

vinity", the true Godhead.<sup>24</sup> And how could it be a question of "rays of the divinity" if the light was only a symbol of divinity, formed from another nature?<sup>25</sup>

Again, Basil the Great, after showing that the God Who is adored in three Persons is a unique light, speaks of the "God who dwells in light unapproachable",<sup>26</sup> for the unapproachable is in every way true, and the true unapproachable. This is why the apostles fell to the ground, unable to rest their gaze on the glory of the light of the Son, because it was a "light unapproachable". The Spirit, too, is light, as we read: "He who has shone in our hearts by the Holy Spirit."<sup>27</sup>

If then the unapproachable is true and this light was unapproachable, the light was not a simulacrum of divinity, but truly the light of the true divinity, not only the divinity of the Son, but that of the Father and the Spirit too. This is why we sing together to the Lord when we celebrate the annual Feast of the Transfiguration: "In Your light which appeared today on Thabor, we have seen the Father as light and also the Spirit as light,"<sup>28</sup> for "You have unveiled an indistinct ray of Your divinity."<sup>29</sup> . . . So, when all the saints agree in calling this light true divinity, how do you dare to consider it alien to the divinity, calling it "a created reality", and "a symbol of divinity", and claiming that it is inferior to our intellection?

## 13

Maximus, who is accustomed to reason by symbols, analogies and allegories, does not (as you know) always use the inferior as symbol of the superior, but sometimes the opposite: Thus he can say that the body of the Lord hanging on the Cross has become the symbol of our body nailed to the passions.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Maximus, speaking allegorically, claimed that this light was a symbol of the cataphatic and apophatic theologies;<sup>31</sup> he spoke of a superior reality as the symbol of inferior ones, a reality which contains in itself the knowledge of theology, and is its source.

Did he not also say that Moses is the symbol of providence and Elijah of judgement?<sup>32</sup> Are we for that reason to assume these prophets never really existed, but all was fantasy and imagination? Who else but Barlaam would have dared to say so, or claim that this light was a nature alien to the divinity, a simulacrum of divinity? This is why the choir of inspired theologians have almost all been chary of calling the grace of this light simply a symbol, so that people should

not be led astray by the ambiguity of this term to conclude that this most divine light is a created reality, alien to the divinity.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the phrase "symbol of divinity", wisely and properly understood, cannot be considered absolutely opposed to the truth.

## → 14

But let us then suppose it is a symbol of divinity, as you believe. Even so, you will not utterly convince us of error nor deprive us of our blessed hope. For every symbol either derives from the nature of the object of which it is a symbol, or belongs to an entirely different nature. Thus, when the sun is about to rise, the dawn is a natural symbol of its light, and similarly heat is a natural symbol of the burning power of fire.<sup>34</sup>

As to signs which are not connatural in this way, and which have their own independent existence, they are sometimes considered symbols: Thus, a burning torch might be taken as a symbol of attacking enemies. If they do not possess their own natural existence, they can serve as a kind of phantom to foretell the future, and then the symbol consists only in that. Such were the perceptible signs shown by the prophets in simple figures, for example, the scythe of Zachariah,<sup>35</sup> the axes of Ezekiel,<sup>36</sup> and other signs of this sort.

So a natural symbol always accompanies the nature which gives them being, for the symbol is natural to that nature; as for the symbol which derives from another nature, having its own existence, it is quite impossible for it constantly to be associated with the object it symbolises, for nothing prevents it from existing before and after this object, like any reality having its own existence. Finally, the symbol lacking an independent existence exists neither before nor after its object, for that is impossible; as soon as it has appeared, it at once is dissolved into nonbeing and disappears completely.

Thus if the light of Thabor is a symbol, it is either a natural or a nonnatural one. If the latter, then it either has its own existence or is just a phantom without subsistence. But if it is merely an insubstantial phantom, then Christ never really was, is or will be such as He appeared on Thabor. Yet Denys the Areopagite, Gregory the Theologian and all the others who await His coming from heaven with glory, affirm clearly that Christ will be for all eternity as He then appeared, as we showed above.<sup>37</sup> This light, then, is not just a phantom without subsistence.

Indeed, not only will Christ be eternally thus in the future, but He was such even before He ascended the Mountain. Hear John Damascene, who is wise in divine things: "Christ is transfigured, not by putting on some quality He did not possess previously, nor by changing into something He never was before, but by revealing to His disciples what He truly was, in opening their eyes and in giving sight to those who were blind. For while remaining identical to what He had been before, He appeared to the disciples in His splendour; He is indeed the true light, the radiance of glory."<sup>38</sup>

Basil the Great testifies to the same truth: "His divine power appeared as it were as a light through a screen of glass, that is to say, through the flesh of the Lord which He had assumed from us; the power which enlightens those who have purified the eyes of the heart."<sup>39</sup> And do not the annual hymns of the Church affirm that, even before the Transfiguration, He had previously been such as He then appeared? "What appeared today was hidden by the flesh, and the original beauty, more than resplendent, has been unveiled today."<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, the transformation of our human nature, its deification and transfiguration—were these not accomplished in Christ from the start, from the moment in which He assumed our nature?<sup>41</sup> Thus He was divine before, but He bestowed at the time of His Transfiguration a divine power upon the eyes of the apostles and enabled them to look up and see for themselves.<sup>42</sup> This light, then, was not a hallucination but will remain for eternity, and has existed from the beginning.

But if Christ was such and will remain such for eternity, He is also still the same today. It would indeed be absurd to believe that such was His nature up to the most divine vision on Thabor, and that it will always be such in the Age to Come, but that it has become different in the intervening period, setting aside this glory. Today also He is seated in the same splendour, "at the right hand of the Majesty on high."<sup>43</sup> All then must follow and obey Him Who says, "Come, let us ascend the holy and heavenly mountain, let us contemplate the immaterial divinity of the Father and the Spirit, which shines forth in the only Son."<sup>44</sup> And if one refuses to be convinced by a single saint,

one may be obedient to two, or rather all. So the blessed Andrew, who was as a shining and holy lamp in Crete, thus hymns the light which shone on Thabor: "The intelligible world of angels, in celebrating this light in an immaterial manner, gives us a proof of the love which the Word bears towards us."<sup>45</sup>

The great Denys says almost the same thing when celebrating the sublime order of supercosmic powers:<sup>46</sup> They do not only contemplate and participate in the glory of the Trinity, he declares, but also in the glorification of Jesus. Having been made worthy of this contemplation, they are also initiated into it, for He Himself is deifying light: "They truly draw near to it, and gain first participation in the knowledge of His theurgic light."<sup>47</sup> Macarius similarly states . . . , "Our mixed human nature, which was assumed by the Lord, has taken its seat on the right hand of the divine majesty in the heavens,<sup>48</sup> being full of glory not only (like Moses) in the face, but in the whole body."<sup>49</sup>

Therefore Christ possesses this light immutably, or rather, He has always possessed it, and always will have it with Him. But if it always was, is and will be, then the light which glorified the Lord on the Mountain was not a hallucination, nor simply a symbol without subsistence.

And if someone says that this light is an independent reality, separate from the nature of Him Whom it signifies, of Whom it is only a symbol—then let him show where and of what kind this reality is, which is shown by experience to be unapproachable, and not only to the eyes ("The disciples fell head-first to the ground",<sup>50</sup> we are told), and which shone forth only from the venerated face and body of Christ. For otherwise, if it *were* an independent reality, eternally associated with Christ in the Age to Come, He would be composed of three natures and three essences: the human, the divine and that of this light. So it is obvious and clearly demonstrated that this light is neither an independent reality, nor something alien to the divinity.

Having reached this point in our treatise, we must now explain why the saints call this deifying grace and divine light "enhypostatic".

## NOTES

also mean "what really exists", that which is genuine or authentic, e.g., of our *real* adoption as sons by the grace of the Holy Spirit (III. i-27). The first sense of the word goes back to the christology of Leontius of Byzantium, the second to Mark the Monk.

5. In the ontological sense, i.e., as an energy pertaining to, and inherent in, the nature of the Spirit.

6. Ps. Denys, *de div. nom.* II.7, PG III, 645B.

7. That is, the Spirit transcends His self-gift, not only metaphysically, in the sense that the Cause is always ontologically prior to its energies and effects, but also as gift, since we can never (because of our human limitations as creatures) contain the divine life in its plenitude.

8. Excerpts from the Macarian writings have circulated under the names of various mediaeval writers, including Symeon Metaphrastes (tenth c.).

9. 2 Cor. 3:18.

10. *Metaphrastes, de elev. mentis* 1, PG CXXXIV, 889 = Ps. Macarius, *Logos* 48, 6-7, ed. H. Berthold, *Makarinos/Symeon Reden und Briefe* II (Berlin, 1973), p. 104).

11. *De elev. mentis*, 2 *ib.*, 892AB, cf. Ps. Macarius, *ed. cit.*, p. 105. Note here Symeon's emphasis on the *eschatological* nature of sanctification: Those who receive the divine light are anticipating the resurrection-glory of the Age to Come. What now is for the most part an interior glory—though not exclusively, as in the case of Moses and several of the monastic saints of the Desert—will then be shown forth externally in the transfigured bodies of the saints.

12. 1 Thess. 4:17.

13. *De div. nom.* I.4, PG III, 592BC. The saints in heaven enjoy the same vision of the transfigured Christ as the apostles did on Thabor. The Transfiguration (so central to Eastern Christian spiritual theology) is not an isolated and ephemeral event in the life of Christ (as suggested by Barlaam), but an eternal paradigm of the vision of God, and of the transfiguration of the cosmos.

14. Cf. Rev. 21:23-24, 22:5.

15. *Ep. Cl ad Cleodinium*, PG XXXVII, 181AB. Gregory is referring to the Second Coming, when Christ will appear in the same glory as that in which He was revealed on Thabor. The divinity "triumphs over the flesh", not in the sense of abolishing or defeating the body, but as having overcome its corporeal opacity, rendering it a luminous vehicle of spirit.

16. The word literally means "lasting only for a day", as, for example, mayflies.

17. Cf. Plato, *Tim.* 27D, applied by Barlaam to the visions of the hesychasts (cf. *Triads* II.iii.55).

18. A phrase of Gregory Nazianzen (*vid.* note 15, above).

## NOTES

19. The light of Thabor cannot be a mere created and passing symbol, because it is the glory of the changeless divinity. It is a supernatural light, visible in this life only to those whose eyes have been transformed by grace.

20. Cf. Col. 3:11; and Gregory of Nyssa, *de anima et resurr.*, PG XLVI, 104C.

21. Gregory of Nyssa, *ibid.*

22. Cf. John Chrysostom, *ad Theod. lapsum* I.11, PG XLVII, 292, on the Transfiguration, where John speaks of "beholding the King Himself, no longer in a riddle or through a mirror, but face to face" (cf. Num. 12:8 and 1 Cor. 13:12). The vision on Thabor, in all its concrete actuality, is a tangible earnest or guarantee of the reality of the unmediated and direct vision of Christ in heaven.

23. Hom. XL.6, PG XXXVI, 365A.

24. Chrysostom passage not identified.

25. That is, the light can only be the radiance of the divinity if it is itself divine, of the same nature as God. God's glory may indeed be manifested *through* creation, but it cannot itself *be* a creature or a created symbol.

26. Ps. Basil, *c. Eunom.* V, PG XXIX, 640AB, citing 1 Tim. 6:16.

27. 2 Cor. 4:6.

28. Citing the *Exaposteilarion*, a liturgical text sung in church during the Matins of the Feast (August 6). Although Christ was the sole subject of the historical Transfiguration, the divine uncreated light or energy is the common glory or energy of all Three Persons of the Trinity, and is not a property of the Son alone.

29. Last verse of the *aposticha* on Vespers for August 7.

30. Cf. *Ambig.*, PG XCI, 1376CD.

31. Cf. *ibid.*, 1165BC. Maximus means that the higher reality (the divine light) can symbolise the lower reality, i.e., the theologies which struggle to adumbrate it.

32. *Ibid.*, 1168C. This is the opposite case, a created entity used to symbolise a divine quality. The point here is that even in a case such as this, the symbol can be a reality in its own right, not something imagined or a passing phenomenon.

33. In practice, of course, most symbols of higher reality are created things, and this is why the Fathers tend to avoid describing the uncreated light as a symbol.

34. Palamas now pauses to define the only sense in which this light *is* a symbol: It is a *natural* symbol of the divinity (cf. note 5, above), connatural and coexistent with God, analogous to the inseparable relationship between the sun and its rays. Symbols *not* participating in the nature of what they symbolise either have an independent existence from that symbolised (e.g., Moses and providence), or exist only notionally, as an illustration (e.g., a conflagration as symbol of a military onslaught). Since the light of Thabor is

identical with the eternal glory of Christ, it must be a natural symbol, not a created or imaginary one, and itself truly existing and eternal. Further on this topic, *vid. infra*, chapters 19–21.

35. Zach. 5:1–2 (LXX).

36. Ezech. 9:2.

37. Cf. *supra*, Sections 10–11.

38. *Hom. in Transfig.* 12–13, PG XCIV, 564C–565A. It is not Christ who is changed into something new in the Transfiguration, but the disciples. The Transfiguration reveals the divine glory He possessed from all eternity, but which was hidden under the veils of the flesh in His Incarnation. For the apostles, these veils are momentarily drawn aside on Thabor.

39. Source not identified.

40. Cf. the third *sticheron* of the *Lite* of the Vespers of August 6.

41. An important theological point: The very assumption of our human nature by the Logos had the effect of healing and transforming it. Even in terms of Christ's humanity, then, what is shown forth at the Transfiguration is not something new at that moment; it is a revelation of the divinised human nature of Christ, which potentially may be appropriated by all who share that nature.

42. Palamas often stresses that it does not lie within our natural powers to bear the dazzling vision of God. Even those who have "purified the eyes of the heart" need a special grace to enable them to behold the uncreated light (cf. Section 17, *infra*).

43. Heb. 1:3.

44. John of Damascus, Canon II for the Feast of the Transfiguration (Ode IX, *troparion* 2).

45. *In Transfig. hom.*, VII, PG XCVII, 933C.

46. That is, the angelic hierarchy, whose members contemplate the glory of the Godhead both as it is eternally, and as incarnate in Christ.

47. *De cael. bier.*, VII.2, PG III, 20BC. This light is "theurgic" in the sense of "divinising", causing the angels to share in the life of God.

48. Heb. 8:1.

49. This passage is cited earlier, in *Triads* I.iii.29, but is not to be found in the published text of Ps. Macarius.

50. First *sticheron* of the Lauds of August 6; also, Canon of the same day, by Cosmas of Maiouma (Ode IX, *troparion* 1).

51. Cf. Section 9, above, and note 4.

52. The point of this terminological paragraph is that the divine light or energy is neither an independent reality apart from the three divine Persons, nor something temporary and fleeting, but exists permanently as an outgoing power in God. Like personal attributes, the energies must have a personal (or hypostatic) *locus*—by nature, they inhere in the Divine Persons, by grace, in us; and it is this that is meant by the term "enhypostatic".

53. A reference to the christological decree of the Council of Chalcedon (451). The divine light does not *naturally* pertain to our created nature, but even in the case of unfallen Adam, is always a gift of God. So the light can be only the natural symbol of Christ's *divine* nature.

54. Acts 1:4.

55. *Kontakion* of the Feast of the Transfiguration.

56. *Hom. in Transfig.* 12, PG XCVI, 564B.

57. Cf. *Cent. gnost.* I.48, PG XC, 1100D—an especially important text for Palamas's theology, giving patristic authority for his doctrine that divine energies are permanently related to the divine essence, and are therefore eternal and uncreated. The other "realities contemplated around God" (*ta peri theou*) would include such divine attributes as goodness, justice and providence.

58. God in His essence is unitary and utterly simple, yet ineffably contains multiplicity within Himself: primarily, the triunity of Persons, but also the plenitude of divine attributes, powers and energies. It is only on the plane of limited human logic that the existence of the One and the Many in God presents an intellectual problem.

59. *Kathisma* after the *polyeleon* of Matins on August 6.

60. *Ambig.*, PG XCI, 1165D.

61. Because there is no continuity or affinity of nature between symbol and object, as in the case of natural symbols. Since light and heat are naturally derived from fire, or energy from essence, we can say that a single entity is under consideration, and in a sense, the light is its own symbol.

62. The image of fire is borrowed from Ps. Denys, *de cael. bier.* XV.2, PG III, 326Dff.

63. The analogy of the sun's light is an appropriate one, since it is not only the object of vision, but that medium *in* which all vision takes place. Similarly, there can be no vision of God without participation in His light and life. The gift of divine light is what enables man to see divine realities (including itself) at all.

64. A Dionysian periphrasis for "angels". Not even the angels can know the divine mysteries fully; how much less can men?

65. On this point (that man must transcend his natural powers by grace to see the divine light), see notes 42 and 63, above.

66. *Hom. in Transfig.* 12, PG XCVI, 564C.

67. It is important to note that the vision of God is not simply an *interior* experience, but according to Palamas, involves also the *bodily* eyes, transfigured by grace. The whole man is the subject of divinisation, not just the intellectual or spiritual principle.

68. Cf. text of Barlaam cited above, Section 10.

69. *Hom. in Transfig.* 10, PG XCVI, 561D.

70. 1 Thess. 4:17.

71. Damascene, *ibid.*, 15–16 (*ibid.* 569AB).