

Mystical Theology

Symeon the New Theologian

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- 949-1022 AD. Galatian.
- Disciple of Symeon the Studite.
- Symeon opposed a developing scholasticism, that instead of using Aristotelian categories to articulate in rational terms the mysteries of revelation, inverted the process and fostered the rational systematization of the deposit of dogma .
- Opposed by the chief theologian of the Emperor's court, Symeon was removed as abbot of St. Mamas and exiled. Within one hundred years of his death Symeon was universally recognized as a saint.

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- “They err (blaspheme against the Holy Spirit) who insist that no one living can truly experience God mystically, directly, and intensely, habitually living in the consciousness of God’s immanent indwelling.”
- “When men search for God with their bodily eyes they can find Him nowhere, for He is invisible. But for those who ponder in the Spirit, He is present everywhere. He is in all, yet beyond all. In this, His salvation is near to those who fear Him, but far away from sinful men.”

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- “The remembrance of Christ brings light to one’s mind and drives away the demons, and the light of the Holy Trinity which shines in a pure heart lifts it away from the whole world. When a man participates in this, though he is still on Earth, he has a taste of the glory that is to come, at least so far as he can, for although he is moved by Heaven’s grace he is still wrapped in the veil of flesh.”
- “If, when all visible reality has passed away, nothing shall exist but God, who is and ever shall be, then those who share in the riches of His grace within this world are already enjoying their riches of the age to come, even though they are still on Earth.”

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- “If the Holy Spirit is in you, you will comprehend well enough His action within you as the Apostle says about Him: ‘There where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty’ ...All those who have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ completely; they are children of light and walk in the light that has no decline.”

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- “We bear witness that ‘God is light,’ and those to whom it has been granted to see Him have all beheld Him as light. Those who have seen Him have received Him as light, because the light of His glory goes before Him, and it is impossible for Him to appear without light. Those who have not seen His light have not seen Him, for He is the light, and those who have not received the light have not received grace. Those who have received grace have received the light of God and have received God, even as Christ himself, who is the Light, has said, ‘I will live in them and move among them.’”

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- “Those who simply teach do not gain the Lord’s blessing. It is for those who have first practiced the commandments...”
- “Listen only to the advice of your spiritual father, answer him with humility and, as to God, tell Him your thoughts, even to a simple temptation, without hiding anything, do nothing without his advice.”
- The spiritual warfare never ceases. It is incorporeal enemies that we face, they are constantly facing us even though we do not see them...No one may escape the alternatives of either winning and staying alive or of being overcome and dying.”

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- To the Christian faithful in doing the spiritual battle, the Holy Spirit gradually brings about the purification of the heart. The sign of this state of purification and reintegration into the “new man” of Christ is the continued state of abiding sorrow for sin...the Holy Spirit pours out tears in great effusion and abundance (Baptism in the Spirit).
- “Before all else, pray to be given tears, that weeping may soften the savage hardness which is in your soul, and, having acknowledged your sin unto the Lord, you may receive from Him the remission of sins.”

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- There is no serious prayer life without fasting. “Fasting gradually disperses and drives away spiritual darkness and the veil of sin that lies upon the soul.”
- “Love is not a name, but the divine essence, both participable and yet incomprehensible, but totally divine.”
- Theology is not a matter of propositions, but of persons, and, ultimately, not dogmas, but union with the person of Christ himself.
- “Those who simply teach do not gain the Lord’s blessing.”

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- “True charity begins with seeking in as healthy way to be perfect as God wants all of His children to be. Thus before one can exercise true charity toward the neighbor, one must learn to be freed from all self-attachment by showing a love toward the real ego, the person God knows us as in his Logos. Then...charity (can be exercised) according to (one’s) state of life...Sharing is by one’s Christian presence” ...even to the extent that one would plead God to allow him to suffer in their stead...an attitude like that of Moses and indeed of God himself.

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- “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven...the Kingdom of Heaven is ‘within us’...(it) consists in not desiring anything that is visible and subject to corruption...the affairs and pleasures of this world, wealth, fame, pleasure, or any other worldly or bodily enjoyment...(one) abstains from all these things...(for) he who turns to any one of the things that are visible has neither seen (the) Kingdom of Heaven nor perceived or tasted its joy and pleasantness.”

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- “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted’...When the faithful man...performs all that the divine commandments enjoin and directs his mind toward their sublimity...a conduct and purity that are above approach, he will discover his own limitations...that he is weak and lacks the power to attain to the height of the commandments...unworthy to receive God and give Him thanks and glory, since he has as yet failed to attain any good of his own...will indeed mourn with that sorrow which is truly most blessed.”

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- “The pledge of the Kingdom of Heaven is the comfort that springs from sorrow...(the soul) begins eagerly to bring forth the fruit of (virtues) for Christ...for when it is always being watered and made fruitful by tears and wholly extinguishes its temper, it becomes meek...it will desire and yearn with both ‘hunger and thirst’ to learn God’s judgments. Further, the soul will become merciful and compassionate...(pure in heart) and...thus attain to the vision of God and clearly see His glory. Those...are in truth peacemakers and will be called the sons of the Most High...They are objects of abuse and...gladly endure and exult.”

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- “We are so enslaved by passions and find ourselves in such blindness and ignorance that we do not even perceive our condition nor realize that we are doing badly. Therefore, when we are reminded by someone of some sin we reply as if we had never heard the Christian Scriptures...”
- “If a man keep the whole law, but fails in one point, he becomes guilty of all of it.” (Jas 2:10)
- “You will render an account of every careless word.” (Mt 12:36)
- God is Judge “of the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Heb 4:12)

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- “He who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Mt 5:28)
- “Know then for sure, O man, that he who is ruled by lust of money is judged covetous, even though he possesses nothing at all. He who lusts after many and costly dishes is a glutton, even though he...feeds on nothing but bread and water. He is a whoremonger who attaches himself to his imaginations...So too he who (questions another’s actions) in his heart is a slanderer...even though he utters no word...”

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- “We must therefore carefully discern the thoughts that come on us and set them against the testimonies from the divinely inspired Scriptures and from the teachings of the...Holy Fathers...If they are not in harmony with the ‘word of truth’ we must expel them with much anger, as it is written, ‘Be angry and sin not.’” (Ps 4:5)
- “Every man who has committed sin (as have I who stand condemned) has stopped up the senses of his soul with the mud of pleasure. Even were he to renounce all...to cleanse our souls we must also weep and mourn from our hearts.”

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- “What shall a man give to God that he might repay Him?” (Rom 11:35)
- “So it is possible for all men...not only for monks but for laymen as well, to be penitent at all times and constantly, and to weep and entreat God...”

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- “It is possible for one who has wife and children...servants, a large household, and great possessions, and who is prominent in worldly affairs...to be able daily to weep and pray and repent; he can also attain to perfection of virtue if he so wishes. He can receive the Holy Spirit and...enjoy the vision of Him (as did Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David and many others)...All the things they acquired during their lifetime they used with piety, not as though they owned them, but rather like (stewards) who ‘deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it.’” (1 Cor 7:31)

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- Adam is driven out of Eden because he did not confess his sin. “And God said to Adam, where are you.” Adam does not say that he has sinned, rather, “I heard the sound of You as You were walking in the garden and I realized that I was naked and I hid myself.” God gives him a second opportunity to reply, “Who told you that you are naked? Unless you ate of the tree which I commanded you not to eat.” But Adam denied his sin, further accusing God, “The woman You gave me deceived me.”
- Eve did not repent either and was cast out.

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- After their expulsion, Adam and Eve were “subject to sweat and bodily toil. They began to hunger and thirst, to be cold and shiver...As they perceived more vividly their misfortune and fall, they realized their own perversity and God’s unspeakable mercy...outside Paradise they repented (and did so all their lives)...God did not cancel their sentence (having) pronounced it on them for their correction and to prevent any one from setting himself up against the Maker of all things...(yet) He would recall man from his exile...He himself came down to them...(became) like them (and) undertook to die like them.”

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- “The deadly wound consists of every sin that is not repented and confessed, and of falling into despair. This depends on our choice and will.”
- “Through Holy Baptism and the Communion of His undefiled Mysteries, His Body and His Precious Blood, He cleanses us and gives us life and restores us to holiness and sinlessness. More than that He sends us forth to enjoy the honor of liberty, so that we may not...serve our Master by compulsion, but out of free choice.”

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- “Just as the demons are fed by our evil deeds and so prevail against us, so, when we abstain from evil, they become weak through starvation and lose their vigor... He who became poor for the sake of our salvation is thus nourished by us, and suffers hunger when we neglect Him.”
- “The man who has no fear of God does not believe either that God exists, for he is a fool...The man who says he fears God but does not keep His commandments is a liar...So if the fear of God is not in us and we do not keep the divine commandments, then we are no different from the pagans and the unbelievers.”

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- “Faith, the fear of God, and the observance of His commandments, bring us a reward in proportion to our purity...we rise from fearing God to loving Him...’He who accepts my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me” (cf Jn 14:21)

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- “When the three-personed Deity dwells within the saints...it is not the fulfillment of desire, but the cause and beginning of a much greater and fervent desire...it drives him on towards...an ever deepening desire for the Godhead as if he were being consumed...The mind can find no limit in the One it yearns for. It cannot grasp Him and it cannot set any limit on its own desire and love...it feeds within itself a longing that knows no bounds and a love that can never be satisfied...he considers that he really does not love God because he cannot embrace the fullness of love.”

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- “Belief is a matter of dying for Christ and his commandments. It is believing that such a death is life-giving. It is to count poverty as riches, and to consider the lowest humiliation as true honor and nobility. Faith is believing that when one has nothing, one has everything.”
- “To have faith in Christ...means we should bear all our daily trials that bring us sorrow, distress, or unhappiness, and bear them patiently for as long as God wishes and until He comes to visit us.”

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- “God seeks nothing else from us men except that we do not sin; this alone. But this is not a work of law; it is rather a careful guarding of the image and dignity from above.”
- “Many are called, but few are chosen.” (Mt 22:14)

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- “A man who is deaf to the Word is deaf to all voices. But the man who hears the Word can hear them all and still be deaf to everyone. He hears them all, but listens to none except those who speak within the Word. Even from these he takes nothing, for he listens only to the Word who speaks silently through them.”
- It is a common practice in monastic communities to recite the Jesus prayer silently while listening to others...that is how one listens to the Word who speaks silently through them.

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- “A man who has achieved the measures of perfection is dead and not dead, for he lives in union with God because he no longer lives for himself. (Rom 14:7) He is a blind man, for he no longer sees by nature...He neither stirs nor moves, for all movement has been fulfilled in Him. He is devoid of thoughts because he has become one with Him who is beyond understanding. He rests where there is no more stirring of the mind...

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- ...either of reflecting, reasoning, or understanding, for there is no way it can conceive or define something beyond thought or conception, and it is therefore in a state of rest. The rest is the stillness of blessedness beyond all sensation...”
- “If someone has not been judged worthy to come to such a degree of perfection...he can only blame himself...A man only deprives himself of these good things as he is negligent, and when he breaks the commandments.”

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- “If the man does not strive after union with the latest of all the saints (Eph 4:3), in love and fervent longing, by means of humility but rather a degree of unfaithfulness towards Him, then he will never be wholly united or bound up with the earlier saints who preceded him, even if he thought he had perfect faith and perfect love (1 Cor 13:2) in the sight of God and all the saints. They shall cast him far from them since he would not accept with humility the place that was destined for him, which God set out for him before all the ages.”

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- Predestination, however, is an excuse for sloth. God calls all to repentance.
- “When a man penetrates the depths of humility and recognizes that he is unworthy to be saved, his sorrow releases springs of tears, and as a consequence spiritual joy floods out in his heart. In this way, hope rises out of this spring, grows with it, and strengthens our certainty of being saved.”
- “Each man must look at himself and understand himself. He must not rely only on this hope to the exclusion of spiritual humility and sorrow before God, nor on humility and tears without the spiritual joy and hope that must accompany them.”

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- “To the extent that God wants to be known by us, He reveals himself. And as much as he is revealed, so is He seen and known by those who are worthy. But no one can ever experience or see this if he is not first united to the all-holy Spirit, or if he has not acquired a humble, pure, simple, and contrite heart through much effort and toil.”
- “Baptism does not take away our self-determination or our free will; instead, it grants us freedom no longer to be held against our will in the devil’s tyranny... it is up to us to decide to remain in the commandments of Christ, our Master...”

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- “If we have pity on one man it does not save us, but to despise even one man sends us to the flames. The saying, ‘I was hungry and thirsty’ was not given for one single occasion or meant just for one day; it sets out the whole course of life. To feed Christ, then, or to give Him drink , or clothes, or whatever else is mentioned, is not something done once and once alone, it is something our Lord and God has told us He receives from His servants through all and in all.”

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