

Introduction

Symeon the New Theologian is one of the most outstanding Fathers of the Eastern Church. He is now commonly regarded as a great 'mystic of fire and light',¹ a forerunner of Byzantine Hesychasm. Some scholars call him 'the greatest of the Byzantine mystical writers'.² Others speak of his 'tremendous relevance' for modern man.³ Almost ten centuries after his death, his teachings on the vision of God as light, on sanctity and dispassion, on ecstasy and deification still attract many Christians, who find inspiration in his writings.

Yet Symeon is also one of the most controversial writers of the entire Christian tradition. He was granted the name of 'the New Theologian', which, though finally transformed into an honourable appellation, might well have been given to him originally by his opponents as an offensive nickname, to emphasize the dangerous novelty of his theology.⁴ During his lifetime he was many times

¹ Cf. Maloney, *Mystic*, title.

² Cf. Krivochéine, *Light*, 9.

³ Maloney, 'Introduction', 36.

⁴ Cf. Krivochéine, 'Writings', 325–6. In the Byzantine tradition the appellation *καινός θεολόγος* ('new theologian') bears sharp negative implications: see Wirth, 'Theologos', 126–7. Thus, Gregory of Nyssa called the heretic Eunomios *καινός θεολόγος*, 'the new theologian': see *Eunom.* 1. 250 [i. 100]; 2. 42 [i. 238]; 3. 8. 9 [ii. 242]; 3. 2. 8 [ii. 54]. Symeon himself used the expression *καινός θεολόγος* to reproach his opponent in *Theol.* 1. 92. Cf. similar usage in Gregory Palamas, who calls his opponent 'this new theologian' because he had departed from the tradition of the Fathers: *Triads* 3. 2. 4 [659]. One can perceive a slight difference in tone between *καινός* and *νέος*, but the second adjective may also bear negative connotations. Nikitas Stithatos, for example, opposes 'the new teachers' (*νέοι διδάσκαλοι*) to the church Fathers: see *Limits* 28 [392]. H.-G. Beck suggested that Symeon was for his contemporaries both 'Symeon the New' and 'Symeon the Theologian', and only later these two appellations were merged into a single *ὁ Νέος Θεολόγος*: cf. 'Symeon', 59ff.; *Literatur*, 585ff. In this case 'the New' would be a standard appellation given by Byzantines to recent saints in order to distinguish them from the ancient ones who bear the same name (cf. Hilarion the New, Stephen the Younger, etc.). However, B. Krivochéine, arguing from the fact that the expression 'the New Theologian' is contained in the earliest manuscripts of the 'Catechetical Discourses', asserts that this was the initial appellation of Symeon, which was only later transformed in some manuscripts into 'the New and the Theologian': see 'Writings', 315–27; cf. *SC* 96, 154–6.

accused of nothing less than a heresy. For years he lived in conflict with the official church authorities and in his old age was expelled from Constantinople. He had both quite a number of adherents and many enemies. His teaching was subject to heated debates not only during his lifetime but also after his death. His works were never forgotten and were in fact quite popular among the Orthodox monks of many centuries; outside the monastic milieu, however, his name was until the last few decades hardly mentioned even by scholars in Byzantine history and culture.

The rediscovery of Symeon is a recent phenomenon. His rich literary legacy, which includes 3 Theological Discourses, 15 Ethical Discourses, 34 Catechetical Discourses, 2 Thanksgivings, 225 Chapters, 4 Epistles, and 58 Hymns, has only quite lately become available for scholarly analysis.⁵ This is why, although Symeon is now considered by Byzantine scholars to be one of the most important objects of study, the literature on him is still rather limited. It includes only a few monographs, of which that by Archbishop Basil Krivochéine⁶ is the best known, being widely appreciated as an adequate and comprehensive exposition of Symeon's life, doctrine, and spirituality.⁷

In modern scholarship Symeon has been presented as a prominent mystical writer, but his relationship to Orthodox tradition has not yet been fully investigated.⁸ The interest in Symeon primarily as a

⁵ It was critically edited, except the 'Epistles', in 1957–73 by J. Darrouzès, B. Krivochéine, J. Koder, J. Paramelle, and L. Neyrand in 9 volumes of the *Sources Chrétiennes* series (see Bibliography). As to the 'Epistles', the first of them was edited by K. Holl: see *Enthusiasmus*, 110–27. *Ep.* 2–4 are not yet published: for their text we used the 16th-century manuscript *Vatic. gr.* 1782, foll. 205v.–230 (having also consulted some other manuscripts). Before the *SC* edition, Symeon's works were only available in the edition by Dionysios Zagoraios (1782), who published the original text of Symeon's 'Hymns' and an inadequate Modern Greek translation of his 'Discourses' and 'Chapters'.

⁶ See Krivochéine, *Light*.

⁷ Among other major scholarly works on Symeon are: Holl, *Enthusiasmus*; Biedermann, *Menschenbild*; Völker, *Praxis*; Turner, *Fatherhood*. An outline of some major themes of Symeon's mystical theology can be found in Špidlik, 'Symeon', *DSp* 14, 1387–1401; Maloney, *Mystic*. Among the books and articles which deal with some particular aspects of Symeon's doctrine and spirituality there are: Hausherr, *Mystique*; idem, *Direction*; Fraigneau-Julien, *Sens*; Hatzopoulos, *Two Outstanding Cases*; Ware, 'Father'; idem, 'Mystery'; Kazhdan, 'Zamechaniya'; idem, 'System'; McGuckin, 'Symeon'; idem, 'Renewal'. Several theses on Symeon have been written, in particular: Stathopoulos, *Gottesliebe*; Deppe, *Christ*; Rossum, *Problem*; Lascaris, *Liberation*; Theodoropoulos, *Love of God*. Some other pieces of literature on Symeon will be referred to in the course of our study.

⁸ In B. Krivochéine's *Light* Symeon is presented almost totally without reference to tradition. The most precise investigation into the connection between Symeon and

mystic, with the simultaneous underestimation of the traditional character of his teaching, might be explained partly by the Western influence on the modern scholarly approach to Symeon. For the study of mysticism in general it is a commonplace to regard the mystic as 'the great religious rebel who undermines the orthodox establishment, placing his own experience above all the doctrines of the accepted authorities, and who not infrequently engenders serious opposition even to the point of being put to death for heresy'.⁹ To a certain degree this view would correspond to medieval Western mysticism, which often became an individualistic and enthusiastic, sometimes almost protestant, movement opposed to the formal, rationalistic, and traditional 'orthodoxy'. There is a tendency among scholars to transfer this understanding of mysticism to Symeon and present him as a writer whose conceptions 'smacked of Messalianism',¹⁰ contained 'doubtful orthodoxy',¹¹ and were close to protestantism.¹² One scholar even found in Symeon's 'Chapters' 'a startling similarity to Neo-Paulician and Bogomil beliefs'.¹³

It is obvious that Symeon's own mystical experience was a primary source of his theological and literary inspiration. It is also true that Symeon had a conflict with the representatives of the 'official' Church: this makes his case somewhat similar to that of some

the tradition is still W. Völker's *Praxis*, but it deals only with Symeon's asceticism and mysticism; other studies, such as those by B. Fraigneau-Julien, H. Turner, and A. Hatzopoulos, examine particular questions. Besides, all these authors when searching for parallels to Symeon limit themselves to patristic writings, which constitute altogether only a part of Orthodox tradition; as we shall see, in the case of Symeon patristic literature was not the only important feature of his background.

⁹ Katz, *Mysticism*, 3.

¹⁰ Mango, *Byzantium*, 119. Cf. Bois, 'Hésychastes', 8–10. Symeon was presented as a Messalian in Allatius, *Diatriba*, and Deppe, *Christ* (see Bibliography).

¹¹ Darrouzès, *SC* 51-bis, 36.

¹² Idem, *SC* 122, 37.

¹³ Garsoian, 'Heresy', 107ff. This paper is an example of how a scholar, on the basis of some external and superficial parallelism in ideas and expressions between Orthodox writers and heretics, provides us as a result with a totally wrong picture of an Orthodox author. Being prompted by the intention 'to show that . . . both orthodox and heterodox mysticism coexisted, and to recall the perpetual thinness of the line separating orthodoxy from heresy', which is in fact the driving force behind many writings of modern Byzantine and patristic scholars, N. Garsoian produced a list of 'corresponding points' between Symeon's 'Chapters' and the doctrine of Neo-Paulicians (the term has been invented by N. Garsoian herself). She suggests, for example, that Symeon 'rejected' Baptism and hierarchy, which in fact he did not (see our discussion in Chapter 9). The scholar goes so far as to postulate that Symeon's mysticism was 'perhaps affected by the contemporary Byzantine fascination with Satanism': See *ibid.* 112.

Western mystics. But was Symeon really attempting to oppose his personal experience to the experience of his Church and place it 'above all the doctrines' of traditional Orthodoxy? Should his conflict be regarded as a clash between him and tradition, or was it in fact a debate about the nature of the tradition itself, which was understood in different ways by Symeon and by his opponents? It is my conviction that in Symeon we find a mysticism which is absolutely traditional, in the Orthodox sense of the term, and I shall try to prove this in the course of this study. It must be then a study of the mystical nature of tradition and the traditional nature of mysticism, and of Symeon as both a highly personal and at the same time very traditional ecclesiastical figure.

This study is conceived as a continuation of the work of Archbishop Basil Krivochéine in the direction outlined by him. When finishing his book on Symeon, he wrote:

Having reached the end of our study, we are still faced with the same difficult questions: who is Symeon? Exactly what does his name 'The New Theologian' mean? How could such a figure arise in the Byzantine world? Where does he come from; what place does he occupy in Orthodox spirituality and in Orthodoxy in general?¹⁴

What follows is an attempt to answer some of these questions, namely to determine, as far as possible, the place of Symeon in Orthodox tradition, to find out his background, and to compare his teaching with that of his predecessors. This research must, therefore, be focused on those features of Orthodox tradition that conditioned Symeon's development as a theologian and on the points of correspondence between Symeon's views and traditional doctrines.

I shall concentrate mostly on such aspects of his theology as have not been specially discussed in the existing literature. Symeon's biblical approach has never been precisely analysed, that is, his understanding of Scripture and his exegetical method. His attitude towards church worship and its influence on him have not yet been investigated. His place in the Studite tradition, that is the tradition of the Stoudios monastery in Constantinople, where Symeon began his monastic vocation, has not been defined. The personality of his spiritual father, Symeon the Studite, still remains obscure, and the original text of his only known writing, the 'Ascetical Discourse', has never been studied. The connection between Symeon the New

¹⁴ Krivochéine, *Light*, 391.

Theologian and patristic tradition as a whole has been only partly clarified. Symeon's knowledge of hagiographical literature and its influence on him have not been examined. Some important parts of his own doctrine, such as his anthropology and triadology (or trinitarian theology), have been left aside by scholars. Without claiming to fill in all these gaps in the existing studies on Symeon, I shall attempt to break new ground on the basis of original research.

This study will proceed by tracing Symeon's concepts back to their possible origins in tradition. This is why, seeking parallels between Symeon and preceding Fathers, I shall focus my attention primarily on those writers who were or may have been known to Symeon rather than on the authors who are *now* commonly regarded as great mystics of the early Church. When studying Symeon, one is surprised not to find in him any significant dependence on the key writers of the formative period of mystical theology,¹⁵ such as Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Dionysios the Areopagite, not to speak of Plato, Philo, and Plotinus, who are virtually ignored by Symeon together with the whole of the Neo-Platonist tradition. On the other hand, one finds that Symeon's thought was influenced by the theology of Gregory Nazianzen, who was extremely popular throughout the history of Byzantium, but who is not that significant for a modern reader of mystical theology. This study will be mainly concerned with exploring the channels of tradition that directly influenced Symeon, such as the writings of Gregory Nazianzen, which Symeon read and quoted, or those of Symeon the Studite, who was his spiritual father, as well as the variety of scriptural, liturgical, hagiographic, and ascetical texts which were read in the church offices. Without entirely excluding indirect evidence, much less attention will be paid to the authors who seem not to have been of great significance for Symeon.

As this study deals with mysticism and tradition, let us explain briefly what these two terms will entail in the course of this research.

Mysticism in general is, according to A. Louth's definition, 'a search for and experience of immediacy with God'.¹⁶ In fact, the word 'mysticism' is alien to Orthodox usage as it does not occur in the writings of the church Fathers. However, it is derived from the Greek adjective *μυστικός* (hidden, secret), which occurs very often

¹⁵ Cf. Louth, *Origins*, pp. xi ff.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. xv.

in patristic literature in general,¹⁷ and in Symeon in particular. The latter speaks of 'mystical illumination',¹⁸ 'mystical contemplation',¹⁹ 'ineffable mystical visions',²⁰ 'mystical radiance',²¹ 'mystical union' with Christ.²² Thus, in many cases in Symeon the adjective *μυστικός* refers to experience connected with the vision of God as uncreated light. This gives us the right to employ the phrase 'mystical experience' as an equivalent to the 'vision of the divine light' or 'vision of God', and the word 'mystic' as designating a person who has experience of this vision. The word 'mysticism' will mean both someone's personal experience of the vision of God (or of 'immediacy with God'), and his attitude to this experience as expressed in his writings ('mystical doctrine').

As regards the word 'tradition', it will be used with the meaning of the Greek patristic term *παράδοσις*. Athanasios speaks of

the very tradition [*παράδοσις*], teaching and faith of the Universal Church [*καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας*] from the very beginning, which the Lord gave, the Apostles preached, and the Fathers preserved.²³

John of Damascus indicates that *παράδοσις* consists of both written and unwritten sources,²⁴ and defines it as 'the eternal principles [*ὄροι*] that our Holy Fathers determined'.²⁵ On the basis of these definitions one can say that tradition is the living continuity of doctrine, spirituality, and experience, which derive from Christ and are preserved over the centuries. In Orthodox usage, tradition is normally conceived of as including the Old and New Testaments, orally delivered Christian teaching, transmitted from generation to generation, liturgical worship with its customs and rites, the Creeds and rules of faith, the acts of the Ecumenical Councils, the writings of the church Fathers, the lives of saints, and finally the personal spiritual experience of each believer from the beginning of Christianity up to the present. In other words, it includes the entirety of the centuries-old experience of the Universal Church.²⁶

This study will in fact deal with the Eastern tradition: not because

¹⁷ Cf. Lampe, *PGL*, 893–4.

¹⁹ *Hymn* 43. 73; 50. 161; 50. 235.

²¹ *Hymn* 55. 6.

²³ *Serap.* 1. 28 [593 C–596 A].

²⁵ *Imag.* II. 12 [104]; III. 41 [141].

¹⁸ *Hymn* 32. 46.

²⁰ *Hymn* 30. 149–50.

²² *Hymn* 51. 58.

²⁴ *Imag.* I. 23 and II. 16 [111].

²⁶ Cf. Ware, *Church*, 196. On the meaning of 'tradition' see Flesseman-van-Leer, *Tradition*; Hanson, *Tradition*, 7–9, 237–60; Prestige, *Fathers*, 1–22; Kelly, *Doctrines*, 29–51; Florovsky, 'Palamas', 165–71; Meyendorff, *Tradition*, 13–26.

Eastern is equivalent to Orthodox,²⁷ but only because the Eastern tradition appears to have been more or less self-sufficient and independent of the West. The world of Eastern Christianity long before the formal division of the Universal Church into two parts around the eleventh century had its own theological terminology and its own way of thinking, which were largely unaffected by external influence. It was conditioned to a significant degree by the usage of Greek, the dominant language of the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. This is why mainly Byzantine Greek texts will be used, with only occasional references to Latin sources; some attention will be paid to Syriac sources, but normally to those which might have influenced, in their Greek versions, the development of Byzantine theological thought in general and Symeon in particular.

With regard to quotations, I shall sometimes use existing translations;²⁸ but in many cases, where existing ones are inadequate in some way, or where there is no translation, I shall use my own. In referring to ancient authors, I shall use the traditional nomenclature of the Eastern Church, such as Makarios of Egypt instead of Pseudo-Macarius (or Macarius/Symeon), and Dionysios the Areopagite instead of Pseudo-Dionysius, without special discussion of the question of authenticity of their writings. The titles of patristic writings will usually be given in English translation and in abbreviation.²⁹

²⁷ 'Orthodoxy claims to be universal', Bishop Kallistos Ware writes, 'not something exotic or Oriental, but simple Christianity': Ware, *Church*, 8. For Eastern and Western theological approaches see *ibid.* 44–52.

²⁸ The list of translations used in the present study is given in the Bibliography.

²⁹ For their full titles refer to the Bibliography.

PART I

*The Historical, Monastic, Scriptural, and
Liturgical Background of St. Symeon the
New Theologian*

Symeon's life covers the last quarter of the tenth century and the first quarter of the eleventh. This means that for most of his life the reigning emperor of Byzantium was Basil II (976–1025), the greatest of the emperors of the Macedonian dynasty. Under his reign, the Byzantine Empire experienced a period of renewed confidence and expansion, pushing its Eastern borders as far as Armenia, and also recovering the great city of Antioch, and in the West incorporating the Bulgarian Empire that had been independent of Byzantium for centuries. Political confidence was matched by religious developments—as witnessed by Mount Athos, where many monasteries enjoyed substantial imperial patronage, as well as by new monastic foundations in the capital.

The epoch in which Symeon lived was also marked by the struggle between the Macedonian dynasty and the emerging military and civilian aristocracy, a struggle in which Basil II still held the upper hand, but which the emperors were destined to lose. Was Symeon's life in any way affected by this struggle? We know that in his early years he served at the imperial court, where he was brought by his uncle; we know that Symeon's uncle 'was suddenly ushered out of life by an extraordinary death',¹ but we do not know exactly what happened: we cannot say whether he became a victim of a coup d'état or fell into disgrace and was executed. In any case, it is difficult to be precise about Symeon's relation to the events of his time, since there is an unresolved scholarly controversy about the precise dates of his birth and death.

Symeon's life overlaps with that of Michael Psellos, 'the first Byzantine humanist',² who, in the eleventh century, became a symbol of the cultural revival in Byzantium. This revival was characterized by a renewed interest in classical tradition, by collection and assimilation of the classical inheritance in both literature and art.³ One doubts, however, whether this had anything to do with what Symeon the New Theologian was preoccupied with for most of his life. His knowledge of classical literature and his involvement in the

¹ *Vie* 3. 16.

² Haussig, *Byzantine Civilization*, 323.

³ See Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change*, 141.

process of its assimilation seems to have been extremely limited. He was certainly not an integral part of the so-called 'Macedonian renaissance', as far as his cultural background is concerned.

What is much more important about Symeon is his monastic background, which was dominated by the practice and ideas of the famous Studite monastery, and his spiritual father Symeon the Studite (also called the Pious). No less important is Symeon's biblical, liturgical, and patristic background. It is to these matters that we now turn. In what follows Symeon the New Theologian will primarily be considered as a monastic writer and theologian rather than a hero of eleventh-century Byzantium.

Symeon the New Theologian in the Context of the Studite Monastic Tradition

1. The Studite Monastery and Its Educational Activity

The monastery of Stoudios⁴ played a decisive role in the life of Symeon the New Theologian. Here he met his spiritual father Symeon the Studite, whose influence on him was enormous. Here he began his own monastic path. From here, because of his disobedience towards the hegumen, or abbot, he was expelled eventually to become hegumen himself in another monastery of the same tradition and type. The Stoudion was Symeon the New Theologian's spiritual homeland, and we shall not come to understand his monastic achievements without first looking at what this monastery meant for him and for Byzantine monasticism in general.

The monastery was founded in the middle of the fifth century, but it is only during the iconoclastic epoch that it became one of the most significant centres of Byzantine monasticism. The monastery and its hegumen Theodore (799–826) played a decisive role in the struggle against iconoclasm and after the final victory over iconoclasm in 843 its authority was extraordinarily high.⁵

This monastery represented a new kind of urban monasticism in comparison with early Christian monasteries, whether cenobitic or eremitical. Monasticism appeared, in particular in fourth-century Egypt, as a flight from the world: thousands of monks joined the monasteries which were established far from populated areas, and only a few ascetics still lived in towns; but in later generations we find an increasing tendency towards a return to the 'world' and the establishment of monasteries inside cities. This was a kind of monastic mission within the world, but it gave the monasteries themselves

⁴ *ODB*yz 3, 1960. The name of the monastery ἡ μονή τῶν Στουδίου can literally be translated as 'the monastery of those [belonging] to Stoudios'; we use the shortened form 'the Stoudion'.

⁵ Cf. Beck, *Jahrtausend*, 210–11.

a different colour. They were no longer isolated communities: lay people attended monastic offices; monks had to carry out the spiritual direction of seculars, have intensive and constant contact with the life of the city, visit people and receive visitors. In the post-iconoclastic epoch the transformation of monasticism from an 'enthusiastic' movement into a special class within the Eastern Church was completed, and this class has occupied a leading position in the Church ever since.⁶

The unique history of the Studite monastery, its location in the Byzantine capital, its significance for the defence of the veneration of icons, its liturgical and hymnographical activity, its role in the spiritual direction of people, its influence on Byzantine politics, its richness and grandeur, and, of course, the great personalities of Theodore and other hegumens and elders: all these factors gave it the central position which the monastery occupied in Byzantine monasticism for several centuries.⁷ The influence of the Stoudion was very strong not only in the area of Constantinople, but also quite far beyond its boundaries, for example, on Mount Athos. So we are entitled to speak of the Studite tradition as a whole complex of features which were characteristic of Byzantine monasticism in the period in which we are interested.

One of the most important features of this tradition was the educational activity of the Studite monks. This is important for us because Symeon the New Theologian and his spiritual father Symeon the Studite (the Pious) were directly involved in it: both as spiritual directors and writers, the first also as a copyist and organizer of a library.

The spectrum of educational activity in the Studite monastery and other communities belonging to its circle was very wide. N. Wilson considers that the parallel between them and learned Benedictine monasteries of the Middle Ages is pertinent.⁸ The Studite monastery itself possessed a rich library.⁹ The tradition of copying books in the monastery derives from Plato, the uncle and predecessor of Theodore. The latter, in his funeral oration on Plato, spoke of the large number of books copied by Plato himself.¹⁰ In the time of

⁶ *Ibid.*, 255–8.

⁷ In fact, from the 9th to the 14th century, with a break in the 13th century, when Constantinople was occupied by the crusaders: see *ODByz* 3, 1960–1.

⁸ Wilson, 'Libraries', 62.

⁹ See EleOroulOs, *Βιβλιοθήκη*. On monastic libraries in Byzantium in general see Volk, *Klosterbibliotheken*.

¹⁰ *Laud. Plato* 16 [820 A].

Theodore there was already a scriptorium in the monastery, where a number of copyists produced books: the rules of Theodore provide penalties for copyists, in particular if they do not follow the original exactly or do not observe correct punctuation.¹¹ The art of calligraphy was developed in the Studite monastery,¹² and the origin of the minuscule script is connected with the monastery: as C. Mango indicates, 'it was introduced for the purpose of . . . cabinet study as opposed to reading out loud.'¹³

Encouraging copying and collecting books, Theodore did not forget to remind his monks of the necessity of reading them. One of the instructions of the Studite *Hypotyposis* contains the prescriptions concerning the borrowing of books from the library:

It should be known that on days when we perform no physical labour the librarian bangs a gong once, the brothers gather at the place where books are kept, and each takes one, reading it until late. Before the bell is rung for evening service the librarian bangs again, and all come to return their books according to the list.¹⁴

One might deduce from this rule that reading books was regarded as a kind of reward and was supposed to be done during leisure time, whereas on ordinary days manual work predominated (and so the parallel with the learned Benedictines does not in this respect fit very well).¹⁵ However, another interpretation of the rule is possible: perhaps the reading of books was permitted every day, at times when there was no manual labour, but compulsory only during leisure time; so the rule was given just to prevent monks from wasting time on feast days. Be that as it may, the rule indicates that monks could borrow at least one book each at the same time: if there were seven hundred or a thousand monks in the monastery,¹⁶ how many books must there have been in the library?

Generally speaking, when giving instructions concerning the

¹¹ See *Pen.* 53–60 [1740 C].

¹² Leroy, 'Vie', 41.

¹³ Mango, *Image*, p. vii, 45.

¹⁴ *Hyp.* 26 [PG 99, 1713 AB]; cf. Wilson, 'Libraries', 63.

¹⁵ J. Leroy sharply criticizes the view which presents the Studite monastery as a centre of intellectual culture, or even a kind of conservatoire or academy. In the monastery there was a small school [cf. *L. Nich. Stud.* 869 C], where the pupils learned the alphabet, reading, Holy Scripture, and sometimes calligraphy; however, this school never became a university: 'Vie', 40–3.

¹⁶ *L. Theod. Stud.* 31 [148 C] indicates that there were about one thousand monks, whereas Theophanis the Chronographer [*Chron.* 481] gives the number of seven hundred.

library and books, Theodore followed the tradition of early monasticism. According to the Pachomian rules, there should have been no one in the monastery who had not learned to read and who did not know by heart something of Scripture, at least (!) the New Testament and the Psalter.¹⁷ We have no evidence that learning Scripture by heart was compulsory in Studite monasticism, but, as we have seen, reading books was encouraged and even required. We think that there is a difference between the aim of reading in early monasticism and in the Studite tradition: early monks read books in a contemplative manner just to gain profit for their own souls, whereas the Studites were supposed to be able to bring profit to others, particularly to seculars who asked for spiritual direction. Simplifying, one can say that the Studites were not expected to be uneducated. Even when a certain hagiographical source mentions an 'unlettered' monk, it does not usually mean that he was not able to read: the author only wishes to emphasize that his hero did not obtain his wisdom from books, but directly from God.

2. Spiritual Direction in the Studite Tradition

Another aspect of the Studite tradition which should be discussed in connection with our main subject is the enormous activity of the Studites in the spiritual direction of both monks and laymen. Inside the monastery the hegumen himself was usually the spiritual father of all the monks. The Studite *Hypotyposis* prescribes daily 'revelation of thoughts', that is, confession before the hegumen. In Great Lent it took place during matins and was organized as follows: at the beginning of the fourth ode of the canon the hegumen went from his usual place in the church and sat down in a remote corner of the church, where the monks came to him one after another.¹⁸ The daily confession before the hegumen, it seems, was a necessary component of the monastic life; at least, it was prescribed by the rule.¹⁹ The confession

¹⁷ Hausherr, *Penthos*, 139–40.

¹⁸ *Hyp.* 22 [*PG* 99. 1712 B]; cf. Leroy, 'Vie', 33. It is not clear whether this prescription of the *Hypotyposis* relates to Great Lent only (it is placed under the rubric on Lent) or to the whole year. In general, Theodore the Studite attached much value to the hegumen as the head of a monastic community: in *Gr. Cat.* I. 45, which was delivered during his uncle Plato's life, he emphasizes that neither the latter, in spite of his age and previous leading position, nor another presbyter or the economos, should be regarded as equal to the hegumen.

¹⁹ Cf. Janin, 'Monachisme', 24–5.

before someone else instead of the hegumen was allowed only in exceptional circumstances; one particular case was when the hegumen resigned but remained in the community: he could pass to his successor the administration of the monastery but keep for himself the spiritual direction.²⁰

If the daily confession of monks existed in both early and later monasticism, the practice of the monastic direction of lay people is especially characteristic of the iconoclastic epoch, at least on a large scale. The beginning of the institution of the 'elders' whose main task was to confess lay people is connected with this practice. Of course, the elders who directed lay people existed before iconoclasm as well, but their social importance and influence had grown enormously during this particular period.

To understand the nature of this institution, which has existed in the Eastern Church up to the present time, one must take into consideration historical circumstances which caused its development in the iconoclastic period. As Bishop Kallistos Ware points out, within the life of the Church there are two forms of apostolic succession:

First there is the visible succession of the hierarchy, the unbroken series of bishops in different cities Alongside this, largely hidden, existing on a 'charismatic' rather than an official level, there is secondly the apostolic succession of the spiritual fathers and mothers in each generation of the Church.²¹

If these two types of succession usually coexist in peace and in most cases merge together, when the bishops and priests are spiritual directors of people, in the iconoclastic epoch there arose a polarization between them. The reason was the distinct fall in authority of the 'official' hierarchy in the eyes of the people because of the collaboration of its members with iconoclasts. When such a high number of representatives of the clergy became renegades, people turned to the monks, in whom they saw the defenders of Orthodoxy. Though Studite sources do not speak of the spiritual direction of laymen as a special monastic service and do not appear to have initiated a special post of the 'confessor of people', this service in fact existed since this time and many monks were involved in it.

It is known that in the epoch we are speaking of there were a number of monks who heard confessions without being priests. This is not something unique to the Studite tradition or the iconoclastic

²⁰ Hausherr, *Direction*, 110.

²¹ Ware, 'Father', 299.

period. The founders of Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism, who were spiritual fathers of their monks, such as Pachomios and Anthony, were never ordained; Varsanouphios and John of Gaza were not priests.²² But in early monasticism spiritual direction of non-ordained monks was mostly limited to monastic circles. What was new in the iconoclastic and post-iconoclastic periods, was that non-ordained monks became 'elders' of lay people. K. Holl provides many examples from lives of saints and ascetical sources which confirm this statement.²³ The view of monks as possessing the right of confession is fixed in some authoritative sources, such as 'Sermon on Penitence' by Patriarch John the Ascetic, who does not hesitate to say:

Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . sent prophets, Apostles, bishops, priests, deacons, and teachers for spiritual teaching, while monks for exhortation, [so that people may] confess before them with repentance.²⁴

In the twelfth century John of Antioch refers to this custom as existing from the iconoclastic period:

For four hundred years, since the time [of Constantine Copronymos] until now, the order of monks has been honoured and exalted by the faithful to such a degree that confession and avowal of sins, absolution and penances have been transferred to the monks.²⁵

Modern scholars, in order to explain such a steady practice in Byzantine monasticism, distinguish between spiritual direction and revelation of thoughts on the one hand, and sacramental confession on the other. I. Hausherr argues very strongly that they are completely separated, and that the rôle of non-ordained spiritual fathers

²² *Ibid.*, 308.

²³ See Holl, *Enthusiasmus*, 316–26. R. Barringer has shown that some pieces of early hagiography are misinterpreted by Holl and that there is no clear evidence concerning non-ordained monks who heard confessions of lay people in hagiographical sources before the end of the 7th century: see *Penance*, 122. However, in the period between the late 7th and mid-9th centuries the centre of gravity of ecclesiastical penance, as far as the confession of laymen is concerned, shifts very markedly away from the episcopal towards the monastic sphere of influence: *ibid.*, 154. As to the period between 886 and 983, some pieces of hagiography (e.g. 'Lives of Andrew the Fool', 'Paul the Younger', 'Luke the Younger') directly refer to non-ordained monks acting as 'spiritual fathers' and giving absolution (*συγχώρησις*, 'forgiveness'): *ibid.* 177 and 192.

²⁴ *Penit.* [1920 A].
²⁵ *Mon. Disc.* [1128 BC]. This text may be confirmed by another 12th-century piece of evidence: among the miniatures of the manuscript *Vatic. gr.* 1927 there is one, on fol. 51v., which presents the sacrament of confession performed by a monk, not a priest; see Martin, *Illustration*, 159.

was 'more psychological than theological or canonical'.²⁶ 'One would have to prove that they gave sacramental absolution', the scholar claims.²⁷ However, such a distinction does not correspond to any distinction the monastic sources themselves make. Moreover, the Eastern practice of confession did not have 'sacramental absolution' in the Western sense, that is, with the reading of a special formula in which the privilege of the priest to 'bind and loose' is emphasized.²⁸

There was, of course, strong opposition to this custom on the part of hierarchy and canonists,²⁹ and finally it almost disappeared in the Eastern Church, but in the time between Theodore the Studite and Symeon the New Theologian (ninth to eleventh centuries) it existed and was becoming more and more widespread. Having obtained a prominent place in spiritual direction of lay people, elders extended the service itself: they were not only a kind of adviser, as early spiritual directors may appear to be;³⁰ sometimes they would bring the entire life of their spiritual children under their control. The ideal of absolute obedience, peculiar to monasteries, was transferred to relations between the elder and the spiritual child. One may say that it was a revolution in the attitude to spiritual fatherhood in general, and in the practice of confession in particular.

3. Symeon the Studite: Personality

Symeon the New Theologian's spiritual father, Symeon the Studite, was one of the representatives of the institution of 'elders'. In the life of his great disciple he occupied an enormously important place. 'Symeon the New Theologian is probably unique in that the three principal external events of his life, his becoming a monk at the Stoudion, his transfer to another monastery and finally his exile were all due to his extraordinary devotion to his spiritual director, called Symeon the Pious,' H. Graef writes.³¹ The greatest interior event

²⁶ Hausherr, *Direction*, 100–2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 100. Cf. a similar distinction between the monastic 'forgiveness of sins' and the episcopal power of 'binding and loosing' in Barringer, *Penance*, 163.

²⁸ Such a formula crept into some Greek and Slavic *euchologia* only as a result of Western influence after the 17th century: cf. Meyendorff, *Byz. Theol.*, 196.

²⁹ See Holl, *Enthusiasmus*, 326–31.

³⁰ For spiritual direction in the pre-monastic age (the 1st to 3rd centuries) see Campenhausen, *Authority*.

³¹ Graef, 'Director', 608.

which changed the whole of Symeon's life, his first mystical illumination by the divine light, is also due to Symeon the Studite. Through the latter Symeon the New Theologian was introduced to monastic life in general and to the Studite tradition in particular. During Symeon the elder's lifetime Symeon the younger greatly admired him and after his death immediately began to venerate him as a saint.

All these facts impel us to pay particular attention to Symeon the Studite's personality and teaching. Why was he able to exert such a great influence on his disciple? What was the nature of their relationship: was it just a personal friendship, or can Symeon the Studite also be considered as a direct predecessor of Symeon the New Theologian in some aspects of the latter's ascetical and mystical approach? To answer these questions, one has to analyse all the existing evidence on Symeon the Studite's personality.³²

Unfortunately, we lack specific biographical details; some evidence concerning him in the writings of both Symeon the New Theologian and Nikitas Stithatos has survived, but, as we shall see, it is not clear enough to allow the exact reconstruction of his spiritual image.

To begin with, let us quote the passage from Symeon the New Theologian's sixteenth 'Catechetical Discourse', which is regarded as autobiographical;³³ this text provides valuable, though fragmentary, information on Symeon the Studite:

I was the novice of a venerable father, who was equal to the great and exalted saints . . . It happened that one day we were going into the city in which he lived, to visit his spiritual children. We spent the whole day among them, for there were many whom he helped even by his presence alone. At evening we came back to our cell, hungry and thirsty from much labour and the heat, because, even though the day was hot, he was not accustomed to take the slightest nap, in spite of his age, though he was about sixty years old.³⁴

Symeon entered the Stoudion when he was 27, and the Studite at that time was 60, so the latter was born some thirty-three years before Symeon, that is, according to I. Hausherr, in 917.³⁵ (Following P. Christou's chronology, one should presume in 924.)³⁶ We learn

³² In Chapter 4 we shall more specifically discuss Symeon the Studite's literary influence on Symeon the New Theologian.

³³ See Krivochéine, *SC* 104. 236–9 (n. 2).

³⁴ *Cat.* 16. 8–39.

³⁵ Hausherr, *Mystique*, p. xc.

³⁶ On different chronologies of Symeon the New Theologian see n. 87 below.

from the passage that the Studite, though not a priest, had many spiritual children and was regarded as an elder. The very fact that he was allowed to visit them, spending the whole day outside the monastery, shows that he was respected not only by his adherents but also by the monastery authorities.

Continuing his story, Symeon gives us a piece of information concerning the Studite's ascetical approach and methods of spiritual direction. Having returned to the cell after an exhausting day, the young Symeon did not want to eat, because he thought he would not be able to stand for prayer. But the elder told him to eat without any embarrassment:

So we ate and drank even more than necessary, for he also ate condescending to my weakness. Then when the meal was finished he told me: 'Know this, child, that it is neither fasting, nor vigil, nor bodily effort, nor any other laudable action that pleases God, but only the humble, simple and good soul and heart'.³⁷

The disciple marvelled at what he heard and, having bowed down, asked for the elder's prayers. Before he left, he was told by the elder merely to recite the *Trisagion* (Τρισάγιον)³⁸ and go to sleep. Then, when Symeon returned to his own place and started to recite the *Trisagion*, a mystical illumination took place, when he saw the divine light and his elder within it.³⁹

We learn from this story that the Studite was not a rigorist in ascetical matters: he would allow himself and his disciple to eat even 'more than necessary' and recite only a short *Trisagion* before sleep instead of the usual quite long 'rule of prayers'. These two pieces of evidence correspond to the 'Ascetical Discourse' written by the Studite, where he recommends to the disciple to eat everything which

³⁷ *Cat.* 16. 51–7.

³⁸ In Byzantine practice the term *Τρισάγιον* (thrice holy) signifies not only the hymn 'Holy God, Holy and Strong, Holy and Immortal, have mercy upon us', but also a short doxology, short prayer to the Holy Trinity, and 'Our Father', which follow the *Trisagion* at the beginning of each office. Cf. the usage of the term *Τρισάγιον* in the Studite *Hypotyposis* 2: '*Τρισάγιον* and "Lord, have mercy" 12 times' [PG 99. 1705 B]. The same usage in the *Typikon of Evergetis* 633–4: 'Sing *Τρισάγιον* and *troparia* "Have mercy on us, O God" '; Gautier, 'Typicon' 226–7 [27]; cf. also 100; 103; 226; and 975.

³⁹ *Cat.* 16. 57–77. The description of the illumination is very similar to that of *Cat.* 22. However, in *Cat.* 22 the hero who experienced the illumination was still a layman 20 years old, while the vision in *Cat.* 16 took place when the hero was 27 and a novice in the monastery. Nikitas Stithatos indicates that these were two separate experiences (*Vie*, chs. 5 and 19).

is offered and to drink wine;⁴⁰ and refers to the *Trisagion* before sleep when saying: 'It is better to recite with attention merely one *Trisagion* and go to sleep, than to spend four hours in vigil with useless chatting.'⁴¹ The ease with which the Studite sometimes allowed his disciple to relax ascetical discipline does not mean, of course, that he was not himself an ascetic and a man of prayer; it only means that he did not put 'bodily effort' in first place, but emphasized the need for humility and simplicity in order to achieve mystical experience.

Symeon speaks of the Studite's own deep mystical life, testifying that he had visions of divine light. In *Cat.* 16 Symeon mentions that he often heard from his spiritual father 'of divine illuminations sent from heaven to the ascetics, of floods of light, and conversations between God and man thereby'.⁴² In *Eth.* 5 Symeon describes his talk with the Studite after the first vision of light as a dialogue between one who has just received his first mystical experience and one who has possessed it for a long time:

If there exists someone who has explained this to him before, since he has already come to know God, he comes to that person and tells him: 'I have seen!'. [The elder] asks: 'What did you see, my child?'—'A light, my father, a sweet sweet light; and my mind does not know how to describe it to you . . . At once the space of my cell vanished and the world disappeared . . . I was left alone with this light . . . There was ineffable joy, which is still in me, and great love and desire, so that streams of tears flowed out of me, as you see now.' And he answers and tells him: 'It is He, my child.'⁴³

Such a mysticism was what attracted the young Symeon to the Studite; one may suppose that this, together with the gift of healing which he possessed,⁴⁴ was what gained him many other spiritual children.⁴⁵

I. Hausherr's suggestion that the appellation 'the Pious', *Εὐλαβής* (which he translates as 'Réserve') was given to the Studite in an ironical manner by his enemies, who allegedly 'accused him of a serious lack of modesty [réserve]',⁴⁶ lacks any serious basis. There is no evidence that the term was ever used sarcastically. More likely, it was respectfully given to the Studite by his spiritual children by analogy with the biblical Symeon (Luke 2: 25). Besides, Symeon the New

⁴⁰ *Asc.* 25. Cf. also in Nikitas' 'Life of Symeon': 'The elder, wishing to cut off his [Symeon's] own will . . . , ordered him to eat and sleep'; *Vie* 12. 10–12.

⁴¹ *Asc.* 9.

⁴³ *Eth.* 5. 294–310.

⁴⁵ Turner, *Fatherhood*, 62.

⁴² *Cat.* 16. 9–12.

⁴⁴ *Vie* 72. 12.

⁴⁶ Hausherr, *Mystique*, p. lxxix.

Theologian would probably not have used the term when speaking of his spiritual father, if it was really a sarcastic nickname.

The Studite seems not to have been highly educated: Symeon speaks of his spiritual father as 'one who has not received grammar lessons' (*μαθησέως γραμμάτων ὑπάρχων ἀμύητος*),⁴⁷ and Nikitas calls him 'unlettered' (*ἀγράμματος*).⁴⁸ However, such expressions are nothing but clichés characteristic of the lives of saints. As H. Turner remarks, the very fact that the Studite handed the book by Mark the Ascetic to Symeon shows that he had read it and that it was his own and not the monastery's property.⁴⁹ Moreover, the Studite was an author of at least one written work, which shows that he was able to express himself adequately in writing.

Several modern authors who have written on the Studite have analysed evidence in both Symeon and Nikitas which seems to indicate that the Studite was a kind of a 'holy fool', that is, using L. Rydén's definition, 'a person who serves God under the guise of foolishness'.⁵⁰ This type of sanctity, based on the literal interpretation of Paul's 'we are fools for Christ's sake' (1 Cor. 4: 10), and 'the foolishness of God is wiser than men' (1 Cor. 1: 25), has been known in the Orthodox East since the fifth century,⁵¹ and occurs in Byzantine and Russian spirituality over many centuries (if not up to the present), though quite rarely. Scholars are divided in their opinions concerning the question of whether Symeon the Studite was a holy fool. K. Holl expresses his surprise at the Studite's strange behaviour as described by Symeon.⁵² Both I. Hausherr and B. Krivochéine take a moderate position on the question, while admitting that there is something ambiguous in the existing evidence on the Studite.⁵³ I. Rosenthal-Kamarinea is convinced that the Studite was a holy fool in the full sense of the term,⁵⁴ and L. Rydén calls him 'a part-time holy fool'.⁵⁵

Let us, in turn, examine the evidence in order to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. There is a passage in Nikitas which indicates the charges made against Symeon by Stephen of Nikomidia: the latter

⁴⁷ *Cat.* 6. 195.

⁴⁸ *Vie* 72. 13.

⁴⁹ Turner, *Fatherhood*, 62.

⁵⁰ Rydén, 'The Holy Fool', 106.

⁵¹ Palladios speaks (in the year 420) of the Egyptian nun Isidora, who pretended to be a fool: *Laus. Hist.* 34 [98–100].

⁵² Holl, *Enthusiasmus*, 18.

⁵³ See Hausherr, *Mystique*, p. Ixxix; Krivochéine, *Light*, 359.

⁵⁴ Rosenthal-Kamarinea, 'Studites', 515–19.

⁵⁵ Rydén, 'The Holy Fool', 111.

was convinced that the Studite was a 'sinner' (ἀμαρτωλός), whereas Symeon venerated him as a saint.⁵⁶ To explain the reason for Stephen's accusation, Nikitas writes:

[Symeon the Studite], after mortifying his flesh through excessive dispassion and subduing the instincts of his earthly life into perfect silence to such a degree that the body of anyone who came near him did not evoke any more feeling from him than one corpse does from another, feigned passionateness (ἐμπάθειαν), first to conceal the treasure of his dispassion, then because he wanted through this bait to rescue certain souls from the abyss of perdition . . . The synkellos seized upon this admirable fishing method and used it as a specious pretext for his accusation.⁵⁷

Evasive and equivocal expressions by Nikitas do not allow us to understand in what concrete actions the Studite's 'passionateness' was displayed. We must not forget that Nikitas did not know the Studite personally and everything he tells us about him, he could take only from Symeon's writings or conversations. As for Symeon, for him the Studite was dispassion personified.⁵⁸ When describing the Studite's dispassion, Symeon indicates that there were some aspects of the Studite's behaviour which 'by the standards of contemporary monasticism would have appeared bizarre'.⁵⁹ The following passage from 'Hymn 15' is quite eloquent:

Symeon the Saint, the Pious, the Studite,
Did not blush before the members of anyone,
Neither to see others naked, nor to be seen naked . . .
He remained motionless, unhurt and impassive.⁶⁰

Wondering in what circumstances the Studite could see naked people and could appear naked, scholars found 'parallels' in the 'Lives' of Symeon of Emesa and Andrew, both holy fools. The first on one occasion stripped naked and came to the women's section of the public baths; naturally, he was expelled by the furious women. Having been asked afterwards how he felt when entering the women's bath, Symeon answered: 'Believe me, child, I was then like a piece of wood among other pieces of wood. For I did not feel that I had a body and that I was among bodies.'⁶¹ The second, Andrew,

⁵⁶ *Vie* 81. 13ff.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 2–13.

⁵⁸ See Krivochéine, *Light*, 358–60.

⁵⁹ Turner, *Fatherhood*, 63.

⁶⁰ *Hymn* 15. 206–12. Cf. the discussion of the traditional fear of nakedness in monasticism in Chapter 10 (Section on dispassion).

⁶¹ *L. Sym. Emes.*, 82–3 [148–9].

also used to walk naked⁶² and also felt as if he were 'dead or a piece of wood without feelings' while in the company of some prostitutes.⁶³

The question is, how far these episodes correspond to what we know about Symeon the Studite? Apart from the similarity in using some standard comparisons, such as that of the body with a piece of wood, there is nothing else which would directly correspond; there is no trace of evidence that the Studite walked naked in the street or went to a women's bath. Moreover, neither Symeon nor Nikitas call him *σαλός* (fool). Comparing the Studite's life with that of famous holy fools, we see significant differences: he was a monk of a monastery, while they often lived in cities among lay people; he was respected in the monastery and city as an elder, while they were despised by both monks and laymen.

There is, one suspects, a quite trivial explanation for the passage from Symeon's 'Hymn 15': the Studite simply went to the bath, either in the monastery or in the city, and indeed not the women's but the men's bath. At least, it is the only normal situation when a monk can see naked people and himself be seen naked. Most probably, he would go to the bath in his own monastery. As C. Mango states, in Byzantium 'members of clergy attended the baths as regularly as any other segment of urban society'.⁶⁴ The majority of monks also must have attended the baths, but not as often as lay people and secular clergy: 'monastic typika of the eleventh and twelfth centuries', the scholars argue, 'varied between washing twice a month to three times a year, but the most usual frequency was once a month'.⁶⁵ We know from Theodore the Studite himself that, even in his time, in the Stoudion there was 'a bathhouse with baths and other facilities'.⁶⁶ Symeon the New Theologian mentions baths (*λουτρά*) among the immovable property of the monasteries of his time.⁶⁷

At the same time there was always some opposition to attending

⁶² *L. Andrew* [696 BC].

⁶³ *Ibid.* [652 C–653 A].

⁶⁴ Mango, *Image*, p. iv, 338–9.

⁶⁵ Kazhdan and Constable, *People*, 69. On the various monastic rules concerning bathing see Berger, *Bad*, 60ff.

⁶⁶ See *Gr. Cat.* 1. 36. There is no complete edition of Books 1 and 3 of the *Great Catechesis*; there are only some parts of them published by J. Cozza-Luzi in *Nova Patrum Bibliotheca* 10 (Rome, 1905). We cite from the Russian translation of these books (for the full title see Bibliography under Theodore the Studite), which was prepared on the basis of the eleventh-century manuscript *Patm.* 111, and which contains the most complete text so far published.

⁶⁷ *Cat.* 5. 732–4.

the baths in monastic circles.⁶⁸ We may remember two stories from the 'Spiritual Meadow': in one of them monks asked the hegumen to build the bath in the monastery near the spring, and, though he was against it, he agreed, 'condescending to the weakness of the brothers'. As soon as the building was finished, the water in the spring dried up, and it came again only after the hegumen ordered the bath to be destroyed.⁶⁹ In another story the old monk Alexander complained that 'our fathers never washed their faces, and we open public baths [τὰ λουτρά τὰ δημόσια ἀνοίγομεν]'.⁷⁰ Therefore, attending the baths was considered a weakness, whereas not attending was regarded as an ascetical virtue.⁷¹ For the rigorist party of monks the very fact that the Studite went to the bath could be enough to declare that he was as weak as the others, and so not a saint at all. As is discussed below, the Studite was not a rigorist in ascetical matters, whereas the 'standard saint' of Byzantine ascetical and hagiographic literature would not usually eat or sleep or wash himself: everything like that was regarded as 'condescension to the body' and therefore incompatible with the ideal of sanctity.

One therefore arrives at the conclusion that there is nothing directly testifying that the Studite was a holy fool, even 'part-time', or that he 'cultivated nudism'.⁷² Neither is there anything specific to confirm H. Graef's supposition that 'there had been at least some incident in his life which was not in keeping with sanctity, and which both his disciple and Nikitas did their best to cover up, while not being able to leave it out altogether'.⁷³

One may suggest, however, that even if Symeon the Studite was not a holy fool himself, he might have at least imitated holy fools in certain respects. Nikitas, when speaking of some strange traits of the Studite's behaviour, explains them by his humble desire to conceal

⁶⁸ Cf. the recommendation to monks not to attend baths in Diadochos, *Chapt.* 52 [114].

⁶⁹ John Moschos, *Meadow* 80 [2937 A–1940 A].

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 168 [3036 A]. This last remark might reflect the practice of certain Byzantine monasteries to provide bathing facilities for lay people: on this practice see Magdalino, 'Bath', 173ff.

⁷¹ On ἀλουσία (uncleanliness) as a traditional monastic virtue see Hunger, 'Badwesen'. As early as in the 4th century, Athanasios testifies about Anthony the Great that he 'did not wash his body with water': *L. Anth.* 47. 2 [262]. Gregory Nazianzen praises his friend Basil the Great for ἀλουσία: see *Disc.* 43. 61 [258]. Gregory himself, however, partook of the 'consolation of the bath': *Ep.* 126 [93]. Cf. Magdalino, 'Bath', 116.

⁷² The expression of J. Gouillard, 'Procès', 11.

⁷³ Graef, 'Director', 609.

his dispassion.⁷⁴ The idea that ‘the dispassionate should conceal his dispassion by pretending to be subject to some passion,’ derives from John Klimakos.⁷⁵ The latter also cites some cases from the lives of holy fools as examples of their humility and dispassion.⁷⁶ Developing the idea of Klimakos, Symeon in *Cat.* 8 says that the one who ‘pretending to be evil seems to utter wicked words . . . to turn those who do evil to repentance and salvation’ is an imitator of Christ and a saviour of people.⁷⁷ Very possibly, the Studite is implied here. However, any direct parallel between the Studite and holy fools is still lacking.

Nikitas tells us that the Studite spent forty-five years in monastic life and possessed gifts of healing and miraculous powers.⁷⁸ The exact year of his death is not known: I. Hausherr puts it at approximately 986 or 987.⁷⁹ The only information with which Nikitas provides us is that between the death of the Studite and Symeon’s conflict with Stephen sixteen years passed.⁸⁰ It is, therefore, clear that the Studite had died by the end of the tenth century.

4. The Life of Symeon the New Theologian

Let us now turn to our main subject and examine the existing evidence concerning the life of Symeon the Studite’s great disciple, Symeon the New Theologian.

The basic source of biographical information on Symeon the New Theologian is his ‘Life,’ written by his disciple Nikitas Stithatos thirty years after Symeon’s death.⁸¹ Nikitas observes the basic rules of the classical Byzantine life of a saint, developing standard themes: his hero is born into a noble family; from early childhood he is virtuous and serious, avoiding childish play; he goes to school but rejects ‘pagan wisdom’; he refuses his family inheritance when entering the monastery; he struggles against demonic temptations and always gains victory; he performs miracles and healings. Such

⁷⁴ *Vie* 81. 6–7.

⁷⁶ *Ladder* 25 [997 BC].

⁷⁸ *Vie* 72. 10–12.

⁸⁰ Cf. *Vie* 73. 11–12.

⁷⁵ *Ladder* 26 [1064 BC].

⁷⁷ *Cat.* 8. 16–22.

⁷⁹ Hausherr, *Mystique*, p. xc.

⁸¹ Hausherr, *Mystique*, 1–128 (= *Vie*). For the scholarly exposition of Symeon’s life see Krivochéine, *SC* 96, 15–54; idem., *Light*, 15–63; Turner, *Fatherhood*, 16–36; Moda, ‘Christ’, 105–20; McGuckin, ‘Symeon’ (the latter is largely devoted to repudiation of Nikitas Stithatos).

themes we find already in the 'Life of Anthony' (fourth century), which became a prototype of all subsequent lives of saints.⁸²

Another, still more important, source of Symeon's biography are his own writings: unlike the works of most of the church Fathers of both preceding and subsequent periods, all his works are of a distinctly autobiographical character. There is a difference between the portrait of Symeon drawn by Nikitas and the picture we can obtain from Symeon's own writings. Nikitas' work is an icon of Symeon's life rather than his biography: it is stylized and conventional.⁸³ When reading Symeon himself, one is always astonished by the complete absence of any posing or stylization, which is so characteristic of many Byzantine writers of his epoch, and by Symeon's openness, unusual for the Eastern tradition: he sets forth his inner mystical journey with clarity and plenitude. However, Symeon says very little about the external events of his life: in this respect we mostly have to rely on the information provided by Nikitas.⁸⁴

According to I. Hausherr's generally accepted chronology, Symeon was born in ad 949 and died in 1022.⁸⁵ Before Hausherr, K. Holl claimed that Symeon was born in between 963 and 969 and died in 1041 or 1042.⁸⁶ Questioning both chronologies, the Greek patrologist P. Christou advanced yet another one, insisting that the date of Symeon's birth is 956 and that of his death is 1036.⁸⁷ In the follow-

⁸² Its critical text has been published in *SC* 400. One may also compare the 'Life of Symeon' written by Nikitas with the 'Life of Theodore the Studite' attributed to the monk Michael: see *PG* 99. 113–232 (one version), and *PG* 99. 233–328 (another version).

⁸³ Cf. Krivochéine, *SC* 96. 16.

⁸⁴ The fact that Nikitas wrote with the intention to rehabilitate Symeon is not a sufficient basis for questioning the reliability of the 'Life' altogether, as some modern scholars do. Even though Nikitas sometimes contradicts himself when speaking of Symeon, his work is the only testimony of someone who knew Symeon personally (though in the latter's old age). It is clear that where Nikitas differs from Symeon, one should always prefer Symeon. But where modern scholars advance hypotheses which contradict Nikitas, we are often inclined to give preference to Nikitas.

⁸⁵ Hausherr, *Mystique*, pp. lxxxix ff.

⁸⁶ *Enthusiasmus*, 23–6.

⁸⁷ *Νικίτα*, 9–11; 'Εἰσαγωγή', 12–24. Hausherr's chronology has also been questioned by other scholars: see, e.g., Stathopoulos, *Gottesliebe*, 9ff.; Kazhdan, 'Zamechaniya', 4–10. The main arguments against Hausherr's chronology are the following: 1. It contradicts the data of Nikitas' 'Life of Symeon': Nikitas indicates that Symeon was a priest for 48 years, whereas, according to Hausherr, he was a priest for only 42 years, from 980 to 1022. 2. Nikitas indicates that when Symeon the New Theologian established the cult of Symeon the Studite after the latter's death, it was Patriarch Sergios who gave his approval to this cult; after this Symeon celebrated the feast of his spiritual father for 16 years without obstruction until the conflict with Stephen of Niko-

ing account of Symeon's life Hausherr's dates with Christou's dates in brackets will normally be given.

The place of Symeon's birth was the village of Galati in Paphlagonia. Symeon's parents Basil and Theophano were rich and influential, although provincial, aristocrats. From the age of eleven Symeon lived in Constantinople with his uncle who occupied an important position at the imperial court. Symeon studied at a 'grammar' (secondary) school and demonstrated outstanding ability, but did not continue his studies at a 'philosophical' (higher) school.⁸⁸

According to Nikitas, the young Symeon refused the honour of being introduced to the imperial brothers Basil and Constantine Porphyrogenitoi, preferring to remain on the sidelines.⁸⁹ What was the reason for this and what eventually led Symeon to the position of a *σπαθαροκουβικουλάριος* (chamberlain of the bodyguard) and a *midia* arose (*Vie* 72. 22–73. 15). Sergios occupied the see of Constantinople in 1001–19. Even if he gave his approval to the cult of Symeon the Studite in 1001, the conflict and exile of Symeon the New Theologian must have taken place no earlier than 1016, whereas Hausherr dates the conflict to 1003–5 and the exile to 1009. 3. Hausherr's calculations are based on the presumption that Nicholas II Chrysovergis, who ordained Symeon, ascended the throne of Constantinople in 979, whereas some authoritative Byzantine sources place his enthronement in 984: see Grégoire and Orgels, 'Chronologie'; cf. Ostrogorsky, *History*, 585. If the latter date is correct and Symeon died in 1022, his priesthood would have lasted neither 48, nor 42 years. The chronology advanced by P. Christou corresponds more closely to the data of Nikitas' 'Life of Symeon', and so must not be ignored. See, however, objections by V. Grumel in 'Chrysoberges', 253 ff.

⁸⁸ *Vie* 2. 23–6. Note the difference between Symeon and Theodore the Studite, who, according to his 'Life', 'passed through all philosophy, with both ethics and dogmatics, and also dialectics and logic' [117 C–120 B]. The basic principles of the Byzantine educational system were inherited from the ancient Graeco-Roman tradition, and the division of the Byzantine curriculum into two stages corresponded to a similar division in late antiquity where normal education consisted of the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music, mathematics). Some Byzantine sources refer to three stages: so-called *προπαιδεία* (preliminary education), *παιδεία ὀφ ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία* ('common education') and *τελεώτερα μαθήματα* ('more perfect skills', higher education). The basic models for the mastery of grammar were still the works of Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, and other ancient Greek writers, so in fact Byzantine schoolboys studied a language which nobody had spoken for many generations: see Lemerle, *Humanisme*, 99–103, 302–3; Buckler, 'Education', 200–20; Mango, *Byzantium*, 125 ff.; Wilson, *Scholars*, 18 ff.; *Kultura Vyzantii*, 366–400. Nikitas actually says that Symeon fully mastered basic grammar and then studied *tachygraphy* and acquired beautiful handwriting, but he refused to receive 'external education' with rhetorical skills. We should notice, however, that even secondary education in Byzantium was not on the whole available to everybody: as Lemerle indicates, nine-tenths of the population were unlettered: *Élèves*, 3 (cf. however, a more positive estimation of the level of literacy in Byzantium which is given by Browning, *Literacy*, p. vii, 46–52). The majority of those who received education belonged either to the aristocracy or to the clergy.

⁸⁹ *Vie* 3. 1–9.

member of the *σύγκλητος* (state senate) which he was to assume,⁹⁰ we do not know. Nikitas only mentions an ‘extraordinary’ death of Symeon’s uncle which made Symeon think of withdrawal from the world.⁹¹ The actual withdrawal, however, did not take place until several years later.

For all his outward prosperity, Symeon, as he makes it clear in one of his hymns, very early experienced great inner suffering on account of the absence of people close to him and his inability to be satisfied with earthly wealth:

My parents did not harbour natural love for me,
 My brothers and all my friends laughed at me . . .
 Relatives, acquaintances from outside and powerful people in the world
 Turned away from me and could not bear to see me,
 And even more strove to ruin me through their dishonour.
 Often I desired glory without sin,
 But did not find it in this present life . . .
 How many times I wanted people to love me,
 Desired to have closeness and openness with them,
 But nobody among upright people could bear me;
 Others more wanted to see me and to be more closely acquainted with me
 But I ran away from them . . .
 Good people avoided me on account of my external appearance,
 While evil people I myself avoided from my own volition.⁹²

⁹⁰ *Vie* 3. 9–11. The rank of spatharocubicularius was in earlier centuries restricted to eunuchs: see Bury, *System*, 122; Yannopoulos, *Société*, 36; Oikonomides, *Listes*, 301–2. In Symeon’s time, however, it no longer required a eunuch status; see McGuckin, ‘Symeon’, 19. Some scholars suggest that Symeon could have been castrated in childhood: see Turner, *Fatherhood*, 19; Morris, ‘Saint’, 44. This supposition, however, lacks sufficient grounds, since neither in the ‘Life’ nor in Symeon’s own writings is there a clear indication that he was a eunuch. Nikitas, who mentioned that Symeon’s disciple Arsenios was a eunuch (*Vie* 45. 4–5: τῷ σώματι εὐνοῦχος), would have said the same about Symeon if he also were one: for the Byzantine mentality there was nothing negative about this (the comparison with a eunuch in *Vie* 147. 6 refers to Symeon’s posthumous ‘angelic’ state). Indirect proofs that Symeon was not a eunuch, for example, his allusion to nocturnal pollution in *Euch.* 1. 141–6, should also be taken into account.

⁹¹ *Vie* 3. 16.
⁹² *Hymn* 20. 98–119. With regard to the young Symeon’s ‘external appearance’, it was probably quite pleasant. Nikitas says that Symeon ‘differed from the others by his good looks and handsome appearance’ (*Vie* 3. 1–2). Symeon in *Cat.* 22, which is regarded as autobiographical, speaks about the young George, of whom Symeon himself was a prototype, that ‘he was handsome in appearance, elegant in body, manners, and gait, so much so that some for that reason had evil suspicions about him—that is, such people as looked only at the outward covering’ (*Cat.* 22. 24–7). Perhaps, some ‘good’ people avoided Symeon because, with his aristocratic manners and rich relatives close to the emperor, he looked like a young careerist, while ‘evil’ people were interested in him only because of his closeness to the higher circles.

This early dissatisfaction with life compelled Symeon to read spiritual literature and to seek out a man who could be his guide. This desire of Symeon's also did not meet with the approval of those around him, who all concurred in asserting that 'there is now no such saint on earth'.⁹³ However, Symeon continued his search for a spiritual father and eventually this search was crowned with success. Let us note in passing that the polemic with those who said that in his time it was impossible to attain sanctity (such people Symeon labelled 'new heretics')⁹⁴ became one of the basic themes of his later works.

The meeting with Symeon the Studite, who became the spiritual father of the young Symeon, turned out to be decisive in his life: in this person Symeon the younger found the one whom he had long been seeking. The young Symeon so loved his teacher that he venerated him as a saint, regarding himself as unworthy to touch his garment or to kiss the place in which he stood during prayer.⁹⁵

Once the elder gave him a book by Mark the Monk (fifth century?) to read, where he was particularly struck by three sayings, in which he found the recommendations to follow the voice of his conscience,⁹⁶ to fulfil God's commandments in order to attain the 'energies of the Holy Spirit',⁹⁷ and to seek the inner spiritual *gnosis* which comes through prayer.⁹⁸ The young Symeon took Mark's words as a call to action. In all things he began to obey the voice of his conscience, began to try to fulfil all Christ's commandments and pray diligently, each day adding to his evening prayer rule. His prayers became long, concentrated, and intense, and were often accompanied by tears. It was at this time, as Symeon stood praying one night, that he was visited by his first mystical illumination, which he describes in his twenty-second 'Catechetical Discourse', speaking of a certain George but implying himself:⁹⁹

One day, as he was standing and reciting 'God, have mercy upon me, a sinner', uttering it with his mind rather than his mouth, suddenly an abundance of divine radiance appeared from above and filled all the place. As this happened, the youth lost all awareness and forgot that he was in a house and under the roof. He saw only light all around him . . . He was wholly united

⁹³ *Euch.* 1. 78–80.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Hymn* 21. 302–4; *Cat.* 29. 137–50.

⁹⁵ *Vie* 12. 20–6.

⁹⁶ *Law* 69 [913 C].

⁹⁷ *Deeds* 57 [940 A].

⁹⁸ *Law* 11 [908 A].

⁹⁹ The same episode is told by Symeon in *Euch.* 1. 87–110 (this time in the first person) and by Nikitas in *Vie* 5. 1–31: this suggests that the story in Symeon's *Cat.* 22 is autobiographical.

to the immaterial light and thought that he himself became light; having forgotten all the world, he became filled with tears and with ineffable joy and gladness.¹⁰⁰

Then, Symeon continues, George's mind ascended into heaven and saw an even brighter light in which his spiritual father appeared to him . . . When the vision passed, the youth came to himself and soon the cock crowed: the night had passed by unnoticed.¹⁰¹

Despite this clear divine visitation, Symeon remained in the world for quite a long time: the period between the first vision of the light and entering the monastery he considered to be the years of his spiritual fall.¹⁰² He led a dissipated secular life, but did not break off contact with his spiritual father, to whom he was indebted for his final exodus from the world.

What was the main reason for Symeon's withdrawal from the imperial court and his entry, at the age of 27,¹⁰³ into the Studite monastery? An attempt to answer this question has been made by J. McGuckin, who connects the events of Symeon's youth with those that took place at the Byzantine imperial court of 960–90. McGuckin, in particular, advances the hypothesis that in 976, when the Paracemomenus Basil seized power on behalf of Basil II Porphyrogenitis, 'Symeon knew that his political career was over, and even perhaps that his life was in danger'; therefore, he sought 'political refuge' in the Stoudion.¹⁰⁴

Turning from the realm of hypotheses to the area of literary evidence, let us see what Symeon himself says of his exodus. He describes it in bright colours, regarding his elder as one who, like Moses, has taken him out of Egyptian captivity:

He said: 'Come here, my child, I will lead you to God.'

And I said to him from my great unbelief:

'And what sign will you show me to assure me . . . ?'

¹⁰⁰ *Cat.* 22. 88–100.

¹⁰¹ *Cat.* 22. 101–13.

¹⁰² *Euch.* 2. 41–6. The striking words in *Hymn* 24. 63–83, where Symeon enumerates his sins, most probably refer to this period of his life.

¹⁰³ Krivochéine, *SC* 96. 23.

¹⁰⁴ McGuckin, 'Symeon', 23. Without entering into a detailed discussion of McGuckin's argument, one may say that the main weakness of his speculations about Symeon's biography lies in the fact that he entirely depends on I. Hausherr's chronology, regarding it as unquestionable. As has been said (see n. 87 above), there is a great deal of uncertainty about the dates of Symeon's life, and several chronologies have been advanced by scholars; any attempt to reconstruct Symeon's historical background on the basis of one particular chronology risks falling apart once this chronology is proved mistaken.

'Light a large fire', he said, 'so that I may penetrate to the centre,
 And if I do not remain unburned, do not follow me.'
 This word struck me, and I did what he had commanded.
 And the flame blazed up, and he stood in the middle,
 Intact, uninjured, and he called me to him.
 'I am afraid, master', I said, 'for I am a sinner!'
 He stepped out, came to me and embraced me:
 'Why were you afraid, tell me, why do you fear and tremble?
 This marvel is great and awesome, but you will see greater ones yet!'
 Struck [ἐξέστην], I told him: 'Master, I do not dare to approach you . . .
 For I see that you are a man who transcends human being,
 I do not dare even look at you, whom the fire venerated!'
 He made me come close, he clasped me in his arms
 And kissed me again with a holy kiss
 And he himself entirely gave out a fragrance of immortality.'¹⁰⁵

What is this: allegory or an account of a real event? We can indeed encounter a number of similar stories in the lives of saints.¹⁰⁶ Whatever it may be, Symeon the younger immediately followed his master:

'Come, let us take to our heels,' Moses said . . .
 'Let's go, master,' I said, 'I will never separate from you . . .'¹⁰⁷

Symeon began his monastic life with great zeal; yet it was not his lot to remain in this monastery long: the hegumen and brotherhood were disturbed by his excessive love for the elder Symeon the Pious. Symeon the younger's attitude to Symeon the elder was based upon complete obedience: he was a servant of his teacher and would not

¹⁰⁵ *Hymn* 18. 137–58.

¹⁰⁶ There is a story in the *Apophthegmata*, how someone came to visit Abba Arsenios, and, having looked through the window, saw him standing in prayer and embraced with flame: see Arsenios 27 [96 BC]. In a similar story Joseph of Panepho 'stood and opened his hands to the heaven; and his fingers became as ten torches of fire, and he said: "If you wish, you can become entirely as fire"': Joseph of Panepho 7 [220 D]. Cf. also Pamvo 1 [368 C] and 12 [372 A]; Sisois 14 [396 BC]; Silouanos 12 [412 C]; Theodore of Pherme 25 [193 AB]. Another much later example is the conversation between Seraphim of Sarov (died 1833) and N. Motovilov, when the face of a Russian saint became 'like the sun' and he gave out light and fragrance: see *Beseda Seraphima*, 17–22 (see the quotation in the General Conclusion at the end of the present study). Francis of Assisi, who was seen 'surrounded by marvellous light' during prayer, would be a parallel from Western spirituality: see *Flowers* 17. Something similar might have happened with Symeon the Studite in presence of his disciple. There is, however, one special detail in the case of Symeon the Studite: a fire was lit, while in other cases it simply appeared.

¹⁰⁷ *Hymn* 18. 221–3.

dare to take a step backwards without the latter's direction.¹⁰⁸ The hegumen suggested several times that the young novice renounce the elder's guidance, but he did not consent, resulting in his expulsion from the monastery.

Nothing specific is known concerning the reason of Symeon's exile from the Studite monastery. Nikitas insists that the jealousy of monks was the only reason,¹⁰⁹ but there may have been something in the spirituality of Symeon the Studite which caused discontent in the hegumen. Besides, the hegumen himself, according to the Studite tradition, was usually (though not necessarily) the spiritual director of the monks. As was indicated above, the rôle of hegumen in the Studite tradition was very important indeed. It might be added here that the situation which arose involving the two Symeons was not uncommon in the history of spiritual direction in the East. The activity of elders often evoked hostility from the hegumens and other representatives of the hierarchy. It was connected with the fact that the elders usually lived in monastic communities but had their own spiritual children, and relations between them were closer than relations between other monks. Therefore sometimes elders created a 'community inside the community', and it did indeed cause the jealousy of others.¹¹⁰

Symeon then joined the monastery of St. Mamas the Martyr in Constantinople,¹¹¹ where he was tonsured as a monk. Nikitas describes as follows Symeon's daily schedule in St. Mamas:

He practised only prayer and stillness, devoted himself to the study of divine Scripture and in a most perfect way became united to God in the contemplation of light . . . Every day he purified himself with the life-giving bread and precious blood of Christ, and ate only vegetables and seeds . . . He did not take anything else on any day except Sundays. On feast days he took part in the common meal with the brotherhood, [sitting] with his head hung down and in a state of constant contrition. Then he stood up with thanksgiving and escaped to his cell, locked the door and remained in prayer. Then, having spent some time reading, he would rest a little, bowed to the earth, for he had no bed or blanket or anything else necessary for the body . . . After

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Vie* 12. 1–26. Servants were regarded as a common feature in Byzantine monasteries of that period; they attended their masters, served them meals and performed other necessary work: see Krausmüller, 'Stoudios', 74. Cf. the mention of a servant in Symeon, *Cat.* 4. 290–9.

¹⁰⁹ *Vie* 16. 3–5, 17–20; 21. 1; 22. 1.

¹¹⁰ See Kontsevich, *Optina*, 9–10.

¹¹¹ Concerning this monastery see Janin, *Géographie*, 325–31.

the reading he would do manual work, copying the text of divine Scriptures: he was a brilliant copyist, and everyone who saw his handwriting became filled with joy. When the bell rang [του ξύλου δὲ κρούουτος],¹¹² he would immediately rise to divine psalmody, and while the divine Oblation [ἀναφορά] was being accomplished . . . he would pray with tears and converse with God until the priest elevated the bread. After this, filled with the divine fire, he would receive the most pure Mysteries and immediately without a word return to his cell.¹¹³

We should note that daily Communion, accompanied by tears, was a characteristic feature of Symeon's spirituality. In this he was faithful to the ancient monastic practice,¹¹⁴ as well as to the advice of his spiritual father Symeon the Pious, who used to say: 'Brother, never take Communion without tears.'¹¹⁵ Later, as hegumen, Symeon the younger strove to revive the tradition of daily Communion, as well as insisting upon the need for tears during Communion. However, the majority of monks were unable to imitate him in this: as he writes in *Cat.* 4, when he once quoted the words of Symeon the Studite on Communion with tears to some laymen and monks, his listeners greeted these words with naked hostility and irony.¹¹⁶ As regards Symeon himself, he maintained his custom of daily Communion throughout the rest of his life.

During the first years after he became a monk, Symeon saw the divine light many times: he mentions one such vision in the same discourse which tells of the youth George, yet remarks that this second vision was weaker than the first: it was merely 'a dim ray of the most sweet and divine light'.¹¹⁷ Another vision is described in *Cat.* 16: it was again bright and caused within the ascetic a state of profound ecstasy.¹¹⁸

After living two years in the monastery of St. Mamas, Symeon was entrusted with instructing the brethren in church. In 980 (988), when the hegumen of the monastery died, the monks elected Symeon in his place. At about the age of 31 he was ordained priest and elevated to

¹¹² Literally, 'when they struck the wood'. In Eastern Orthodox monasteries a piece of wood is often used instead of a bell to call monks to church services.

¹¹³ *Vie* 24. 9–27. 9.

¹¹⁴ In a later section we shall specially discuss the question of frequency of Liturgy and Communion in both tradition and Symeon.

¹¹⁵ *Asc.* 24. Cf. Symeon's *Cat.* 4. 11–12.

¹¹⁶ *Cat.* 4. 1–18. 'There were not only lay people, but also many monks who were famous and renowned for virtue', Symeon mentions (13–14).

¹¹⁷ *Cat.* 22. 314–18.

¹¹⁸ *Cat.* 16. 78–107.

the rank of hegumen by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Nicholas II Chrysovergis.¹¹⁹ During his ordination he again had a vision of the light: his biographer writes that when the bishop read over him the prayer of consecration,

he saw the Holy Spirit, Which descended without form as simple and boundless light and covered his sacred head; he always saw this light when he celebrated the Liturgy throughout the forty-eight years of his priesthood.¹²⁰

When Symeon became hegumen, the monastery of St. Mamas was in decline and Symeon took upon himself the task of its revival. He successfully managed the monastery's building projects and attended to its economic needs. Nikitas tells us that Symeon restored the monastery church, covered the ground with marble and purchased new church plate, including vestments, icons and lamps 'made from limpid stone'. He also organized the library and sacristy.¹²¹ Symeon's former aristocratic connections might have helped him to find financial support for his activity as a rebuilder of the monastery.¹²²

However, his main task was to raise the spiritual level of the brethren, who for many years had been left without guidance. He appealed to the monks with ardent exhortations to combat the passions and to fulfil Christ's commandments. From his writings of this period, such as *Cat.* 1, delivered in all likelihood soon after he became hegumen, it is clear that he viewed the monastery as a single family of which he had been appointed spiritual father by the will of God.

It is surprising to see, [B. Krivochéine writes], how Symeon in his very first appeal to his monks' endeavours to establish personal spiritual ties between himself and them. It was not easy to embody in practice the high ideals of the new hegumen in a monastery where the spiritual life was at a rather low level. Knowing this, Symeon repeatedly tries to enlist the support of the brethren in the common work of reviving the monastery. He does not cease exhorting them to begin a new life.¹²³

¹¹⁹ *Vie* 30. 3ff. J. McGuckin, on the basis of Hausherr's chronology, argues that Symeon was ordained by the Patriarch Anthony the Studite rather than by Nicholas Chrysovergis and that, in view of Symeon's rapid elevation to the heguminate after only three years at St. Mamas, his previous transfer to this monastery from the Stoudion should be regarded as 'advancement' rather than 'expulsion': see 'Symeon', 24.

¹²⁰ *Vie* 30. 13–18.

¹²¹ *Vie* 34. 12–21.

¹²² J. McGuckin draws our attention to the fact that Symeon enjoyed significant patronage by the Byzantine aristocracy throughout his life: see 'Symeon', 25.

¹²³ *SC* 96. 35–6.

Symeon's ardent sermons did not go unheeded: soon the monastery was full of new monks, among whom there were many of Symeon's devoted disciples. The young hegumen acquired popularity among the citizens of Constantinople; many civil servants and well-to-do patricians became his followers. The main theme of the majority of his sermons was the appeal to mystical union with Christ, which, he believed, is possible for all those who desire it.¹²⁴

Symeon's discourses and exhortations were rooted in his own experience. The major theme of all of them was the divine light, which he himself contemplated with ever-increasing frequency. However, for a long time he was not aware that it was Christ who had appeared to him in the form of light until Christ Himself began to speak to him. In *Euch.* 2 Symeon relates in detail how he once heard the voice of Christ, Who said to him:

'I am God, Who has become man for your sake, and as you have sought Me out with all your soul, from now on you are My brother, My co-heir and My friend'.¹²⁵

From Symeon's other writings it is clear that after this special personal encounter with Christ, the mystical feeling of closeness with Christ remained constant for him.

Symeon did not regard his mystical visions as something extraordinary, but was convinced that everyone who seeks out God with all their heart would be worthy of seeing Him as light. This is why, in his sermons directed to the community, he spoke openly about his personal experience, thinking that this would encourage other brothers to follow his example and would finally bring them to the same sort of experience, which was for him the very core of a true Christian life.

However, by no means all of Symeon's audience were capable of accepting his teaching and of following him: to many people his spiritual ideal seemed excessively high. Some monks, attracted by his zeal, later turned out to be insufficiently brave and left the monastery. On the other hand, among those who remained in the monastery opposition gradually grew: a lack of understanding arose between the hegumen and the brothers. Symeon was accused of speaking too often of his personal experience: this could appear to be a breach of monastic ethics, according to which a monk should not speak of himself. Symeon's demanding insistence upon striving for

¹²⁴ Cf. *Hymn* 27. 131–2.

¹²⁵ *Euch.* 2. 230–3.

spiritual gifts irritated those who did not have them, something attested by the aforementioned episode when Symeon spoke of Communion with tears while the monks greeted it with sarcasm. Finally, certain opinions of Symeon could not go unnoticed—on the uselessness of Baptism for those who do not have awareness of the grace of the Holy Spirit that they received; on the ineffectualness of Communion for those who do not see Christ with the eyes of the soul; on the impossibility of salvation for those who admit within themselves even the slightest passion; and so on. Such ideas, expressed in a sharp polemical tone, could serve as a pretext for accusing Symeon of unorthodox thinking.

The atmosphere in the monastery became more and more uneasy. During the patriarchate of Sisinnios I (995–8) some of the monks spoke out openly against the hegumen: when he was preaching during matins, they attacked him, shouting loudly, and wanted to drive him out of the monastery, but Symeon, as Nikitas claims, stood his ground with his hands lowered and looking at those who hated him with a smile and ‘bright countenance’. Beside themselves with anger, they ran out of the church, smashed the locks of the monastery gates and ran to the other end of the city to the patriarch.¹²⁶ The latter summoned Symeon, and, after questioning him, was convinced of his innocence. He wanted to expel the rebels, but Symeon implored him to allow them to return to the monastery.¹²⁷ After this he remained hegumen until, in 1005 (1013), he handed over his duties to his disciple Arsenios.¹²⁸

After adopting a more secluded life, Symeon most likely thought that he would spend the rest of his days in stillness, but further trials awaited him. The former Metropolitan of Nikomidia Stephen¹²⁹

¹²⁶ *Vie* 38. 7–39. 14. ¹²⁷ *Vie* 39.14–40. 10.

¹²⁸ Hausherr, *Mystique*, p. xc. Nikitas describes the retirement of Symeon as a voluntary act: ‘everything was all right’ in Symeon’s life, but cares of the monastery distracted him from silence, so he ‘decided to organize the management in the monastery according to the ancient custom and become free from troubles . . . Then, by the decision of the Patriarch Sergios, he willingly leaves the post of hegumen . . .’ (*Vie* 59. 1–12). Therefore, apart from the ‘will’ of Symeon there was a decision of the patriarch. Nikitas describes the conflict between Symeon and Stephen of Nikomidia (see below) as if it had arisen after Symeon’s retirement. However, he indicates, for example, that Symeon returned ‘to his flock’ after the argument with Stephen (*Vie* 77. 2) and that he associated with monks who were ‘under him [subordinated to him]’ (*Vie* 82. 11). There are weighty considerations for the assumption that the conflict actually arose during the period when Symeon was still hegumen, and his retirement was caused by it. Cf. Kazhdan, ‘Zamechaniya’, 9.

¹²⁹ Stephen was ordained Metropolitan of Nikomidia in 976, but, after leaving his

spoke out against him, accusing him of excessive veneration for his spiritual father, who by this time had long since died. Every year, on the memorial day of his elder, Symeon arranged in the monastery a solemn celebration which was attended by many of those who venerated the elder. An icon of Symeon the Pious was also painted and a service to him was composed.¹³⁰ Stephen reproached Symeon for glorifying his elder as a saint when he had not been officially canonized.¹³¹ Nikitas describes this conflict as a clash of legalistic formalism with genuine spirituality: for Symeon his spiritual father's holiness was beyond question, and he had no need of official confirmation of this holiness.

Once Stephen met Symeon in the building of the patriarchate and asked him: 'How do you distinguish the Son from the Father, with an intellectual or an actual distinction?'¹³² Stephen's question is indicative of one of the most important disputes of the age, although most likely it was put with the aim of demonstrating Symeon's lack

diocese, he lived in Constantinople and was close to the patriarch and the emperor: *Vie* 74. 5–12; cf. Hausherr, *Mystique*, pp. li–lvi. He was the author of several theological and hagiographical writings, among them, very probably, is the hagiographical collection *Menologion of Basil II*: see Beck, *Literatur*, 531–2. In some passages of the 'Life' by Nikitas he is called 'Symeon of Alexini' (*Vie* 74. 6; 93. 25; 99. 4), but the origin of this name is not clear: see Lequien, *Oriens I*, 594.

¹³⁰ *Vie* 72. 22–6. Nikitas mentions 'hymns', an 'encomion', and a 'life' written by Symeon in honour of his spiritual father.

¹³¹ In fact, the early Christian Church had not known the practice of formal canonization in a modern sense: the Church was alien to the idea (which was first expressed by the iconoclasts of the 8th century) that 'special human initiative is required in order to bring something into the realm of the "holy"': Brock, 'Iconoclasm', 57. Veneration of a saint usually began in the area where he lived (the monastery, town, or even village) and either remained limited to this area (so called 'locally venerated' saints) or spread wider, sometimes throughout the Christian world. However, Symeon the New Theologian's lifetime coincided with the codification of saints by Symeon the Metaphrastic, who collected ancient lives of saints and made a new recension of them. As P. Lemerle points out, almost all the saints of the Metaphrastic collection belonged to ancient times and only very few to the iconoclastic or post-iconoclastic epoch; it was a kind of 'antiquarianization' of saints: *Humanisme*, 293. 'The compilation of the Metaphrastic corpus and the Synaxarion of Constantinople', another scholar writes, 'and the opposition aroused by Symeon the New Theologian in his attempt to establish a cult of his spiritual father Symeon the Studite, indicate that the official Church was tending, from the end of the tenth century, to conceive of the communion of saints as a closed society, whose numbers were now more or less complete': Magdalino, 'Holy Man', 61. Symeon the New Theologian, with his idea of the possibility and necessity of being a saint, with his constant struggle against 'new heretics' who rejected this possibility and with his self-established cult of Symeon the Studite, found himself in opposition to this movement and thus to the official Church. See the discussion of this matter in Chapter 6 of this study.

¹³² *Vie* 75. 16–17.

of book learning and scholarship. One might deduce from Stephen's question that Symeon was somehow involved in a kind of triadological argument and that perhaps the disagreement between him and Stephen reflected a difference in their positions in this argument.¹³³ We do not have enough evidence to confirm this supposition and the theological background to the debate is still unclear. In later sections of this study we will have to return to this conflict, significant for the history of Eastern spirituality, in an attempt to clarify its nature.

Symeon did not reply immediately but promised to give a reply in written form, after which he returned to his cell and wrote an epistle in verse, known as 'Hymn 21'. Initially setting forth his teaching on the Trinity, he then attacks those who, like Stephen, dare to theologize without having mystical gifts: this is a theme very characteristic of Symeon and here it is developed with particular polemic sharpness. According to Symeon, the Holy Spirit is sent

... Not to lovers of glory,
 Not to rhetoricians, not to philosophers,
 Not to those who have studied Hellenistic writings . . .
 Not to those who speak eloquently and with refinement,
 Not to those who have achieved great names . . .
 But to the poor in spirit and life,
 To the pure in heart and body,
 Who speak and even more live simply.¹³⁴

Having indirectly denounced Stephen in this way, Symeon then moves into open attack:

Stop, man, tremble, mortal by nature . . .
 How dare you, who are completely flesh
 And have not yet become spirit, like Paul,
 To philosophize and speak about the Spirit . . . ?
 Yes, abandon your curiosity,
 Lay aside the blasphemy of your words . . .
 Like the serpent, possess prudence to be sure,
 But vomit the poison of wickedness . . .¹³⁵

One can imagine what indignation this epistle caused in the ambitious metropolitan. He complained to the patriarch and the bishops about Symeon: under pressure from him the Synod was formally

¹³³ Cf. Darrouzès, *SC* 122. 9–10.

¹³⁴ *Hymn* 21. 54–68.

¹³⁵ *Hymn* 21. 118; 174–6; 317–18; 400–1.

summoned at the beginning of 1009 (1020) and it expelled Symeon from the monastery.¹³⁶ At the same time Stephen organized an attack on the icons of Symeon the Pious, which were destroyed on his orders.¹³⁷

Symeon, expelled from Constantinople, settled by the church of St. Marina near Chrysopolis, where he founded a small monastery.¹³⁸ Soon his friends in the capital achieved his complete vindication by the Patriarch Sergios II and Synod and it was suggested to him that he should return to his former monastery or even occupy a bishop's throne.¹³⁹ However, he turned down these proposals and spent the remainder of his years in the monastery of St. Marina surrounded by his disciples.

Despite these stormy events and the convulsions of the soul that accompanied them, Symeon's inner mystical life never weakened. According to Nikitas, he was granted many extraordinary gifts, including spiritual insight, prophecy, and miracle working. The biographer tells us that once Symeon healed an abbess from a serious illness, appearing to her in a vision together with his elder Symeon the Pious. Another time he healed a young man who could not eat any food: he blessed a piece of bread and gave it to the youth, after which the latter immediately became healthy. He also restored to health a paralysed boy who had lain in infirmity for four years by anointing him with oil from a lamp burning before the icon of St. Marina. There was one incident when his friend was restored to health as Symeon approached him; he had suffered from a stroke and his face had become so affected that he could not open his mouth. In describing these incidents, Symeon's biographer each time stresses the great compassion which Symeon showed to the sick, and his tears when he saw someone struck down by disease.¹⁴⁰

Shortly before his death Symeon himself fell ill. His body was emaciated in the extreme and he could no longer move, but spent the days lying in bed. He could no longer, of course, celebrate the

¹³⁶ *Vie* 94. 1–22. Nikitas indicates elsewhere (see *Vie* 104. 18–19; cf. 108. 8–9) that the patriarch accepted the cult of the Studite and even took part in the celebrations organized by Symeon. Therefore, the fact that he later changed his mind may be explained only by the influence of Stephen.

¹³⁷ *Vie* 93. 1–12.

¹³⁸ *Vie* 100. 1–26. Nikitas informs us that the neighbourhood of the new monastery was hostile to Symeon: some people even threw stones at him; see *Vie* 112. 7–8.

¹³⁹ *Vie* 102. 14–103. 18.

¹⁴⁰ *Vie* 113–22.

Liturgy every day as he had done all his life, but he received Communion every day as before. The time of his death had been made known to him beforehand. He also predicted to his disciples that thirty years after his death his relics would be solemnly translated to Constantinople: this later came true. Symeon died on 12 March 1022 (1037–8), surrounded by his disciples who with tears in their eyes and lighted tapers sang over him the funeral service.¹⁴¹

The account of Symeon the New Theologian's life in this chapter was deliberately limited to the material available from his own writings or from the 'Life' compiled by Nikitas. No attempt was made to place Symeon within the context of Byzantine secular history of his time both because his chronology is uncertain and because this falls beyond the scope of the present study. Much more important for this research has been to show that Symeon was an integral part of the great monastic history with its long tradition of asceticism, learning, worship, and spiritual direction. Discussing Symeon's scriptural and liturgical background, his literary dependence on Symeon the Studite, his cycle of daily reading, his main theological, ascetical, and mystical ideas, we shall many times return to the themes outlined in the present chapter.

¹⁴¹ *Vie* 128. 1–129. 11.