen ist die Theologie der Hesychasten eine Rekapitulation der Gedanken Symeons”. HAUSHERR, *op. cit.* (note 9), 112, quotes this sentence with approval. VÖLKER, W.: *Praxis und Theoria bei Symeon den Neuen Theologen*. Wiesbaden 1974, 361, claims that because Symeon always speaks about seeing a ray of the divine light, but not the source of the light itself, we must consider this vision as being that of the divine Operations and not of the divine Substance itself. A similar argument is put forward by FRAIGNEAU-JULIEN, B.: *Les sens spirituels et la vision de Dieu selon Syméon le Nouveau Théologien*. Paris: Beauchesne 1985, 83–84, 162–164, 190–191). These are just a few examples from a vast literature.

¹³ KRIVOCHEINE, B.: ‘Essence créée’ et ‘Essence divine’ dans la théologie spirituelle de S. Syméon le Nouveau Théologien. *Messager de l’Exarchat du Patriarche Russe en Europe Occidentale*, nos. 75–76 (19^e année: 1971), 151–170. Archbishop KRIVOCHEINE further elaborated the same study in his book on Symeon: *Dans la lumière du Christ. Saint Syméon le Nouveau Théologien, 949–1022, Vie-Spiritualité-Doctrine*. Chevetogne, 1980, 194–209.

¹⁴ KRIVOCHEINE, *op. cit.* (note 13 [1971]), 168–169: “[I]l manque à Syméon une terminologie rigoureuse et conséquente, un développement logique des arguments. Plus encore, on peut trouver parmi ses affirmations sur l’Essence des contradictions et des divergences, apparentes au moins, qui vous déroutent de prime abord.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 170: “[S]yméon n’est nullement un faible d’esprit incapable de penser conséquemment, mais [...] la plupart de ses « contradictions » s’expliquent par le caractère paradoxal et antinomique du mystère chrétien qui rend si difficile, sinon impossible, son expression en langage logique et conséquent, surtout si on approche ce mystère d’une manière concrète et existentielle, comme c’était le cas chez Syméon.”

follows closely and expands upon Archbishop Basil's analysis.¹⁶ He thinks the references to a "substantial participation" only indicate the "truth" and the "reality" of the experience, while Symeon prefers to use other terms, such as "glory, energies, power, might, grace and light."¹⁷

A different opinion has also been voiced, first by the Dominican F. Combefis and recently, following him, by Jean Darrouzès. Combefis, in his Introduction to the "On the Essence and the Operations" of Manuel Kalekas, analysed certain passages of Symeon's *Ethical Discourses*, which speak about a substantial presence of God in the mystical experience, and tried to give them an interpretation in line with the official Roman Catholic doctrine.¹⁸ Following him Darrouzès, in his Introduction to Symeon's *Theological and Ethical Treatises*, affirmed that in Symeon's doctrine the object of the mystical vision is the divine Substance. Moreover, Darrouzès thought that the distinction between Substance and Attributes plays no role in this teaching.¹⁹ He wondered whether Evagrios Pontikos – who had taught a doctrine of "substantial knowledge" – could have influenced Symeon either directly or indirectly.²⁰

It seems to me that all these scholars have grasped one or another aspect of Symeon's doctrine. Thus, without claiming to have arrived at the whole truth, in what follows I shall try to give a broader and more encompassing analysis. I shall try to show that Symeon's teaching contains a clear and articulate doctrine of the divine Substance and Operations, which, although not identical with that of the Hesychasts, is no less coherent and logical. Then, in the second part of the present essay, I shall try to demonstrate that, far from being an individual doctrine of Symeon himself, it is derived from the ascetic and liturgical literature that constituted Symeon's sources for the elaboration of his doctrine. All this said, I find it very important to state beforehand that Symeon's doctrine, notwithstanding all its peculiarities, is very close to that of the Hesychasts, insofar as it describes very similar personal experiences and defends the same "cause": the possibility and indeed the necessity of acquiring a direct and immediate vision of the uncreated divine light already in this life.²¹ However, the doctrinal interpretation of the experiences is different in the two cases.

¹⁶ GOLITZIN, A. G.: *Symeon the New Theologian On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*. Vol. 3. *Life, Times and Theology*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1997, chapter "Of Participation in the Life of the Trinity," 134–140.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 138–139.

¹⁸ PG 152, 270 B–C, quoted by DARROUZÈS, J.: Syméon le Nouveau Théologien, *Traité théologiques et éthiques I–II*. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes par Jean Darrouzès. SC 122, 129 (1966, 1967) "Introduction", 26 (abbreviated as *Traité théologiques et éthiques* in the following).

¹⁹ *Traité théologiques et éthiques*, 27: "[S]'il fallait donner une définition dogmatique d'après les expériences et les affirmations de Syméon, il semble bien que non seulement la distinction essence-attributs n'entre pas en ligne de compte, mais que la vision est bien celle de l'essence de Dieu. Le mystique voit Dieu lui-même dans sa Trinité et son unité, et pas seulement « ce qui est autour de lui » τὰ περὶ Θεοῦ (sic, although the correct expression is τὰ περὶ Θεόν)."

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26, note 2.

²¹ In this, I fully agree with the final conclusion of Archbishop Krivochéine. KRIVOCHÉINE, *op. cit.* (note 13), 170: "Néanmoins, avec toutes ces réserves, S. Syméon, avec son enseignement existentiel sur la οὐσία cachée de Dieu et les rayons de Sa gloire qui nous illuminent, est bien plus près de S. Grégoire Palamas que de ses adversaires."

II. THE THEOLOGY OF THE DIVINE SUBSTANCE

(A) *A substantial participation in God?*

To begin with, one cannot ignore the fact that Saint Symeon speaks in plain and unambiguous terms about a participation in the divine Substance. He draws his expression from a Scriptural source, the Second Epistle of Saint Peter (1:4), where the Apostle says

ἴνα [...] γένησθε θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως ἀποφυγόντες τῆς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ
ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ φθορᾶς

[T]hat [...] ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped
the corruption that is in the world through lust.²²

It seems that Symeon understood this promise literally and interpreted it as a real participation in the divine Nature (φύσις), being identical with the divine Substance (οὐσία). It is this identification that he stresses in the following hymn, where he clearly refers to the Biblical verse cited above (S1):

This [that is, the fact of seeing God] will show me similar to the Angels,
or will make me even greater than them, o my Lord.
For even though You are invisible to them in Your Substance,
And inapproachable in Your Nature, You still definitely
appear to me, and mingle Yourself with the substance of my nature.
For Your properties are not separated and cannot be divided at all,
but Your Nature is Your Substance and Your Substance Your Nature.
Thus, partaking in Your Flesh, in fact I partake in Your Nature
and I participate truly in Your Substance,
becoming a partaker in the Divinity and even
an heir to it and being in the body I become, as I suppose,
greater than the incorporeal beings, a son of God, as You have told.²³

This passage also shows clearly that Symeon knows well the Cappadocian, but also Chrysostomian, doctrine, according to which the Substance of God is incomprehensible and invisible even for the heavenly powers. However, he, who firmly believes in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, interprets this as a substantial presence of Christ's Divinity in His Flesh and Blood, the bread and the wine; so that the fact that this Flesh and Blood mingles with Symeon's own flesh and blood means for him that the divine Substance mingles with his own human substance, common with the human substance of Christ. This is also a doctrine of a mystical *imitatio Christi*. In the same manner as Christ, being one divine Person, exists in two Natures,

²² Unless otherwise stated, translations from the Bible are according to the King James Version.

²³ *Hymn VII*, 23–34. Syméon le Nouveau Théologien, *Hymnes I–III*. Introduction, texte critique par Johannes KODER, traduction et notes par Johannes KODER, Louis NEYRAND, s. j. et Joseph PARAMELLE, s. j. SC 156, 174, 196 (1969, 1971, 1973), vol. I, 210 (abbreviated as *Hymnes* in following).

the divine and the human, so will ourselves as unique created persons exist in two natures and substances, one being ours and the other being that of God's Spirit (S2):

O hear, all those who, just like myself, have sinned against God,
 try and run to grasp and catch intensely
 by your deeds the matter of the immaterial Fire
 – when speaking about matter, I represent to you the divine Substance –
 and light up the intellectual light of your soul,
 in order that you may become like gods possessing within yourselves
 the entire Glory of God in two substances,
 in two natures, in two operations
 in two wills, as Paul proclaims it.
 For different is the will of the changing body,
 and different is that of the Spirit, and different that of my soul.
 However, I am not triple, but double, as man [...].²⁴

The last hint is obviously at the will of the flesh as opposing the will of the Spirit in Romans 7 and 8.²⁵ One may remark the Christological allusions of the text: the same terms which hold for Christ hold also for the divinised saints, or rather, for the divinised sinners, as Symeon puts it. Apparently, the union of the two substances, the divine and the human, in Christ is somehow prolonged through the eucharistic communion in all the faithful who partake in the Eucharistic communion. Finally, the passage also contains a very clear indication of how Symeon understands the term "Substance" in the case of God. He represents it as the matter of the Immortal (or the "wood" [ύλη] of the divine Fire²⁶), that is to say, a substrate, something that can be grasped by the spiritual senses, just as sensible matter can be grasped by the corporeal senses. Whatever the closer theological and philosophical content of this surprising teaching may be, even from this passage alone it becomes quite clear that the term οὐσία, "Substance," represents for Symeon the immanent aspect of the Godhead, unlike in the Hesychast – and one might also say, the Cappadocian – doctrine, where it stands for transcendence.

Another Scriptural text that Symeon understands literally, drawing from it the conclusion that he has received in himself the divine Substance, is 1 John 4:8: "God is love," and *ibid.* 12: "if we love another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us," together with another verse of the same letter (1:5–6): "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Using these verses, Symeon writes in one of his *Thanksgivings* (S3):

As I went once to kiss the spotless icon of the One who gave birth
 to You and prostrated myself before it, Yourself, before I stood up,
 appeared to me within my wretched heart, having made it light and then
 I knew that I consciously have You within myself. From that moment it
 was not by remembering You and the things around You (τῶν περὶ σέ)

²⁴ *Hymn XIII.* 11–21. *Hymnes I*, 256–258.

²⁵ This is indicated in the apparatus of Koder's and Paramelle's edition (*ibid.*).

²⁶ See Deut. 4:24.

that I loved You, recalling You from the memories of these things, but I was convinced in all truth to have You in myself, You who are Love in Substance ($\tauὴν ἐνυπόστατον ἀγάπην$). For You are the true Love, o God.²⁷

Symeon uses here just another attribute ($\grave{\epsilon}\nu\pi\grave{\sigma}\sigma\tau\alpha\zeta$) to denote the substantial and real, not accidental, presence in him of God, whom he identifies with the love he experiences in his heart – the term “heart” denoting here the spiritual, as well as the corporeal centre of the human being. And given that God is not only love, but also light, Symeon sees his own heart completely illuminated by the presence of the divine Light in it. Naturally, $\grave{\epsilon}\nu\pi\grave{\sigma}\sigma\tau\alpha\zeta$ $\grave{\alpha}\gamma\acute{\alpha}\pi\eta$ could be translated in another way as well, as “love in person,” and this translation would not be incorrect. However, as will be shown a little bit later, the expression is in fact a Pseudo-Makarian loanword and in the Makarian literature, where the term is used in the same context as here, it means clearly “substantial,” “in substance,” and the same seems to be its meaning in Symeon’s usage.

In this passage, just as in the first text quoted, we find an allusion to the Cappadocian doctrine of divine transcendence, according to which we cannot grasp the oὐσία of God and can only guess it through “what is around Him” ($\tauὰ περὶ αὐτόν$). As is well known, the Hesychasts interpreted this doctrine in the sense that “those around God,” that is to say, the divine Operations, constitute the only aspect of God with which we can enter into touch even in the mystical experience, the very Being, or Essence, or Substance of God, His oὐσία , remaining hidden forever. For Symeon, however, the Cappadocian doctrine seems to hold only for rational knowledge concerning God, so that the mystic leaves the domain of “those around God” to enter into direct touch with Him in his Substance.

Thus, not only does Symeon stress again and again that in the mystical experience men partake in God’s Substance and nothing else (S4):

[W]hen we take the Spirit of our Lord and God, we become partakers of His Divinity and Substance [...],²⁸

and not only does he affirm that the presence of God in the universe is substantial or hypostatic (taken indifferently in the sense of a real presence) (S5):

He is everywhere and in everything
and He fills the universe completely
with His Substance, with His Nature,
and also with His Reality
($\kappa\alpha\tau'$ oὐσίαν , $\kappa\alpha\tau\grave{\alpha}$ $\phi\acute{\u}σιν$,
 $\kappa\alpha\theta'$ $\grave{\nu}\pi\grave{\sigma}\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\iotaν$ $\grave{\omega}\sigma\alpha\acute{\u}τω\zeta$)[...].²⁹

²⁷ *Thank* II, 265–272. Syméon le Nouveau Théologien, *Catéchèses* I–III. Introduction, texte critique et notes par Mgr. Basile Krivochéine, traduction par Joseph Paramelle, s. j. *SC* 96, 104, 113 (1963, 1964, 1965) III, 350–352 (abbreviated as *Catéchèses* in the following).

²⁸ *Eth.* I. 3, 82–86. *Traité théologiques et éthiques* I, 202.

²⁹ *Hymn* XXIII, 191–194. *Hymnes* II, 200.

He also knows about, and formally rejects, another view, according to which Christ would be completely transcendent in His Substance, so that He would be present in the universe only by his Operation or Power (S6):

This is why I call You and this is why I shout to You:
O You, who are above with the Father and are with us,
not as some think, by Your mere Operation,
not as many believe, by Your mere Will,
nor by Your mere Power, but also by Your Substance [...].³⁰

Once again, one should note the Christological content of the passage. Christ is with us in His Substance because of the hypostatic union that unites Him to the creature. However, one should not pass without also noticing the fact that the view rejected here strangely resembles the one that was later to be adopted by the Hesychasts. A later reader of one of the manuscripts felt this contradiction and added to this passage a long *scholion* in eighteenth-century *katharevousa*.³¹ According to the hypothesis of Johannes Koder, this scholiast might have been Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite.³² The scholiast tries to explain that Symeon's refutation does not, in fact, concern the Hesychast doctrine, but only some pagans and heretics, who thought of God as having a corporeal nature and imagined that He was sitting in the heavens and ruled by His mere order and will the universe, just like an earthly king. Thus, according to the scholiast, Symeon would say that God is present everywhere in His Substance, but we partake only in His Operation or Power, but never in His Substance or Nature, which is imparticipable, ἀμέθεκτος. Rather than giving a correct explanation of Symeon's words, this *scholion* shows how problematic its author found them and how he strove to harmonise them with the Hesychast doctrine, which, by then, had long since become the official dogma of the Orthodox Church.

(B) A confusion between οὐσία and ὑπόστασις?

We have already noted that sometimes Symeon uses the terms οὐσία, φύσις, and ὑπόστασις somewhat indifferently. At two instances I quoted texts (S3 and S5 above), where ὑπόστασις stands in a place where we would expect the term οὐσία. However, this identification seems to work also *vice versa*. The following is a striking example for Symeon's use of φύσις and οὐσία, where normally one would expect the word ὑπόστασις or another similar expression meaning person (S7):

O immaculate Nature, hidden Substance,
Love-of-mankind unknowable to most men,

³⁰ *Hymn XLVII*, 30–34. *Hymnes* III, 122.

³¹ *Ibid.* See the *scholion*'s French translation on p. 123, note 4. The *scholion* can be found in the edition by DIONYSIOS ZAGORAIOS: Τοῦ ὅσιου Συμεὼν τοῦ νέου Θεολόγου τὰ εὑρισκόμενα ... Τὸ δὲ δεύτερον μέρος περιέχει ἑτέρους λόγους αὐτοῦ διὰ στίχων πολιτικῶν πάνυ ὀφελίμους ... ἐκδοθέντας ὑπὸ κυρίου Διονυσίου. Venice 1790, 122 (abbreviated as *Dionysios* in the following).

³² *Hymnes* I, "Introduction," 70.

Mercy unseen by those who lead a heedless life,
 unchangeable, indivisible Substance, thrice-holy,
 simple and shapeless Light, without any composition,
 incorporeal, incomprehensible, ungraspable to all nature,
 how did you appear similar to me, how did you reveal Yourself
 [to those in the darkness (Jes 9:1; Mat 4:16),
 how were You held in the hands of Your holy Mother,
 how were You bound like a murderer, how did You suffer like a criminal,
 in a body, o my King, because You wanted to save me
 and to lead me back to the Paradise of Glory?³³

I think there can be no doubt that the “Substance” or “Nature,” which is celebrated in this hymn and is hardly separable from the Substance in which the faithful partake in the Eucharist, or from the matter/wood of the divine Fire, is in a way to be identified with Christ. However, what place should be assigned to this Substance? We could suspect a monophysite teaching here, according to which the divine Nature in the Economy would be the same as the divine Hypostasis, so that Symeon would be teaching the incarnation of the only Nature of Christ, but this interpretation would be strictly excluded by the many clear dyophysite texts of Symeon, of which we have quoted one in S2. Or we could suspect a kind of Nestorianism, which would consider the two Substances of Christ as two hypostases; however, our text entirely contradicts such an interpretation, for, clearly, Symeon speaks about a divine, eternal, incorporeal Substance, pre-existent to the Incarnation. Moreover, this Substance is called by the divine attributes “Love-of-mankind” (*φιλανθρωπία*) and Mercy (*ἔλεος*), which pertain to God’s saving activity in the world and which were considered later by the Hesychasts as the names of separate Operations. And another enigma: why does Symeon call this Substance or Light, which he somehow identifies with Christ, “thrice-holy (*τρισάγια*),” when normally, in Byzantium, this was an attribute of the Trinity?

Certainly, I do not claim to be able to give any definitive answer to these difficult questions. However, perhaps the following verses of another hymn by Symeon can make us guess what the “thrice-holy Substance” might mean (S8):

[I]n the night itself and in the darkness itself
 I see Christ as He fearfully opens for me the heavens,
 He bends toward me and becomes visible to me
 together with the Father and the Spirit in the *thrice-holy Light*,
 being one in the three and the three being in one;
 anyway, they are the Light, and the Light is the three
 and it illuminates my soul more than the Sun
 and irradiates my darkened mind.³⁴

Although Symeon does not use the term “Substance,” the “Light” and the “thrice-holy” attribute would suggest that he speaks about the same reality as in the

³³ *Hymn XIII*, 37–47. *Hymnes I*, 258–260.

³⁴ *Hymn XI*, 35–42. *Hymnes I*, 234.

previously quoted hymn (S7). There the Light was somehow the Christ, but here Symeon teaches that the “thrice-holy Light” bears the presence of the three Persons of the Trinity, a logical development, given the general usage of this attribute. Thus, putting together all the information gathered up to now, we may say that the Substance, or Light, at hand is the immanent aspect of God, somehow bearing the presence of the three divine Persons together and thus identified with the presence of the Holy Trinity in the created world, primarily in the heart and the soul of the faithful; we may also draw the conclusion that according to Symeon this presence has somehow been incarnated in Christ, in the womb of the Mother of God. If this – *emphatically hypothetical* – interpretation is correct, we might note that, on the one hand, as constituting the immanent aspect of God, this Substance plays exactly the same role as the Operations in the Hesychast doctrine, but that, on the other hand, the Hesychasts would never say that it was this immanent aspect (that is, the Operations in their case), which became incarnate in Christ. Be as it may, the role of this divine principle reminds us of a concept not very much attested in the Greek-speaking Christian world, but all the more prominent in the theological thought of Aramaic (Syrian) Christianity, that of the Shekhinta, the divine Indwelling or Presence.³⁵

(C) A counter-argument against the hypothesis of a substantial participation

Thus, from all the passages quoted (and from others not quoted) here we can establish that Symeon taught a substantial presence of God in the world and also a real participation in the divine Substance in the mystical experience, connected primarily to the participation in the Eucharist. However, what does this mean more precisely? There are some passages that seem to be in plain contradiction with the theory of a substantial presence. In fact, in several places Symeon says that God transmits Himself to humankind not “in substance” (*οὐσίᾳ*), but “in participation” (*μετουσίᾳ*) [S9–10]:

I think that the vision is seen as enveloped together,
not in substance though, but in participation [...].³⁶

If it was in knowledge, deed, and contemplation
that God became entirely man,
it should certainly be thought, if we are to be Orthodox,
that I become entirely God by communication
with God, in awareness and consciousness, not in substance, but in
participation [...].³⁷

³⁵ For the history of the concept in the Aramaic-speaking world, cp. SED, N.: *La Shekhinta et ses amis «araméens»*. *Mélanges Antoine Guillaumont : Contributions à l'étude des christianismes orientaux*. Geneva : Patrick Cramer Éditeur, 1988, 233–242.

³⁶ *Hymn I*, 28–29; *Hymnes I*, 158.

³⁷ *Hymn L*, 198–202; *Hymnes III*, 170.

These passages have been quoted by both Archbishop Basil Krivochéine and Hieromonk Alexander Golitzin as proving that Symeon's thought has a contradictory and paradoxical character and that, *per consequent*, the expressions indicating a substantial participation are not to be taken at face value.³⁸ However, the contradiction seems only apparent. In my interpretation, here Symeon does not say that the participation is not in the very Substance of God – this would be a plain denial of what he affirms elsewhere – but only that it is not in our own substance that we become divine, or become united to God, or see Him, but only in participation – evidently in His Substance.³⁹ What Symeon states here is only that the created nature never becomes God substantially, just as God has never become man according to His substance (but only in the Son's Person). The divinisation of man strictly follows the pattern of the inhumanation of God. The opposite view would lead to a pronounced monophysitism in Christology and to sheer Gnosticism in spirituality.

(D) Substance and Operations

However, does the presence of a doctrine of substantial participation in the Divine in Symeon's writings mean that, as Darrouzès seems to indicate,⁴⁰ he did not know, or ignored, or rejected, any distinction between the divine Substance and Operations, so prominent in the Hesychast doctrine? As we have already seen above (concerning S3) he clearly knew about, and admitted, a distinction between the divine Substance and "those things around it," but he seemed to give a specific interpretation to this Cappadocian doctrine. Now let us see more closely how he understood this distinction.

In fact, he exposed in many places his doctrine on the divine Substance and Operations, but perhaps nowhere as clearly as in his Hymn XXII. Here, after having dwelt at length upon the incomprehensibility and ineffability of God, he – so to say – gives a warning to himself, in God's person, in the following way (S11):

[It is better] not to scrutinise My Nature, o son of man,
nor My Operations, those of the Holy Spirit,
how it [that is, the Spirit] becomes a Sun, how it seems to be a star,
appearing from a distance and above the mountains,
and when it hides from your eyes,
how it causes you an inconsolable anguish and sorrow,
and when you think that it will not appear to you any more,
how you find it inside, somewhere in your heart,
and how it gives you unexpectedly stupefaction and joy.
When it shows itself to you as a flame, when it looks like splendour and fire,

³⁸ KRIVOCHEINE, *op. cit.* (see note 13 [1980]), 206–207 (quoting both texts); GOLITZIN, *op. cit.* (see note 16), 137–138 (quoting only S10).

³⁹ Darrouzès has clearly grasped this point: see his "Introduction" to *Traité théologiques et éthiques*, 26–27: "La déification reste une opération de la grâce, une communion personnelle qui n'aboutit pas à une confusion des natures. Cependant ... la vision est bien celle de l'essence de Dieu."

⁴⁰ See his notes quoted above, in note 19.

do not wonder or scrutinise, it is not good for you!
 Only believe that I am a Light, totally deprived of shape.
 entirely simple, not composed of anything, indivisible by nature,
 inscrutable at the same time, approachable in an unapproachable manner.
 Truly, I am seen and I show myself in My love for men,
 transforming Myself according to the capacities
 of each human being; this is not something that I undergo,
 but those who see are deemed worthy to see Me in this way.⁴¹

I think that these verses contain an unambiguous doctrine. They show that Symeon was fully aware of a distinction between the concepts of divine Substance and Operations. He was also perfectly aware of, and accepted, the Cappadocian doctrine, according to which the Substance of God is entirely hidden and incomprehensible and that it lets us guess itself only through its Operations in the universe and, most of all, in ourselves. Symeon states as well – and in this, he again follows the Cappadocian Fathers – that these Operations are multiple and variable according to our capacities, while the Substance is absolutely one, unique, and indivisible. He still closely follows the Cappadocian teaching when he affirms that the divine Substance remains unchangeable, while everybody perceives it in a different manner. But he adds to all this a peculiar interpretation, contained in the following lines of the poem (S12):

The virtues of the soul constitute the substrate (ὑπόκεινται) as a kind of matter, in which the divine Light of the Spirit, which envelops them, is also called according to the substrate of its matter (κατὰ τὸ ὑποκείμενον τῆς ψυχῆς),⁴² since it has no proper name among men. Thus, when man is seized by sorrow and weeps, then the Spirit is also called “water,” because it cleanses and united to the tears, it washes away all dirt; when compunction quenches the anger of the heart with the assistance of the Spirit, this is called “meekness”; and again, when man becomes enflamed against impiety, this happens through the Spirit and is called “zeal.” Again, it is called “peace,” “joy,” and “benignity,” since it gives all three to the one who mourns, and it makes joy gush forth like a fountain in the heart.⁴³

I think that this is a very philosophical, and not only poetic, explanation of the inherent hidden unity and the apparent multiplicity of the Divine: in Himself, that is,

⁴¹ *Hymn XXII*, 148–165, *Hymnes* II, 182.

⁴² Father Joseph Paramelle translates these lines in the following way: “Les vertus de l’âme sont en dessous comme du bois / et la lumière divine de l’Esprit qui les enveloppe / tire son nom aussi du bois sur lequel il repose” (*ibid.* 185). Naturally, this translation is also correct, because of the ambivalence of the word ψυχή. However, given the obvious technical meaning of the couplet ψυχή-ὑποκείμενον, it is hardly possible to suppose that Symeon was unaware of the philosophical meaning of the expressions that he used.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 176–189, 184.

in His Substance, God remains one, perfectly simple, and not composed of anything. However, out of His love for mankind He enters into composition with the many souls, personally different from each other, so that He is named after the composite mirror images that appear in them. In this manner, every virtue of a soul attracts the Spirit in the form of a different grace and it is this transfigured state of the soul, or, rather, the act of God by which He enters into composition with the soul, which Symeon calls the divine Operation. Nevertheless, even this Operation receives its name from the material element of the composition, that is, the soul's virtue, and thus is properly ineffable in itself.

This is certainly a doctrine of distinction of the divine Substance and its operations, but different, at least in its philosophical content, from that of the Hesychasts. Not only is the idea of a participation in God's Substance, *a priori* excluded by the teaching of the latter, preserved by it, but we cannot speak of a real distinction of the Substance and its Operations in the Hesychast sense either. For Symeon, this distinction is rather due to our perception only. According to his doctrine, God is, and remains forever, absolutely simple, but men can have their own substance united to God's through grace, on the reverse pattern of the Incarnation of the Word, so that God can be named in the resulting composition. If my interpretation is correct, this is a philosophically consistent, though extremely subtle, teaching about the divine presence in the world, the Eucharistic communion, and the mystical experience. To my understanding, it interprets and defends in another way the same phenomenon which is interpreted and defended by the Hesychasts: the ungraspable and ineffable, but entirely real presence of God in the universe and ourselves. Thus, the two doctrines can perhaps be considered as identical in their ultimate content, but very different in their form, and also in their philosophical connotations.

III. THE SOURCES OF THE DOCTRINE

(A) *On Symeon's sources in general*

There arises, however, the question of whether this is a very personal teaching, peculiar only to Symeon, or whether the New Theologian takes it from some pre-existent tradition. I think that an inquiry into Symeon's sources permits us to answer this question. The sources of Symeon's writings, surprisingly enough, have not been very studied thoroughly.⁴⁴ The only patristic author whom Symeon names explicitly is Saint Gregory the Theologian.⁴⁵ Besides this most important source, it is generally accepted that Symeon used the Pseudo-Makarian homilies, and Archbishop Basil

⁴⁴ For a by now ten year-old summary of the state of the research, see TURNER, H. J. M.: *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Spiritual Fatherhood*. Leiden–New York–København–Köln: E. J. Brill 1990, 45–51. Research since conducted by HM. Alexander Golitzin has somewhat modified the picture presented by Turner. See GOLITZIN, A. G.: Hierarchy versus Anarchy? Dionysius Areopagita, Symeon the New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, and their common roots in ascetical tradition. *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38/2, 1994, 131–179.

⁴⁵ See TURNER, *op. cit.* (see note 44), 46–49.

Krivochéine, in his edition of the *Catecheses* of Symeon, mentions a close literary parallel with a Makarian passage.⁴⁶ It is known from Niketas' *Life of Symeon* that Symeon was acquainted with the writings of Mark the Hermit and John Klimakos.⁴⁷ Some other references to John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Maximos the Confessor, and diverse saints' *Lives* have also been found by various researchers. In addition, Louis Bouyer and Jean Darrouzès mention the name of Evagrios as a possible source of Symeon, without quoting any further evidence.⁴⁸ Although this has been many times denied, Alexander Golitzin has shown beyond any doubt that Symeon had read and used Pseudo-Dionysios.⁴⁹ I have also gathered together further evidence supporting this latter thesis.⁵⁰ To all this, one should add the several lives of the saints read in the monasteries,⁵¹ as well as all the prayers of the liturgical cycle, which Symeon must have known well and which must have exerted a deep influence on him. Now let us take a look at those sources in order to determine whether Symeon could have taken his doctrine of the divine Substance and substantial participation from one or some of them.

(B) Substantial participation: Pseudo-Makarios

As concerns Gregory the Theologian, the other Cappadocians, and John Chrysostom, they could be Symeon's sources for the distinction between divine Substance and Operations, but they could hardly be the origin of the latter's doctrine of a substantial participation. Very different is, however, the case of Pseudo-Makarios. Even a glance at the language of this spiritual author can convince us that he must be the most important, or one of the most important, sources of the doctrine at hand. We have already mentioned Symeon's synonymous usage of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις, two basic terms that had originally meant the same thing in the philosophical language, but which were cautiously distinguished by the Cappadocians, and, following them, by the Second Ecumenical Council in 381. As is well known, from that period onwards, οὐσία meant "Substance" in the theological language, and especially the common Substance of the Divinity, while ὑπόστασις gradually acquired the meaning that we nowadays understand by Person, and meant especially the three divine Persons of the Trinity. However, in Pseudo-Makarios we find the earlier synonymous usage, which is no wonder in the case of a fourth century author not influenced by the

⁴⁶ The parallel can be found in the opening section of *Catechesis XXXIV*. There, Symeon paraphrases a text from the *Epistula Magna. Catéchèses*, III, 271 note 2.

⁴⁷ Nicetas Stethatos, *Life of Saint Symeon the New Theologian* 6. 28ff; Αρχιμ. Συμεών Π. Κούτσα, Νικήτα τοῦ Στηθάτου Βίος καὶ πολιτεία τοῦ ἐν ἀγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Σεολόγου. Εισαγωγή, κείμενο, μετάφραση, σχόλια. Nea Smyrne: Ekdoseis Akritas 1994 (repr. 1996), 64. For a discussion of John's influence on Symeon, cf. TURNER, *op. cit.* (note 44), 45–46.

⁴⁸ BOUYER, L.: *Histoire de la spiritualité chrétienne* II. Paris 1961, 673; for DARROUZÈS, see note 18.

⁴⁹ GOLITZIN, *op. cit.* (note 44).

⁵⁰ PERCZEL, I.: Denys l'Aréopagite et Syméon le Nouveau Théologien. *La postérité de Denys l'Aréopagite en Orient et en Occident. Actes du colloque international de Paris, 29 Septembre–3 Octobre, 1994*. Ed. by Y. de Andia. Paris: Études Augustiniennes 1997, 341–357.

⁵¹ See *Catéchèses* I, 424–425, notes 1–5 and TURNER, *op. cit.* (note 44), 51.

Cappadocian Fathers.⁵² But the lack of distinction between οὐσία and ὑπόστασις is all the more surprising in the case of Symeon, who wrote in a period when this distinction was already consecrated by a multisecular usage. This fact shows only an overall characteristic of Symeon's thought: its faithfulness to the spiritual authors whose teachings have inspired it.

I have also mentioned that Symeon's concept of a substantial participation in God is based on a literal interpretation of a Scriptural verse, 2 Pt 1:4:

That [...] ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

I have also quoted Hymn VII (S1), where Symeon based his interpretation on an identification of the terms Nature and Substance. Now, we find the same interpretation of the same verse in Pseudo-Makarios (M1):

[T]hey should ask and receive a heavenly gift from the *Substance* (ὑπόστασις) of His Divinity, for it is written: "that [...] we might be partakers of the divine Nature."⁵³

And another passage referring to the same verse and the same doctrine (M2):

Just as the glory of Christ, being inside, was poured out and shone forth to His body, in the same way the power of Christ, being inside in the saints, will on that day flow out upon their bodies. In fact, they are already partaking of His *Substance* (οὐσία) and *Nature* (φύσις) in their intellect [...].⁵⁴

Another Makarian passage says that the Divinity remained "substantially" in the human nature of Christ, this being the prototype of its substantial presence in the saints. This is in fact an exegesis of John 5:35:

He [John the Baptist] was a burning and shining lamp.⁵⁵

Macarius' text reads as follows (M3):

As many lights and burning lamps are lighted from the fire, but all the lamps and lights are lighted and shine from one nature, so also the Christians are lighted and shine from one Nature, from the divine Fire, the Son of God; they have their lamps burning in their hearts and they are shining before Him, being on the earth, just as He does (Zech 4:3, 11, 14; Rev 11:4) [...] Therefore, the Christians from one aspect are similar to lamps with oil in them, that is, the fruits of righteousness. But if [their lamp] is

⁵² As far as the controversial question of the relation between Pseudo-Makarios' *Great Letter* and Gregory of Nyssa's *De instituto christiano* is concerned, I am inclined to accept J. Gribomont's thesis of the latter's dependence on the former, rather than the opposite view proposed by W. Jaeger.

⁵³ Pseudo-Makarios, *Hom.* 39, 9–11; *Die 50 geistlichen Homilien des Makarios*. Ed. by H. Dörries, E. Klostermann, M. Kröger. Patristische Texte und Studien 4. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1964, 274.

⁵⁴ *Hom.* 15. 38, 539–547, *ibid.*, 149–150.

⁵⁵ In the King James Version: "he was a burning and a shining light."

not lighted from that of the Divinity, they are nothing. The Lord “was the burning lamp” (John 5:35), by virtue of the Spirit of Divinity, who abided substantially (οὐσιωδῶς) in Him and was burning His heart according to His humanity.

In fact, this passage contains virtually all the elements observed earlier in Symeon’s doctrine about God’s substantial presence in men, and about Christ’s two natures being a prototype of the saints who live also in two natures, because they have acquired in themselves the substantial presence of the Spirit. Another similarity consists in the fact that Pseudo-Makarios and Symeon alike constantly speak about a kind of “mingling” of the two natures. Thus Pseudo-Makarios says that when Christians partake in the Eucharist, their souls mingle with the Holy Spirit (M4):

The prophets did not know beforehand that those who partake in the visible bread eat spiritually the flesh of the Lord, that the Apostles and the Christians would receive the Paraclete [...] and be filled by the Divinity, and that their souls would be mingled with the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶

Symeon uses very similar terminology (S13):

O Christ, my God,
how do you entirely mingle with the grass in Your divine Substance,
entirely in Your unbearable Light, o my indwelling God?
How is it that, remaining unchangeable and totally unapproachable,
You preserve unburnable the substance of the grass
and keeping it unchangeable you change it in its entirety [...]?⁵⁷

Of course, the terminology of mingling can be found elsewhere as well in the Greek patristic literature (as in Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysios, and so on) and is, as Columba Stewart has shown, even more prominent in the Syriac literature,⁵⁸ but the presence in the writings of both authors of an entire cluster of themes centred on that of a substantial participation leaves little doubt about the fact that Symeon elaborated his doctrine on the basis of his Pseudo-Makarian readings.

(C) Substantial participation: the hymns of the Byzantine Church

It is important to note that none of the elements of this doctrine are to be found in Pseudo-Makarios only, so Symeon, when he consulted this author, could well have been convinced that he was reading there a general doctrine of the Church. Particu-

⁵⁶ *Hom.* 27, 245–250.

⁵⁷ *Hymn XXVIII*, 159–164, *Hymnes* II, 306.

⁵⁸ On the terminology of “mingling” in Pseudo-Makarios, see STEWART, C.: ‘*Working the Earth of the Heart. The Messalian Controversy in History, Texts, and Language to AD 431*’. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1991, chapter “Metaphors of Mixing and Blending,” 170–203 and conclusions on p. 203: “[S]yriac writers use mixing language with a vividness and directness which sets them quite apart from their Greek-speaking contemporaries [...] So too does Ps.-Macarius.”

larly important, but also particularly problematic, are the hymns of the Byzantine Church that seem to suggest a doctrine similar to that of Symeon. They are important, because there is nothing more natural than a monk elaborating themes that he has encountered in the church services, but also problematic, because often it is difficult to date these hymns, meaning that the question of anteriority is not easily decided. Moreover, the treatment of the hymns requires special expertise in liturgical studies, which I do not claim to possess. However, let me just mention a couple of interesting parallels from this hymnological material, without drawing far-reaching conclusions.

A striking parallel is to be found in the morning service sung on the second day of Christmas, the Synaxis of the holy Mother of God. At the end of the service, during the Praises (αἴνοι), the following *troparion*, attributed by the liturgical books to Andrew of Jerusalem, is sung:

Today, the invisible Nature is joined to mortal men, coming forth from the Virgin. Today, the infinite Substance is wrapped in swaddling clothes at Bethlehem. Today, God leads the Magi by a star to worship Him, and in gold and frankincense and myrrh they foretell His three-day burial. Therefore we sing: O Christ our God, made flesh of the Virgin, save our souls!⁵⁹

In this text we find the same – presumably archaic – terminology, calling Christ a Nature and a Substance, that we have encountered in Symeon's S7 quoted above. If this *troparion* was indeed composed by Andrew of Jerusalem, that is, by Andrew of Crete (660–740),⁶⁰ then it largely antedates Symeon's times and could already have been a part of the Christmas service in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Even more difficult is the dating of another text, a *theotokion* (that is, a praise of the Mother of God) sung at the end of the midnight service canon in the Seventh Tone. If Symeon could have read such a text, it could at least easily have justified his theory of a participation in the divine Substance, as well as his interpretation of 2 Pt 1:4:

Having assumed mind, soul, and the mass of the flesh from your pure womb, God the Word appeared a man in reality and showed that man is a partaker of the divine Substance.⁶¹

The reading of such texts, combined with the Pseudo-Makarian spiritual teaching and other ecclesiastic testimonies could easily give rise to Saint Symeon's theories that I have tried to unfold from his writings in the above.

⁵⁹ Μηναῖον τοῦ Δεκεμβρίου, περιέχον ἄπασαν τὴν ἀνήκουσαν αὐτῷ ἀκολουθίαν, μετὰ τῆς προσθήκης τοῦ τυπικοῦ. Athens: Ekdoseis "Phos" 1996, 405–406. The translation is taken from *The Festal Menaion*, translated from the original Greek by Mother Mary and Archimandrite (now Bishop) Kallistos Ware, with an introduction by Archpriest Georges Florovsky. London–Boston: Faber and Faber 1969, reprint 1984, 293. In the translation I have changed "Essence" to "Substance," according to the terminology used in the present study.

⁶⁰ On Andrew of Crete, see *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Ed. A. Kazhdan, A. M. Talbot, T. F. Gregory, N. P. Ševčenko. New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press 1991, 92–93; EUSTRATIADES, S.: Ἀνδρέας ὁ Κρήτης ὁ Ἱεροσολύμιτης. *Nea Sion* 29, 1934, 673–688; 30, 1935, 3–20, 147–153, 209–217, 269–283, 462–477; *BHG* 113–114c.

⁶¹ Οκτώηχος: Ἀκολουθία τῶν κυριακῶν, περιέχουσα ἄπαντα ἀνήκοντα αὐτῇ κατὰ τὴν τάξιν τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἑκκλησίας. Thessalonike: Ekdoseis Vas. Rigopoulou 1988, 327.

(D) Substance and Operations: John Climacus

Thus, the above are possible sources for the New Theologian's doctrine of a participation in the divine Substance. However, his peculiar interpretation of a distinction between the Substance and the Operations of God seems to have no roots in the Makarian literature and hitherto I could not discover its traces in the ecclesiastic hymns. In an earlier paper I tried to demonstrate that one of the sources that Symeon had used for the elaboration of this doctrine was Pseudo-Dionysios.⁶² I shall not touch upon this source now, but will present another, even more important one, John Klimakos.

Treatise 25 of John's *Ladder*, treating of "The destruction of the passions by the advent of the most high Humility" is a very curious one. It fully justifies the last statement of John's *Life*, put as a foreword before the *Ladder*:

This new seer of God has shown his tablets written by God, tablets containing practical [that is, moral and ascetic] teaching from the outside, but contemplative [that is, theological] teaching inside.⁶³

Now, *Treatise 25* begins with a definition of humility, and this definition constitutes the very core of Symeon's doctrine of the divine Operations in the soul (J1):

Humility is a nameless grace of the soul, which becomes named only to those who have received it by experience. An ineffable wealth, the very naming and transmission of God. For It [that is, Humility] says (φησίν): "learn it," not from an angel, nor from a man (cf. Is 63, 9), or a tablet, but "from me," that is, from my indwelling, illumination, and operation, "that I am meek and lowly in heart" (Mt 11:29).⁶⁴

From the grammatical point of view, the above translation corresponds to only one possible understanding of the text. In fact, in the first reading, the interjected verb φησίν does not necessarily refer to Humility as the subject, but can also refer to the Scripture, or simply to Christ. Such is in fact the solution of the standard English and French translations.⁶⁵ However, the syntax of the sentence does not exclude the above reading (and indeed, rather, suggests it) and it was definitely that of Symeon, who understood by it that what Saint John Klimakos calls by the name "Humility," is in fact Christ Himself, whose indwelling, or whose operation in the soul, generates

⁶² PERCZEL, *op. cit.* (note 50), 354–357.

⁶³ Κλήματος Ἰωάννου τοῦ Σινάτον, καθηγουμένου τοῦ Ὄρους Σινᾶ. Κείμενον ἐπὶ τῇ βάσει χειρογράφων τῆς ἐν Ἀθῷ ιερᾶς μονῆς Ἀγίου Διονυσίου. Ed. SOPHRONIOS THE HERMIT. First edition: Constantinople 1883, second edition: Athens: "Aster" 1979, 9 (abbreviated as *The Ladder* in the following).

⁶⁴ *The Ladder* 25, 3, 117.

⁶⁵ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Saint John Climacus. Revised Edition. Boston, MA: Holy Transfiguration Monastery 1991, 150: "for it is said" (abbreviated as *Holy Transfiguration Monastery* in the following); John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Translation by Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell. The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York–Ramsey–Toronto: Paulist Press 1982, 219: "He said" (abbreviated as *Luibheid-Russell* in the following); Saint Jean Climaque, *L'échelle sainte*. Traduction française par le P. Placide Deseille. 2ème édition, revue et corrigée. Béziers-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine 1987, 218: "car il est dit" (abbreviated as *Deseille* in the following).

the state of humility in the latter. At least, this was the manner in which he paraphrased the selfsame passage in his *Hymn XXIV* (S14):

Let all of us strive to find humility
this nameless grace of our souls,
which has no name, but by experience
becomes named to those who have obtained it.
Christ is meek, lowly in heart
and whoever has obtained His indwelling, knows
that he possesses humility in virtue of Him,
or, rather, that He is himself the Humility.⁶⁶

Clearly, this is a paraphrase of John Klimakos' definition of Humility, making explicit what was either implicit in John's words, or understood only by Symeon, namely, the identification of the "nameless grace" with Christ himself. However, did Symeon only read this meaning into the text, or was it originally meant by John? In other words, did the New Theologian understand John Klimakos correctly? In fact, a comparison of the above chapter of the *Ladder* with some others from the same *Treatise 25* perfectly justifies Symeon's interpretation. Perhaps the clearest among these is Chapter 29 [30] (J2):

Humility is the "door" of the Kingdom, which leads in those who approach it. And I think that the Lord was speaking of this door when He said: whoever wants, "shall go in and out" from this life without fear "and find pasture" (Jn 10:9) and grass in Paradise. "All that ever came" through another door (Jn 10:1) in the monastic garb "are thieves and robbers" (Jn 10:8) of their own lives.⁶⁷

So, if Humility is the door, about which Christ said "I am the door," the identification of Humility with Christ is rather plausible. John's definition of Humility (J1), as well as its paraphrase by Symeon (S14), also contains in a nutshell Symeon's doctrine of the nameless indwelling of the Divine in the soul, acquiring names from the substrate of its presence constituted by the virtues of the soul. But Symeon, in his texts S11–12, clearly speaks in this context about the indwelling of the divine Nature or Substance and about the latter's Operations. Where does he take this doctrine from? Does John define Humility as a Substance? Apparently he does. Interestingly enough, although the definition of Humility does not contain the term "Substance," a *scholion* interpreting the same text⁶⁸ already explains some enigmas contained in the definition, by an allusion to one of Aristotle's characterisations of the category of οὐσία: "a Substance cannot be more or less than what it is."⁶⁹ Thus, the *scholion* states that Humility is called a grace only indirectly, "because of the grace that through Humility is given to the soul." And the explanation follows: "for the names (αἱ προσηγορίαι)

⁶⁶ *Hymn XXIV*, 328–335, *Hymnes* II, 250.

⁶⁷ *The Ladder*, 25, 29 [30], 120.

⁶⁸ *The Ladder*, 117, note 1.

⁶⁹ Bekker 3b 35 ff.

are not susceptible of being more or less”; finally the example adduced by the scholiast, “men cannot be more or less men,” is also identical with the one that Aristotle used to illustrate his postulate. Moreover, in what follows the definition of Humility, Saint John Klimakos does not fail to state that this “nameless grace” is in fact a Substance, and he states this in terms that clearly remind us of Symeon’s expressions:

What the power and Substance of this Sun is, we cannot say. Nevertheless, we understand its inner Substance from its operations and properties.⁷⁰

And the description of the properties follows soon:

You will know and you will not be deceived seeing in yourself the presence of this holy Substance⁷¹ (*οὐσία*) in the abundance of an ineffable light and the inexpressible love for prayer. And before obtaining these two, a heart which does not blame the others if they fall. The precursor of all the aforementioned is a hatred towards any kind of vanity.

It seems to me that these passages constitute something like the direct source of Symeon’s doctrine on the divine presence understood as a Substance, and on its Operations in the soul. These texts also constitute a further, third testimony to a tradition in the Greek Orthodox Church, which spoke of Christ in terms of a Substance. However, it remains still quite obscure to me precisely how John understood this term “Substance” and how Symeon interpreted John’s expressions.⁷²

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Finally, all this seems to show that the history of the Byzantine Orthodox spiritual doctrine before the great Hesychast synthesis was far from being simple and linear. There seems to have existed a spiritual tradition, which had its own terminology transmitted within the monastic circles. The Hesychasts, beyond doubt, deeply revered and used all the authors whom we have treated in this inquiry, but harmonised more thoroughly these spiritual traditions with the mainstream of Greek theological thought, represented by the Cappadocian Fathers and John Chrysostom. In so doing they could work out a lasting doctrinal synthesis, which prevails even now in the Orthodox spiritual tradition.

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⁷⁰ *The Ladder* 25. 24, 119.

⁷¹ The English and French translations that I have consulted translate *οὐσία* otherwise. *Holy Transfiguration Monastery* 155: “possession”; *Luibheid-Russell* 223: “gift”; *Deseille* 223: “réalité”. Of the three, only the third is correct.

⁷² It seems appropriate to add here a note by Basile Markesinis. Upon reading the text of the present study he drew my attention to the traditional doctrine of Christ being “the Substance of the virtues.” Unfortunately, this note came too late for incorporating it into the present study.