Nikita Bogachev

REDEEMING THE SINFUL FLESH: JOHN CLIMACUS AND SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN ON PENITENCE AND THE BODY

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization
in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies.

Central European University

Budapest

June 2020

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(Russian Federation)

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I, the undersigned, **Nikita Bogachev**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

The practice of penitence (*metanoia*) lies in the core of the desert tradition of monastic spirituality. John Climacus in the fifth step of his *Ladder* paid special attention to the discourse on penitence describing his experience of visit into monastic prison where multiple male subjects tormented their sinful flesh. Through the gory descriptions of injured corporeality John in the parabolic way created the image of the ideal and visible repentance. I argue that in the descriptions of corporeal suffering and self-humiliation of penitent subjects, John's narrative in the seventh century still relied on the metaphorical structures of the Early Christian language of martyrdom. In John's nararative the connection between the act of repentance and corporeality was explicit and even accentuated.

In the edge of millennium, Symeon the New Theologian delivered to his monks a Catechetical discourse about the practice of penitence. In this catechesis, he quoted the same fifth step of John's *Ladder* recommending his monks to consult the whole excerpt. Further in his discourse, Symeon introduced to the audience a practice of repentance which included individual staged performance of prayer recitations intermingled with self-beating. In this way, as I demonstrate, Symeon attempted to set a role model to imitate for his monks. This model relied on the reinterpretation of John's discourse, even though the idea of sinful flesh was not explicitly present in Symeon's text.

I claim that for Symeon repentance was not explicitly connected with the sinfulness of flesh but rather with historical and archetypal inability of humanity to perform proper repentance. This inability started with Adam and Eve's failure to repent in Paradise. Symeon saw the history of corruptible existence as a history of portion of flesh which had been taken by God from the Adam's side and transmitted through generations to the Theotokos' womb preparing Christ's Incarnation. For Symeon then, the act of repentance became a necessary act performed before the reception of Eucharist. So, repentant partaking of Christ's deified flesh is a culmination of history of corruptible materiality. Repentant Eucharist, for Symeon, redeems the Adams reception of fruit and his failed repentance. In this way, Symeon embeds the penitent subject into the long history of Christian eschatology making salvation happen through the decisive act of repentance here and now every time during the communion.

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Table of contents

Introduction

In his discourses, Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), arguably the most important tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantine spiritual writer, repeatedly quotes Matthew 4:17.[1] He writes: "'Repent (*metanoeite*) for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.' He (God) is at hand. He stands at the gates of your hearts and mouths."[2] Symeon here writes about the Eucharist and links it to repentance. The latter thus becomes a decisive act on which salvation of both body and soul depends. In the present study, I explore how the same theme of repentance shapes Symeon's views on monastic behaviour, bodily practice and the whole history of creation in his numerous writings produced predominantly before his resignation from the post of *hegoumenos* of St. Mamas monastery in 1005.

At the beginning of this undertaking, it is important to note that I read Symeon's texts against other texts to which Symeon can be connected in his intellectual genealogy. A central place is reserved for the *Ladder* of John Climacus (ca. 579- ca. 649), composed approximately four hundred years before Symeon's time. Symeon repeatedly refers to this text, which was considered to be a monastic "bible."[3] In my study, I explore the connection between both authors, to which many scholars have drawn attention but which has not been studied yet.[4] Thus, comparing Symeon with other authors, I particularly focus on the connection between the views on penitence in the works of John and Symeon, especially as connected to the

[1] Alexander Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (800-1000) (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 1999)*, 1. Kazhdan frames the rule of the Macedonian dynasty with two figures: Photios at the beginning and Symeon the New Theologian at the end.

[2] Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* II.7, 236-238 (ed. Darrouzès); trans. Golitzin, 1:113 (modified): "Μετανοεῖτε · ἤγγικε γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν." Ἤγγικε, πρὸ τῶν πυλῶν ἵσταται τῶν καρδιῶν καὶ τῶν στομάτων ὑμῶν ·

[3] Piroska Nagy, *Le don des larmes au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2000), 96; Alexis Torrance, *Repentance in Late Antiquity: Eastern Asceticism and the Framing of the Christian Life c. 400-650 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 158-159.

[4] E.g. Derek Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 205; John Chryssavgis, *John Climacus: From the Egyptian Desert to the Sinaite Mountain* (London: Routledge, 2016), 58.

construction of the penitent monastic self. However, even though John Climacus is significant for my reading of Symeon, my main aim is to read Symeon against Symeon himself, so to speak, in an attempt to shed light on the consistency of his discussion of penitence throughout his oeuvre.[5]

Earlier studies about Symeon mostly treated the topics of spiritual fatherhood, mysticism, theology of light, and Symeon's relation to the earlier generations of Eastern theologians.[6] Also, special attention was paid to Symeon's affective piety expressed in ritual weeping and gift of tears.[7] Symeon was studied significantly by Russian scholars who embedded him into the history of the Orthodox Church and its tradition.[8] However, the interest to Symeon in Russia appeared even before the Revolution; it happened then that most of his and his pupil Niketas Stethatos' works were translated and published.[9] Nowadays, in the Western scholarship, Symeon's texts are studied mostly from the interdisciplinary perspective which involves close interaction of queer theology, literary theory, and affect theory.[10]

I should point out that in my work I treat Symeon as *hegoumenos* and as theologian. Of course, these identities are methodologically established for the sake of coherence of my analysis. Symeon as *hegoumenos* and author creates *Catechetical* works for his monastic

[5] In his article, István Perczel argued that Symeon is usually perceived as "strange" with "dangerous" ideas if one tries to interpret them from the perspective of theologies of modernist Churches. István Perczel, "The Bread, the Wine, and the Immaterial Body," in *The Eucharist in Theology and Philosophy*, eds. István Perczel, Réka Forrai and György Geréby (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 135.

[6] For example, see: H. J. M. Turner, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Spiritual Fatherhood* (Leiden: Brill, 1990); Alexander Golitzin, "Earthly Angels and Heavenly Men": The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Niketas Stethatos, and the Tradition of "Interiorized Apocalyptic" in Eastern Christian Ascetical and Mystical Literature," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, no. 55 (2001): 125-153.

[7] For this, see: Irénée Hausherr, *Penthos: la doctrine de la componction dans l'Orient chrétien* (Roma: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1944); Evelyne Patlagean, "Piangere a Bisanzio," in *Santità e potere a Bisanzio* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1992), 73-86; Hannah Hunt, *Joy-Bearing Grief: Tears of Contrition in the Writings of the Early Syrian and Byzantine Fathers* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

[8] Hilarion Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[9] Symeon's works were translated and published in the Russian Empire in 1890 and 1892. There was also earlier translation of Practical Chapters in 1852. Symeon's *Hymns* were published in 1917 as well.

[10] A good example are the works on Symeon by Derek Krueger. For instance, see: Derek Krueger, "Homoerotic Spectacle and the Monastic Body in Symeon the New Theologian," in *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline*, eds. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 99-118.

community caring about the questions of discipline, monastic behaviour, and monastic everyday life practice. Symeon as theologian in the text is preoccupied with bigger dramatic questions such as history of creation or interpretation of Biblical narrative about transgression. In the end of my research, I attempt to merge these authorial identities showing how penitent subject, a monk, constructed in Symeon's texts, existing within the context of the eleventh-century monastic community in Constantinople becomes embedded into the bigger narrative of Christian history of salvation.

My concern with corporeality in the works of Symeon and John comes from the fact that penitence is often described as a corporeal experience.[11] I explore this issue in close relation with the discourse of Incarnation, a mystery that transformed the understanding of the materiality of flesh and text as such.[12] Paying special attention to the metaphorical relations between text, food, and flesh I analyse the Eucharistic aspects of language of both authors in question. In my study, *logos* as rational part of a soul, *logos* as textual discourse and *Logos* (Christ) incarnated in flesh have an entangled metaphorical relation to each other as they of course do in the discourse of Christianity.[13] In my discussion of the possible relations between corporeality and penitence, I return every time to the discussion of the mystery of Incarnation which influenced, as I attempt to show, both John's and Symeon's writings.

In this way, my work contributes to the study of repentance in Byzantium in general and in John's and Symeon's works in particular. My comparison of Symeon to other authors deepens our understanding of his intellectual genealogy. At the same time, in my work, I attempt to contribute to the problem of subjectivity and individualism in Byzantine and

[11] Michel Foucault explored this connection in his (only recently published) fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality*. For details, see: Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 4*: Les aveux de la chair*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard, 2018).

[12] *Logos* is a word that has multiple meanings. For instance, "oral expression", "word", "story", "thought", "reason". The sacred writings of the Bible were God's Logos incarnate. See: Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 7. Throughout my study, I repeatedly return to play on different meanings of this word.

[13] For the detailed explanation of these issues, for example, see: Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Karmen MacKendrick, *Word Made Skin: Figuring Language at the Surface of Flesh* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

Western medieval literature which implications I will discuss in detail a bit further in this introduction. I consider my undertaking as a first step in the future research that will be devoted to the synchronical comparison of Byzantine and Western spiritual affectivity and practice of penitence in the period of tenth and eleventh centuries.

Returning to the question of penitent self or subjectivity I would claim that it deserves special treatment in my introduction, since this notion is a key for my work. Of course, the idea of subjectivity is closely tied with the idea of individual which has been a stumbling-block for European intellectual tradition, and it has also caused much debate particularly in modern scholarship on the middle ages.[14] In 1985, Alexander Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein wrote about Symeon's "individualism": "The tendency toward individual isolation was also reflected in the emphasis on personal means of salvation that developed during the tenth century. The teachings of Symeon the New Theologian epitomized this disposition."[15] Even if this is a very interesting and provocative hypothesis, it was produced in line with the trend in the scholarship of the time to discover the individual in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. To locate Symeon's "individuality" within the Macedonian Renaissance might have been a promising way to produce in the realm of historiographical competition between the scholars of Byzantium and the Western middle ages a Byzantine answer to the Western Renaissance of the twelfth century.[16]

Be that as it may, Symeon's spiritual affectivity indeed preceded the Western practices of weeping and affective piety of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[17] Scholarship on the

[14] Lots of works that I name here implicitly raised the problem of medieval individualism or its absence. I would like to point out an important study on this issue by Aron Gurevich, Soviet-Russian medievalist, who promoted the methodology of the *Analles* school in the post-soviet intellectual space: Aron Gurevich, *The Origins of European Individualism*, trans. K. Judelson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

[15] Alexander Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1990), 14.

[16] Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927).

[17] Derek Krueger, "Divine Fantasy and the Erotic Imagination in the *Hymns* of Symeon the New Theologian," in *Dream, Memory and Imagination in Byzantium*, eds. Neil Bronwein and Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 318.

Western middle ages on this same matter tended to follow the patterns of the debate on individuality, arguing that religious weeping and somatic piety became a response to the Cluniac reform and the stronger ecclesiastical control over the lives of believers in the West.[18] In turn, recent scholarship on Symeon's transmission of penitent archetypes in his oeuvre assumes that, by contrast with Kazhdan, hardly we can interpret Symeon's catechedical guidances about true repentance as means for the production of *individuals*.[19] This is not stated to claim that there was no individuality in the middle ages but rather to point out that the notion of *individual* is problematic as such. In current studies, the focus shifted from the individual to the analysis of how different power structures produce the contexts in which the subjective identities can be shaped, transformed, prescribed or suppressed.

In my analysis, I follow the conceptual framework that Derek Krueger used in his study on the formation of penitent subjectivities in the context of Byzantine liturgical practice. Krueger's approach is indebted to the Foucauldian tradition of interpretation of power. Pointing out liturgy as the main instrument of producing penitent subjects, Krueger refers to the idea of interpellation, introduced by Foucault's teacher, Louis Althusser, and further used by Judith Butler.[20] According to this concept, the identity of a subject can be produced by the power structures or agents of power through the process of naming. If a priest calls someone a sinner, the subject who is being called tends to identify with this speech. In this way, the Byzantine liturgy with its staged performances and recitation of sacred texts cast the congregation in the roles of Adam, David, etc. and thus shaped the penitent subjectivities that defined every individual present as sinner longing for redemption.

The first chapter of my thesis sets the stage for the comparison of John and Symeon. It focuses on John's description of a monastic prison in which multiple male subjects torture and

[18] Piroska Nagy, "Ritual Weeping as Ritual in the Medieval West," *The International Journal of Anthropology* 48, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 119-137.
[19] Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 213.
[20] Ibid., 24, 200.

subdue their flesh. I pay special attention to John's practice of authorship and to the rhetorical instruments which shape the narrative so as to instill in the audience a desire to imitate the practice of repentance. The descriptions of tortured flesh, penitence, humility, and the monastic practice of self-control are impressive parts of John's narrative. I explore the metaphorical side of it trying to point out the discursive levels of language which come into play tying all these themes together.

My second chapter is devoted to Symeon and the writings about penitence that he, supposedly, addressed to the community in St. Mamas monastery. With Foucault as my starting point, I analyse Symeon's writings on penitence as the *hegoumenos's* tools of setting patterns of monastic behaviour within the monastery.[21] I discuss Symeon's authorial persona as *hegoumenos* and the function of transmission of texts in shaping the monastic community. Furthermore, I analyse Symeon's practice of true repentance, which involves the recitation of prayers and certain corporeal techniques such as self-beating. I argue that the symbolism of some actions in Symeon's practice was inspired by John's discourse in the *Ladder*. At the end of the chapter, I turn to the discussion of how, in the works of John and Symeon, the communal identity of the penitent subject can be expressed through text and performance.

In the last chapter, I turn to the theological dimension of Symeon's works. I focus on his interpretation of the Book of Genesis and Creation, comparing his discourse with homilies on the same subject by John Chrysostom. After the discussion of how Symeon reshapes the original narrative of Adam and Eve's transgression by introducing the concept of repentance, I turn to Symeon's interpretation of the history of creation as the history of a portion of flesh once taken from Adam's side. I argue that in this part, Symeon's focus on flesh and its history

[21] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

culminating in the process of Incarnation underscores, in the end, repentance and the Eucharist as the main means for salvation against the background of Christian eschatological linearity.

Chapter 1. John Climacus' penitent self

1.1. John Climacus and Symeon the New Theologian

However distant texts may be from one another in time and space, they tend to overcome both. Modern scholarship often links Symeon the New Theologian's views on corporeality and penitence in the eleventh century to the ideas on these topics by John Climacus expressed in his *Ladder* approximately four hundred years before.[22] This chapter aims to question this continuity by analysing John's views on penitence. While the idea of a strong tradition and continuity occurs in most works where John and Symeon are mentioned together, I would like to raise the question of similarity and difference once again, since Symeon lived in a very different period and a very different location: he was an urban monk in Constantinople rather than a desert ascetic. In my view, the application of ideas about desert monasticism to the urban environment of eleventh-century Constantinople have wider contextual implications. It is a well-known fact that Symeon relied on the writings of John and that they influenced him heavily throughout his life. Niketas Stethatos wrote in the Life of Symeon:

> While he (Symeon) was there he searched through his family library and took out the *Ladder* of the divine John. He studied this and, like some *good soil*, received *the seed of the word in his heart* and prepared himself day by day to grow and *bear fruit* [Lk. 8:5-15].[23]

A study of Symeon's ideas can thus shed light on the reception of John's writings in eleventh-century Byzantium. I explore the possibility of a dialogue between these two figures and the refraction of ideas, since, to use Niketas's comparison, Symeon is among those *who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop* [Lk. 8:15]. Niketas also describes

[22] See e.g. John Chryssavgis, *John Climacus: From the Egyptian Desert to the Sinaite Mountain* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 76.

[23] Niketas Stethatos, *Life of Symeon the New Theologian* I.6, 21-24 (ed. Hausherr); trans. Greenfield, 17. Ἔνθεν τοι καὶ τὴν ἐκ προγόνων ἐρευνήσας βιβλιοθήκην λαμβάνει τὴν Κλίμακα τοῦ θεσπεσίου Ἰωάννου ἐκεῖθεν, ᾗ καὶ προσομιλῶν ὡς γῆ τις ἀγαθὴ τὸν σπόρον τοῦ λόγου ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ἐδέχετο καὶ αὐξάνειν ὁσημέραι καὶ καὶ καρποφορεῖν ἑαυτὸν παρεσκεύαζε [cf. Lk 8:5-15].

how after reading John's text Symeon changed his practices of prayer. He began to pray among the dead to remember the inevitable end:

> And then, while he was studying the aforementioned book, he found this sentence there: Insensitivity (*anaisthesia*) is the demise of the soul and the death of the intellect before the death of the body. When he read this saying, Symeon found the treatment that he sought in that book, and he began praying among tombs while he kept vigil, painting an image (*eikona*) of the dead upon his heart. He also began an all-out war against this insensitivity (*anaisthesia*), engaging in more rigorous fasting and vigils and meditating on the remembrance of death and the judgement to come.[24]

Insensitivity (*anaisthesia*) — step eighteen of the *Ladder* — is a concept John uses to describe the life of one who constantly remains in self-contradiction and shows fake piety.[25] Symeon's desire to rush immediately to step eighteen of the *Ladder* is worth noting here. As is common in hagiography, Niketas depicts Symeon as a living saint even before his admission to the monastery.[26] Symeon's desire to engage in a battle with insensitivity also demonstrates his opposition to the fake piety and insensitive spirituality of his own period. In his own writings, Symeon wrote a lot about ritualism which conflicted with his own and his spiritual father Symeon Eulabes's ideas of emotional spiritual devotion.[27] Thus, through this dialogue with the *Ladder* Niketas shows how his urban protagonist was paradoxically linked to the desert monastic tradition of penitence, mourning and prayer, using it to address the issues of the ritualistic urban spirituality of his own time.

A discussion of John's ideas and language of penitence is therefore required to fully understand how Symeon adopted, adapted and changed them in his own thinking. In this vein,

[24] Niketas Stethatos, *Life of Symeon the New Theologian* I.6, 33-39 (ed. Hausherr); trans. Greenfield, 19: "Διὸ καὶ τῇ εἰρημένῃ βίβλῳ προσομιλῶν εὗρεν ἐπὶ λέξεως οὕτως ἔχουσαν · Ἀναισθησία ἐστὶ νέκρωσις ψυχῆς καὶ θάνατος νοὸς πρὸ θανάτου σώματος. Τοῦτο ὡς ἀνέγνω τὸ ῥῆμα ὁ Συμεὼν τὴν Θεραπείαν ἐν τῇ τοιαύτῃ βίβλῳ ζητήσας καὶ εὑρών, προσηύχετο ἐν σοροῖς ἀγρυπνῶν, εἰκόνα νεκρῶν ζωγραφῶν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ καὶ ὅλον τὸν κατ᾽ αὐτῆς ἤρετο πόλεμον, νηστείᾳ μὲν εὐτονωτέρᾳ χρησάμενος καὶ ἀγρυπνίᾳ, μνήμῃ δὲ θανάτου καὶ κρίσεως ἀδολεσχῶν." For the quotation from Climacus, see: John Climacus, *The Ladder* 18; PG 88:932; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 191.

[25] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 18.

[26] Hannah Hunt, *The Joy-Bearing Grief*, 177.

[27] For example, Symeon's *Fourth Catechetical Discourse on Penitence* where he describes how amazed and frustrated the public was at the words of Symeon Eulabes about the everyday weeping and communion. For this, see: Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 4 (ed. Krivochéine); trans. de Catanzaro, 70-89.

I will focus on the way John describes penitent subjects in the *Ladder*. Most pertinent here is the fifth step of the *Ladder*, entitled "On intensive and manifest repentance (*metanoia*), where one also speaks about the life of the holy damned, and about the Prison."[28] Here John allegorically describes how exemplary penitence should be performed. John tells the story of his dwelling in a place called "prison" where various male figures torment their flesh with ineffable torture.[29] They are mortifying their flesh to repent and get an answer from God. Since this relation of body/flesh and self-explorative knowledge seems to be crucial for John's writing, this chapter considers it in detail. In the following chapter I will explore whether the same idea can be traced in Symeon's writings.

1.2. Prologue to Climacus' views on penitence

In the Eastern Christian tradition, the penitent self could be constructed in different ways. According to Derek Krueger, in Byzantium, the primary instrument of shaping the common penitent identity for Christians was the ritual performance of Psalms, Biblical readings, and liturgical poetry during the liturgy. Identified with Biblical archetypes, speakers were themselves becoming the subjects of divine judgement and mercy.[30] In this way, Scripture and liturgical texts provided the instruments for self-control in thoughts (*logismoi*) while conscience itself (*syneidos* or *syneidesis*) was playing the role of an inner impartial judge and an instrument for critical self-analysis.[31] In the *Ladder*, the parable about the prison exemplifies

[28] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:764; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 121: Περὶ μετανοίας μεμεριμνημένης καὶ ἐναργοῦς, ἐν ᾗ καὶ βίος τῶν ἁγίων καταδίκων · καὶ περὶ τῆς φυλακῆς.

[29] Based on John's biography and his ascetic dwellings in Egypt, John Chryssavgis calls the place described by John "Alexandrian prison." Chryssavgis also argues that John's text was written for the monks in *cenobium*. In this way, prison of penitents is a synonym to *cenobitic* type of living. Chryssavgis, *John Climacus*, 23.

[30] Derek Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 2.

[31] Derek Krueger gives an example for such view of conscience from John Chrysostom's *Seventeenth Homily on Genesis*. Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 14-15.

subjects undergoing the liminal and painful process of repentance, the description of which John presents as his real-life experience of encountering penitent subjects. In this part of his narrative, which I will call a *parable* on penitence, sin is a condition that obscures the conscience, making it heavy and impure:

> Overcome by the disgrace of their reflections and their conscience, they could not speak, could not pray to God, could not even make a beginning of prayer; and filled, as it seemed, with darkness and empty despair, they could offer God only a *blank (alogon)* soul and a *voiceless (aphonon)* mind.[32]

Here, John describes the intense mental state of the penitent subjects in the process of repentance, whereby their intellectual faculties do not function properly. As John shows further, the only attitude towards the self that these penitents can maintain is the mortification of the flesh. The submission of the external that prevails over the internal.

So, the experience of penitence for John is deeply corporeal. The subjects of the parable about the prison alienate the part which they consider to be responsible for sin – the flesh. To some extent, then, sin eradicates the self, it is an inner schism between the spiritual and material in which a fragmented subjectivity suffers. The condition of sin is a loss of subjective unity: the bodily parts of the subject are not subdued to the mind which loses its ability to lucidly control the self. An ability to speak and to control the self is the core of subjectivity for John. Thus, his penitent subjects eradicate the remnants of their self in the process of repentance to show their unworthiness and to distance themselves from God. In a way, they prefer to lose the rest of their humanity because they are ill with sin and thus do not deserve salvation. The only spiritual instrument that can restore the defiled subjectivity is mourning as a part of repentance. Hannah Hunt points out that mourning is a primary function of monastic identity and essential

[32] Here, John uses this word (*alogon*) frequently and I translate it in this context as "blank". Later on in the text its meaning will shift to the subjects who are deprived of human characteristics, particularly the primary human characteristic of speech. John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:765; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 122: […] ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν λογισμῶν καὶ τοῦ συνειδότος ἀτιμίας εὐποροῦντας, μηδὲ πῶς ἢ πόθεν τὴν ἱκεσίαν ποιήσασθαι εὑρίσκοντας, μόνην ψυχὴν ἄλογον, καὶ νοῦν ἄφωνον τῷ Θεῷ παριστῶντας, σκοτίας πεπληρωμένους, καὶ ψιλῆς ἀπογνώσεως.

for penitence in the desert tradition; this also applies to John's case. A monk is someone who mourns the loss of innocence.[33] In John's words:

> Theology and mourning do not go together, for one dissipates the other. The difference between a theologian and a mourner is that the one sits on a professorial chair while the other passes his days in rags on a dungheap.[34]

The passage to some extent points to the dichotomy between desert and city.[35] Late antique monastic withdrawal from the world was entwined with negative perceptions of urban space, with a refusal to provide a coherent theological doctrine, and not least with the discourse of Early Christian martyrdom.[36] John is not preoccupied with the history of creation within the Biblical narrative, but rather with the archaeology of the individual self only, and this puts him at odds with Symeon, as will be shown in the following chapters. Unlike Symeon's, John's ideas concern the self in the present, it turns inwards to unlock understanding and rarely locates itself within a huge picture of Christian history. John's authorial persona, as we will see, is embedded in the tradition of desert monasticism expressing the practice of repentance in its limits. He presents his project not as a coherent teaching but as a demonstration of excerpts from personal experiences, finding material in the rhetorical and narrative structures of the *Ladder* to which we are turning now.[37]

1.3. John's *Ladder* and his authorial persona

One can hardly characterise the *Ladder* in prescriptive terms. Regardless of genre, the *Ladder* is indeed a literary testimony of how people live their corporeal existence and overcome

[33] Hannah Hunt, "The Monk as Mourner: Gendered Eastern-Christian Self-Identity in the Seventh Century," *The Journal of Medieval Monastic Studies* 2 (2013): 23.

[34] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 7, *PG* 88:805; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 139: Οὐχ ἁρμόζει πενθοῦσι θεολογία · διαλύσιν γὰρ αὐτῶν τὸ πένθος πέφυκεν. Ὁ μὲν γὰρ τῷ ἐπὶ Θρόνου καθημένῳ διδασκαλικῷ ἔοικεν · ὁ δὲ, τῷ κοπρίας καὶ σάκκου διατρίβοντι.

[35] Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 55.

[36] Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 4.

[37] *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. by Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975), XXI.

their passions. John examines these issues through a combination of confessions, observations, parables and anecdotal stories which transcend the boundaries of one specific genre.[38] Parallels can be found in the *Historia Lausiaca* and *Apophthegmata Patrum*, which are also collections of field notes, sayings, and experiences of desert dwellers. Such a collage method of narrative structure makes the identity of both author and audience unclear. The variety of authorial strategies masks the intended audience of the text: was it written for the community of the Monastery of Burning Bush only or also for lay people? Most scholars link this question to John's biography and identity which both remain problematic.[39]

One way to read this text is considering John as a *hegoumenos* writing for his monks in the early seventh century. From this perspective, John is an author who guides his reader, presumably a monk, through the lists of vices and virtues, collected stories and various habitual examples, which can serve as models for imitation. At the same time, the *Ladder* has many stories about lay life and memories of the life that was left behind, so it may also have served as a guide for lay people. It tells a story of a person who managed to live through the pleasures of lay life before rejecting it, and to learn the joys of the spirit afterwards in the monastic dwelling.[40] This liquidity of the narrative, unbridled by genre frames, granted the text with extreme popularity in different periods and different geographical regions of the Christian world.[41]

The ladder metaphor used by John to describe the process of spiritual growth appeared earlier in Origen's to illustrate the way in which soul possibly ascents to heaven.[42] Some scholars argue that the ladder is not only a way to structure a step-by-step narrative but also to underscore the idea that Earth and Heaven are connected to each other, as in the process of

[38] Hunt, *Joy-Bearing Grief*, 62.
[39] Hunt, *Joy-Bearing Grief*, 63.
[40] Chryssavgis, *John Climacus*, 15-20.
[41] Hunt, "The Monk as Mourner," 24.
[42] See, for example: Origen, *Contra Celsum* VI.21.

Transfiguration.[43] Thus the metaphor illustrates the connection between the sacred and the profane, and makes clear that the profane can be elevated and transformed.

The authorial persona created by John is also connected with penitence as textual structure. It revolves around the idea of monastic humbleness. In Christian literary discourse, authorship is obviously a practice of creation which was the domain of God only, so the practice of Christian authorship became closely related to the idea of humiliation. When writing a text, an author projected a Christian self that could fit into the discourse of humility and modesty before God the Creator, while imitating Him at the same time.[44] Throughout the *Ladder,* John makes various intrusions to present himself as penitent and unworthy; he uses himself as an example of penitence and inserts into his narrative descriptions of his literary penitents as real examples he had witnessed with his own eyes.

John's chapter "On talkativeness and silence," for instance, is one of the shortest in the *Ladder,* illustrating the vice and virtue in question by means of the text itself. He also says there: "I would prefer not to write too much about this, despite the urgings of my wily passions."[45] Consequently, the practice of authorship is presented as a practice of self-control and self-exercise in humiliation and control of passions through the work of the narrative. Even though the act of writing is an act of silence, at the same time, here we can assume that writing was a manner of speech for John.[46] Thus, John places himself in an even more severe self-restriction than Gregory Theologian used to by pledging silence for the holiday of Lent and replacing verbal silence with writing. John considers his text as an act of speech towards the audience. Thus, the authorial persona manifested in the text is presented as pursuing the same

[43] Hunt, *Joy-Bearing Grief*, 63.
[44] Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 2-3.
[45] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 11; *PG* 88:852: "Περὶ πολυλογίας καὶ σιωπῆς." Καὶ πολλὰ περὶ τούτων ἔγωγε γράφειν οὐ βούλομαι, κἂν αἱ τοῦ παθῶν πανουργίαι τοῦτο ποιεῖν προτρέπωνται.
[46] Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 3.

virtuous patterns of behaviour as prescribed in the text, and the text in this way mirrors the practice of ascetic life.

The parable about prisoners shows John walking in the realm of mourning and describing what he sees. It is inserted into the text as a story which illustrates the main idea of the chapter—penitence. John starts his parable by addressing his potential listeners in this way: "Come gather round, come closer and listen, and I will tell a story (*diegesomai*) to you, to all of you who angered God; gather around me and see the great thing He revealed to my soul for your edification."[47] Here we once again arrive to an act of speech within the text. John's appeal introduces a story within a plot which intensifies the truthfulness of John's account for his readers/listeners, since he, as an author, refers to his extra-textual "real" experience. In his own words, he is not a producer of a story—it was God who showed (*hypodeiknumi*) it to him.

The narrative strategies within the text present a difficult combination of *mimesis* and *diegesis*.[48] John narrates a story within a story, and in this story, which is located on the metadiegetic level John himself is a protagonist. However, in the embedded story, John reproduces the multiple voices which he hears in the prison. There he switches to first-person narration identifying his authorial voice with the penitent subjects of the prison. Throughout the whole narration, it is important to ask who is speaking at any given point. Is it the voice of John's narrator or the voices of the penitents in the prison? This mimetic technique of identification with penitents is an instrument used for a better association of reader/listener with the characters of the narrative. Most of those characters speak with quotations from the Psalms from time to time, which links their penitent identity to that of David, an important

[47] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:764: Συνδράμετε, καὶ προσέλθετε, δεῦτε καὶ ἀκούσετε, καὶ διηγήσομαι ὑμῖν, πάντες οἱ τὸν Θεὸν παροργίσαντες, ἀθροίσθητε καὶ ἴδετε, ὅσα πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν ὑπέδειξε τῇ ψυχῇ μου. *Diegesis* (narration, story) is an important notion for literary theory. Plato's distinction between diegesis and mimesis was key to the differentiation of the manner of authorial speech in literary texts. See: Plato, *Republic*, Book III. I refer to this term here so that it could be clearer in my further argument that John, as an author, switches between different modes of narration: diegetic and mimetic.

[48] Plato, *The Republic* III.5-6.

archetype of Christian penitence.[49] In some places, John interjects to indicate that he is quoting others but sometimes his quotations from the imprisoned penitents continue uninterrupted for a considerable length. This semi-mimetic style through which John associates himself with penitent subjects of the prison blurs the boundary between the author, the characters, and the reader for the sake of identification and imitation.

John's parable plays an expressive rhetorical role in *the Ladder*. As we noticed above, John constantly switches between the modes of narration in this place, as it seems, to stimulate a response in the reader/listener and to transmit an emotion. The narrative setting shares the same characteristics with the bodies of the penitents, it functions as an extension of the sinful corporeality. Sensory perception is preoccupied with smell, dirt, and sight of the animal condition of the fallen but penitent monks. The distinct border between the real and unreal is also blurred in this part of the text because of John's explications: "And don't you count the things told as myths, I beg, brothers."[50]

1.4. The prison and the corporeality of penitence

The prison which John describes in his narrative appears even earlier than the fifth step devoted to penitence. In the earlier fourth step "About the blessed and always remembered obedience,"[51] John gives an elaborate description of the monastic prison where the fallen monks dwell. They live there without any food besides bread and vegetables and constantly pray under the command of a certain Isaac. John adds that they live separately, maximum two

[49] Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 17-23.
[50] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:772: Καὶ μὴ μύθους τὰ εἰρημένα λογίσησθε, ἐρωτῶ, ἀδελφοί.
[51] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 4; *PG* 88:677: Περὶ τῆς μακαρίας, καὶ ἀειμνήστου ὑπακοῆς.

per one cell, and "they truly sought the face of the God of Jacob."[52] By mentioning the name of Jacob, John directly refers to the name of his text—the *Ladder*—which is an allegory of Jacob's Ladder.

In the fifth step, "On painstaking and visible repentance (*metanoia*) of which the life of holy convicts consists, and about the prison", John turns to the detailed description of the things he saw in prison while spending there a month out of curiosity.[53] He describes—with terror and pleasure—scenes of severe penitence and mortification. This part of the *Ladder* is significantly focused on the body (*soma*) and flesh (*sarx*) which John seems to use without a clear distinction. John's use of terms does not present a strict dogmatism or coherent system. Corporeality for him stands for an entity that should be subdued, even though both, *soma* and *sarx*, are not negative as such. They were created by God, and God "neither caused nor created evil and, therefore, those who assert that certain passions come naturally to the soul are quite wrong."[54] Rather, man turns his natural impulses into sin through wrong intention and application in thoughts (*logismoi*). Flesh as a domain of these impulses demands control by the mind. Controlling the mind (*nous*) through penitence and prayer is therefore a monk's primary task. That is why John pays so much attention to the documentation of thoughts: he, for instance, recounts that he saw a monk wearing a tablet for inscriptions (*ptychion*) on his belt. This tablet served to record the monk's thoughts (*logismoi*), including temptations and impulses; the documented thoughts were then shown to the *hegoumenos* or spiritual father.[55] Thus the act of writing was also both an important practice in self-examination and prevented the self from fallacy by revealing it publicly.

[52] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 4; *PG* 88:704: Αὕτη ἡ διαγωγὴ τῶν ὄντως ζητούντων τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ Θεοῦ Ἰακώβ.

[53] It is important to note that John asked the *hegoumenos* for a long time to send him there to see the true penitence. John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 122.

[54] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 26; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 251.

[55] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 4; *PG* 88:701; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 105.

In John's work, both *soma* and *sarx* are connected to the ideas of knowledge and self, thus deeper exploration of their use in context may reveal details about the process of constructing penitent subjectivity in Late Antiquity. John Chryssavgis shows that John's use of these notions is extremely ambivalent and that there is no strict relation to be discovered.[56] According to the apostle Paul, however, to whom John also refers, *sarx* is a kind of carnal will which has its own agency and can obscure the self.[57] John writes that flesh desires flesh as blood desires blood, clay desires clay, and worms desire worms, showing that matter is always in the desire of the same matter.[58] Flesh is ambiguous because it is a friend and an enemy at the same time; John quotes the apostle Paul and argues that, in this passage, the apostle speaks about flesh: "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24).[59] In the end, one should be afraid not of death, since Christ died and rose, but of lapsing into sin which deprives one of salvation.

Flesh is also crucial for the definitions of repentance which John gives in the beginning. According to him, firstly, "repentance is ever distrustful of continuous corporeal calling."[60] The idea of body as a stranger which has its own "thinking" and demands pertains here. The struggle against this voice constitutes one of the main aims of monastic penitential practice. A second definition of repentance in Climacus' *Ladder* is "uncared self-caring."[61] This paradoxical definition goes hand in hand with "self-interpretative thought (*logismos*)."[62] The

[56] Chryssavgis, *John Climacus*, 68.

[57] Rom. 8:6: The mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace. (τὸ γὰρ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς θάνατος, τὸ δὲ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος ζωὴ καὶ εἰρήνη). According to Chryssavgis, in Paul's Epistles "flesh" denotes the whole person, which is fallen, while the "spirit" denotes the whole person redeemed. See: Chryssavgis, *John Climacus*, 67.

[58] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 15; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 174.

[59] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 15.; *PG* 88:885; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 175: Τὴν μὲν ἐμὴν ταύτην καὶ οὐκ ἐμὴν ἐχθρὰν φίλην σάρκα, Παῦλος μὲν θάνατον προσηγόρευσε · Τίς με γὰρ, φησὶ, ῥύσεται ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου; (Rom. 7:24).

[60] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:764: Μετάνοιά ἐστι σωματικῆς κατακλήσεως διηνεκὴς ἀνελπιστία.

[61] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:764: αμέριμνος αὐτομέριμνος.

[62] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:764: αὐτοματόκριτος λογισμός.

process of caring about the self is not understood in classical antique terms of taking care of the body but rather in terms of taking care of thoughts, the above mentioned *logismoi*. This is rather a care about the internal self. Finally, "repentance is a forceful suppression of a stomach, and torment of a soul during strong perception."[63] Fasting and forcing the soul into perception go together: the control of food consumption is a way to gain control over both body and soul. The focus for John here is on sensitivity (*aisthesia*), the core quality of the soul to focus on penitence (*metanoia*) and mourning (*penthos*), as discussed at the beginning of this chapter.[64] Symeon, after reading John's *Ladder,* fought against his own insensitivity (*anaisthesia*). Thus, the body with all its filth and incomprehensibility should be transformed and elevated through the redirection of desire.[65] This desire does not only concern food but also erotic desire. Ideally, sexual temptation should be transformed into praise of God:

> I was told once about the astonishing level of chastity attained by someone. 'There was a man who, having looked on a body of great beauty, at once gave praise to its Creator and after one look was stirred to love God and to weep copiously, so that it was marvellous how something that could have brought low one person managed to be the cause of a heavenly crown for another. And if such a man feels and behaves in similar fashion on similar occasions, then he has already risen to immortality before the general resurrection.'[66]

The desire towards the corporeal is replaced by tears of wonder caused by the beauty of creation. The body of another person becomes a reason for elevation and transformation of thought rather than the source of attraction dragging one into the pit of sin. It is the eye of the beholder that defines the way a body is seen, and while elevating the body of the other thinking of it as of the Godly creation and controlling desire one elevates his/her own body. However,

[63] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:764: Μετάνοιά ἐστι θλίψις γαστρὸς ἰσχυρὰ, καὶ ψυχῆς πλῆξις ἐν αἰσθήσει κραταιᾷ.

[64] As a reminder, I would once again refer to the beginning of this chapter which shows that Symeon was struggling with his insensitivity (*an-aisthesia*) after reading the *Ladder*.

[65] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 239.

[66] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 15; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 179.

there are many who fell victim to sin. In the beginning of the chapter on penitence, John describes the practices with which fallen monks subdue their treacherous flesh:

> I went therefore to that abode of penitents (*metanounton mone*), to that land of true grief (*penthounton chora*), and if I may be so bold as to say so, I actually saw what the eye of an inattentive man never saw, what the ear of a lackadaisical man never heard, what never entered the heart of a sluggard (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9). I saw things done and said that could only draw down the mercy of God, *customs* (*epitedeumata*) and *forms of behaviour* (*schemata*) that quickly win His love for men.[67]

John refers to the exclusiveness of his experience, even though he assumes that only inattentive and lazy people have not heard of such things. He describes the things, words and customs that please God and win His *philanthropia*:

> I saw some of those accused yet innocent men stand all night until dawn in the open air, their feet never moving, pitifully pounded by the natural urge to sleep, giving themselves no rest, reproaching themselves, driving sleep away with abuse and insults. Others raised their eyes to heaven, wept, cried, and implored help from there. Others prayed with their hands tied behind their backs, like criminals, their faces blackened with grief and bent earthward, since they thought themselves unworthy to look up to heaven.[68]

Repentance thus is self-punishment and grief. As discussed earlier, penitent subjects for John are also the subjects who in a sense lost their inner *logos*, the capability of building inner speech, the constant self-reflective account about the self that is the main monastic practice to pursue in the cell and during the long days and nights. In one of the last steps, "About the sanctified body and quiet soul,"[69] John says that "brave and determined thinking

[67] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:764-765: Παραγενόμενος οὖν ἐγὼ ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν μετανοούντων μονῇ, καὶ ὄντως πενθούντων χώρᾳ, ἐώρακα ἀληθῶς, εἰ μὴ τολμηρὸν εἰπεῖν, ἅ ὡς ἔτυχεν ὀφθαλμὸς ἀνθρώπου ἀμελοῦς οὐκ εἶδε, καὶ οὗς ῥᾳθύμου οὐ δέχεται, καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίαν ὀκνηροῦ οὐκ ἀνέδη · πράγματα καὶ ῥήματα τὸν Θεὸν δυνάμενα βιάσασθαι, ἐπιτηδεύματά τε καὶ σχήματα τὴν αὐτοῦ φιλανθρωπίαν συντόμως κατακάμπτοντα.

[68] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG*, 88:765; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 122: Τοὺς μὲν τῶν ὑπευθύνων ἐκείνων τῶν ἀνευθύνων παννυχὶ μέχρι πρωΐας ἱσταμένους αἰθρίους, τοὺς πόδας ἀκινήτους ἔχοντας, καὶ τῷ ὕπνῳ ἐλεεινῶς κατακλονουμένους [κατακλωμένους] τῇ βίᾳ ταύτης τῆς φύσεως, καὶ μηδεμίαν ἀνάπαυσιν αὐτοῖς χαριζομένους · ἀλλ᾽ ἑαυτοὺς ἐπιπλήσσοντας καὶ ἀτιμίαις καὶ ὕδρεσι διυπνίζοντας · ἄλλους εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀτενίζοντας, καὶ τὴν ἐκεῖθεν βοήθειαν μετ᾽ ὀδυρμῶν καὶ βοῶν ᾽πικαλουμένους · ἑτέρους ἐν προσευχῇ παρισταμένους, καὶ ὄπισθεν ἑαυτῶν καταδίκων δίκην τὰς χεῖρας συνδήσαντας, εἰς γῆν τε τὸ σκοτεινὸν αὐτῶν πρόσωπον κλίναντας, καὶ ἀναξίους ἑαυτοὺς τῆς εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀναβλέψεως καταδικάσαντας, μηδέ τι εἰπεῖν, ἢ φθέγξασθαι, ἢ εὔξασθαι πρὸς Θεὸν, ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν λογισμῶν καὶ τοῦ συνειδότος ἀτιμίας εὐποροῦντας, μηδὲ πῶς ἢ πόθεν τὴν ἱκεσίαν ποιήσασθαι εὑρίσκοντας, μόνην ψυχὴν ἄλογον, καὶ νοῦν ἄφωνον τῷ Θεῷ παριστῶντας, σκοτίας πεπληρωμένους, καὶ ψιλῆς ἀπογνώσεως ·

[69] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 27; *PG* 88:1096: Περὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς σώματος καὶ ψυχῆς ἡσυχίας.

(*logismos*) is a friend of stillness."[70] So, the monk who walked through the whole of the *Ladder* receives the solid mind which prevents him from lapsing into temptations. Yet, as shown above, *logismoi* can also be the source of turmoil inside one's self. The word (*logos*) can become flesh (*sarx*) but not the other way around;[71] flesh should not become word in a sense that it should not enforce and explicate its corporeal will.

In a way, the image of a complete hesychast, a monk reaching the last steps of *The Ladder*, mirrors the image of those penitents in the prison who, according to John, can be blessed only for the degree of voluntary suffering they experience. The words from the Psalms become the most applicable instrument to describe the condition of those fallen people:

> The words of David could surely be seen to be fulfilled there, for there were men in hardship and bowed down to the end of their lives (*zoes*), going about each day in sadness, their bodies' wounds stinking of rottenness (Ps. 37:6 – 7) and yet unnoticed by them. They forgot to eat their bread (*arton*); their drink was mixed with tears. They ate dust and ashes instead of bread (*artou*); their bones stuck to their flesh and they were dried up like grass (Ps. 101:4–12). The only words you could hear from them were these: "Woe, woe, alas, alas! It is just, it is just. Spare us, spare us, O Lord." Some said, "Be merciful, be merciful"; others, more sadly: "Forgive us, Lord, forgive us if it is possible."[72]

John's short exclamations here are typical words for prayers. The prison becomes a place where fallen monks through severe mortification of their flesh try to reach out to God and receive His answer. They are constantly punishing themselves and addressing Him in despair. John reports their voices:

> 'Will there be forgiveness for those in darkness, for the lowly, for the convicted? Is our prayer vigorous enough to come before the face of the Lord, or has it been rejected – and rightly so – for being worthless and shameful? Or, if it came as far as the Lord, how much could it sway Him? Would it be successful? Powerful? Profitable? Effective? Coming as it does from unclean lips and

[70] John Climacus, *The Ladder*; *PG* 88:1097: Ἡσυχίας φίλος, ἀνδρεῖός τις καὶ ἀπότομος λογισμὸς.

[71] John 1:14: […] and the Word became flesh […] (Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο […]).

[72] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:768; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 123: Ἦν ἐκεῖ τὰ τοῦ Δαυῒδ ἐναργῶς θεάσασθαι ῥήματα, ταλαιπωροῦντας ἰδέσθαι, κατακαμπτουμένους ἕως τέλους τῆς ἑαυτῶν ζωῆς · ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν σκυθρωπάζοντας πορευομένους · προσόζοντας καὶ σεσημμένους σώματος μώλωκας, καὶ ἀνεπιμελήτους ὑπαρχοντας, ἐπιλενθανομένους τοῦ φαγεῖν τὸν ἄρτον αὐτῶν · τὸ δὲ πόμα τοῦ ὕδατος μετὰ κλαυθμοῦ κιρνῶντας · καὶ σποδὸν, καὶ τέφραν ἀντὶ ἄρτου ἐσθίοντας · καὶ κεκολλημένα ἔχοντας τὰ ὀστᾶ τῇ σαρκί · καὶ αὐτοὺς ὡσεὶ χόρτος ἐξηραμμένους. Οὐδὲν ἦν ἕτερον παρ᾽ αὐτοῖς ἀκούειν, εἰ μὴ ταῦτα τὰ ῥήματα · Οὐαὶ, οὐαὶ, οἶ μοι, οἴμοι, δικαίως, δικαίως · φεῖσαι, φεῖσαι, Δέσποτα. Οἱ μὲν ἔλεγον · Ἐλέησον, ἐλέησον · οἱ δὲ πάλιν ἔτι ἐλεεινότερον · Συγχώρησον, Δέσποτα, συγχώρησον ἐὰν ἐνδέχεται.

> bodies, it does not have much power.' […] Among them one had seen knees parched with multiple acts of repentance; the eyes melted out and sunk somewhere in depth; they were deprived of hair; having traces of beatings on cheeks inflamed with seething of multiple tears; outworn and pale faces, they did not have any difference from corpses. Breasts were suffering of beatings, and they spit with blood because they were constantly beating their breasts.[73]

The extreme corporeality and the description of injured flesh can be also analysed through the discourse of martyrdom in Christian writings three hundred years before John's *Ladder*. Even though John does not refer to martyrdom explicitly, detailed accounts of the tearing of flesh and torments in Roman prisons can be seen as analogous to this prison description in John's writing. The prison is a liminal place to encounter God and transform one's self remains, but here the martyrdom is voluntary. The desert mother Amma Syncletica draws a similar analogy: "In the world, if we commit an offence, even an involuntary one, we are thrown into prison; let us likewise cast ourselves into prison because of our sins, so that voluntary remembrance may anticipate the punishment that is to come".[74] The choice of voluntary punishment (*autoproaireton timoria*) replaces the punishment that is inevitable and involuntary (*akousion timoria*).[75] Prison becomes a sacred space in both cases, a place where a soul attempts to see God. John's curiosity to see the penitents with his own eyes and to witness the things happening is justified by his desire to imitate and to see the spectacle which can be interpreted as a spectacle of voluntary martyrdom.

The prison remained a powerful symbol in Christian imagination. With his parable, John literally fulfils the words of Syncletica. The similarities of the corporeality of penitence

[73] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:769, 772; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 124: ἆρα ἔστι συγχώρησις τοῖς σκοτεινοῖς, τοῖς ταπεινοῖς, τοῖς καταδίκοις; ἆρα ἴσχυσεν ἡμῶν ἡ δέησις εἰσελθεῖν ἐνώκιον Κυρίου; ἢ ἀπεστράφη δικαίως τεταπεινωμένη καὶ κατηχυμμένη; ἆρα δὲ εἰσελθοῦσα, πόσον ἐξευμενίσατο; πόσον ἤνυσεν; πόσον ὠφέλησι; πόσον ἐνήργησεν; ἐπειδὴ ἐξ ἀκαθάρτων στομάτων καὶ σωμάτων ἀνεπέμφθη, καὶ οὐ πολλὴν τὴν ἐσχὺν κέκτηται. […] Ἐν ἐκείνοις ἑωρᾶτο γόνατα ἐπεσκληκότα τῷ πλήθει τῶν μετανοιῶν · οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ἐκτακέντες καὶ ἔσω που εἰς βάθος δεδυκότες · τριχῶν ἀπεστερημένοι, παρειὰς κεκτημένοι πεπληγμένας, καὶ περιπεφλεγμένας τῇ ζέσει τῶν πολλῶν δακρύων · πρόσωπα καταμεμαρασμένα καὶ ὠχρὰ, μηδὲν ἐν συγκρίσει νεκρῶν διαφέροντα · στήθη ταῖς πληγαῖς ἀλγοῦντα καὶ αἱμάτων πτύελοι ἐκ τῶν ἐν τῷ στήθει πυγμῶν ἐκπεμπόμενοι.

[74] *Woman's Religions in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook*. ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 412.

[75] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 131.

and that of early Christian martyrdom reveal an additional layer of John's view on the relation between penitence and body. The subordination of the flesh, the process of injuring it remain powerful instruments of self-control and transformative elevation towards God. The difference is in the negative perception of the flesh that is being tormented: the flesh of the martyrs is transfigured with beauty and innocence, but this penitent one is sinful and guilty.

As Michel Foucault concludes on the Early Christian corporeal practice: "The 'flesh' is to be understood as a mode of experience, that is as a mode of knowledge [*connaissance*] and transformation of the self to the self, as a function of a certain relation between the cancellation of evil [*mal*] and manifestation of the truth."[76] In this way, flesh is a dynamic, changeable, and changing substance, which works like a tool or rather a surface in the process of self-exploration. John links the suppression of body undergoing voluntary punishment to deep self-examination.

The process of torturing flesh is, in a way, a process of revealing truth; it is a process of interrogation (*basanizo*). Through mortification, the penitent subjects question their readiness to deserve salvation; these sinners are incessantly asking God: "Be forgiven? Has our cry come to the ears of the Lord?" or "Will there be forgiveness for those in darkness, the lowly, the convicted?" [77] Returning to Foucault's connection between flesh and knowledge/truth, I would like to emphasise that, according to John, there is no end for this process up to one's death: "Can you say anything to us, brother? Please tell us, so that we may know how it will be for us. Your time is over, and you will never have another chance."[78] With these questions the sinners address the one among them who is passing away to resolve the mystery of death and salvation.

[76] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 4*: Les aveux de la chair*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Gallimard, 2018), 50-51. Cited in Stuart Eden, "Foucault's Confessions of the Flesh," review of *Histoire de la sexualité 4: Les aveux de la chair*, by Michel Foucault," *Theory, Culture & Society*, March 20, 2018, accessed May 28, 2020, https://www.theoryculturesociety.org/review-foucaults-confessions-flesh/.

[77] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:773; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 124.

[78] Ibid.

Through the description of penitent bodies John transmits a message of abjection and humbleness to his readers/listeners. In the last words of the fifth step, he declares that by describing these holy penitents he creates a pattern (*typos*), a model (*hypogrammos*), and a picture (*eikon*) to look at:

> In my meditation, or more accurately, in my acts of repentance, a fire of prayer will burn and will consume everything material. Let the holy prisoners, described above, be a rule for you, a pattern, a model, a true picture (*eikon*) of repentance, so that for as long as you live you will have no need of a treatise (*bibliou*); until at last Christ, the divine Son of God, will enlighten you in the resurrection of true repentance. Amen." [79]

So, John alternates not only the modes of narration John but also the modes of representation. He clearly pretends his textual evidence to be perceived as visual, thus influencing the imagination of a reader/listener. This imaginary representation should leave a trace in the memory of the audience replacing any elaborate treatise (*biblios*) in its imitative mode.[80] Through its corporeality and its voluntary character, penitence becomes a practice implicitly fitting into the tradition and language of martyrdom. The prison turns into a space of endless anticipation of death: All of them sat ceaselessly contemplating death, saying, "How will it go for us? What will be the verdict on us? How will life end for us? Will we receive pardon?"[81]

1.5. *Alogoi* and the spectacle of martyrdom

I argue that another recurrent theme in John's description of the imprisoned penitents besides corporeality is the exploration of the limits of human beings in the process of penitence.

[79] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:780-781; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 131: Ἐν τῇ μελέτῃ μου, μάλλον δὲ ἐν τῇ μετανοίᾳ μου ἐκκαυθήσεται πῦρ προσευχῆς καιούσης ὕλην. Ὅρος σοι, καὶ τύπος, καὶ ὑπογραμμὸς, καὶ εἰκὼν πρὸς μετάνοιαν ἔστωσαν οἱ προμνημονευθέντες ἅγιοι κατάδικοι, καὶ οὐ μὴ δεηθήςῃ βιβλίου ὅλως ἐν τῇ ζωῇ σου πάςῃ, ἕως οὗ ἐπιφαύςῃ σοι ὁ Χριςὸς ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ Θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῆς μεμεριμνημένης μετανοίας. Ἀμην.

[80] As noted earlier, Symeon, after reading John's *Ladder*, painted an image (*eikon*) of the dead upon his heart.

[81] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:769; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 124.

Further in the parable John describes even more severe things that he encounters in the monastery prison. A number of penitents refused to eat as humans because they considered themselves unworthy:

> One could see among those men the ones who were burning their tongues, and those tongues were exposed from their mouths as if they were dogs. Some were taking vengeance on themselves in the burning heat. Others were torturing themselves in the cold (*basanizo*). Some, tasting a small sip of water, stopped, [taking] only so much as not to die from thirst. Others who had a small piece of bread (*artou*) threw it far away with their hands saying they were unworthy of sensible *(logikes*) eating (*broseos*) since they performed the deeds of irrational (*alogon* - speechless/irrational/animals).[82]

This paragraph contains one of the most striking prison scenes—and one of the most problematic at the same time. It can be interpreted in several ways. First of all, the penitent subjects exist on the boundary between human and non-human (*alogon*). Two out of three uses of this adjective in the New Testament concern animals. In his second epistle, Peter condemns people who follow the desires of the flesh by comparing them to irrational animals:

> if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from the trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgement. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh (*sarkos*) and despise authority. […] But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning (*aloga*) animals (*zoa*), creatures of instinct (*physika*), born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish." (2 Peter 2:9-12).[83]

In the words of the penitents, given in indirect speech, John adopts similar language to describe the process of painstaking penitence. Losing humanity in the process of repentance through the loss of *logos*, interrogation (*basanizo*) of flesh, and refusing normal food consumption are central themes for John in this passage. The fallen carnality is animalised and

[82] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:768: Ἦν ἐν ἐκείνοις γλώσσας φλεγομένας ἰδέσθαι, καὶ δίκην (adv.) κυνῶν τοῦ στόματος προβαλλομένας. Οἱ μὲν ἐν τῷ καύσωνι ἑαυτοὺς ἐτιμώρουν. οἱ δὲ ἐν τῷ ψύχει ἑαυτοὺς ἐβασάνιζον. Ἔνιοι μὲν μικρὸν τοῦ ὕδατος ἀπογευόμενοι, ἐπαύοντο, ὅσον μόνον μὴ ἐκ δίψης ἀποθνήσκειν. οἱ δὲ τοῦ ἄρτου μικρὸν μεταλαμβάνοντες, τοῦτον τῇ χειρὶ μακρὰν ἀπέρριπτον, ἀναξίους ἑαυτοὺς λέγοντες λογικῆς βρώσεως ὡς τὰ τῶν ἀλόγων διαπραξαμένους.

[83] 2 Peter 2:9-12: οἶδεν κύριος εὐσεβεῖς ἐκ πειρασμοῦ ῥύεσθαι, ἀδίκους δὲ εἰς ἡμέραν κρίσεως κολαζομένους τηρεῖν μάλιστα δὲ τοὺς ὀπίσω σαρκὸς ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ μιασμοῦ πορευομένους καὶ κυριότητος καταφρονοῦντας. […] οὗτοι δε, ὡς ἄλογα ζῶα γεγεννημένα φυσικὰ εἰς ἅλωσιν καὶ φθοράν, ἐν οἷς ἀγνοοῦσιν βλασφημοῦντες, ἐν τῇ φθορᾷ αὐτῶν καὶ φθαρήσονται […] Cf. Epistle of Jude (1:9-10).

tormented. One can encounter similar self-inflicted animalisation in the tradition of desert asceticism.[84] There is an interesting account on this matter in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*:

> But since the thought (*logismos*) persisted, I left for the desert. There I found a sheet of water and an island in the midst, and the animals of the desert came to drink there. In the midst of these animals I saw two naked men, and my body trembled, for I believed they were spirits. Seeing me shaking, they said to me, "Do not be afraid, for we are men."[85]

The desert is the place for struggling with the self and temptation, while at the same time it is a liminal space significant for building introspective ascetic identity.[86] In this context, animalisation is part of humiliation, since animals are irrational beasts, perceived as negative in this case.

In severe penitent practice the monks decided that they were not worthy of sensible eating (*logikes broseos*). Here, John describes the implications of ascetic fasting among the repentant monks and, as one may assume, the inability of the fallen and sinful subjects to take the bread (*artos*) of Eucharist.[87] Since the subjects are *alogoi*, their defiled flesh cannot take the flesh of *Logos*. "For my flesh (*sarx*) is food (*brosis*) indeed and my blood is drink indeed" declaring His flesh consumable.[88] Christ's flesh is the bread (*artos*) of eternal life, which these penitents desire to pursue but, in their act of humiliation, consider it unattainable.

Thus, in John's descriptions the corporeal experience of penitence subverts human identity or, rather, these penitent subjects do not want to be recognised as human beings. Focusing on *alogos* as a consequence of sin together with self-sacrificial penitence blur the

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[84] Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, "Animals in Late Antiquity and Early Christianity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life*, ed. Gordon Lindsay Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), chap. 21, Kindle. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 231.

[85] *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 126. Καὶ ὡς ἐπέμενεν ὁ λογισμὸς, ἀπῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἔρημον· καὶ ηὗρον ἐκεῖ λίμνην ὑδάτων, καὶ νῆσον ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῆς· καὶ ἦλθον τὰ κτήνη τῆς ἐρήμου πιεῖν ἐξ αὐτῆς. Καὶ εἶδον ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν δύο ἀνθρώπους γυμνούς· καὶ ἐδειλίασε τὸ σῶμά μου· ἐνόμισα γὰρ ὅτι πνεύματά εἰσιν. Αὐτοὶ δέ με ὡς εἶδον δειλιῶντα, ἐλάλησαν πρὸς μέ· Μὴ φοβοῦ· καὶ ἡμεῖς ἄνθρωποί ἐσμεν. Find the original text here: https://zogron.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_6185.html.

[86] Brown, *The Body and Society*, 236-237.

[87] Symeon also writes about restrictions on taking Eucharist in his discourses. For example, see: Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 11 (ed. Krivochéine); trans. de Catanzaro, 167-172.

[88] John 6:55: ἡ γὰρ σάρξ μου, ἀληθής ἐστιν βρῶσις, καὶ τὸ αἷμά μου, ἀληθής ἐστιν πόσις.

humanity of the soul. John Chryssavgis argues that the behaviour described above may have been read by John's contemporaries as the behaviour of holy fools.[89] The social role of holy fools, however, was to question existing social norms and transgress the boundaries between pure and impure, public and private, female and male.[90] Their behaviour was not supposed to disrupt the very notion of human by pushing it to the limit. Therefore, John's spectacle demonstrating the subverting power of repentance which reveals the limits of the human could appear much more provoking to his audience. John calls if not for the total imitation but for the remembering of the things described.

Some of the imprisoned sinners in John's narrative even ask to be refused a human burial ceremony: they want to be buried as animals or wish for their remnants to be consumed by the beasts. Refusing to consume food and nourish their own flesh they voluntarily agree to become consumable themselves:

> Therefore those who were about to depart towards the Lord and to stand before the impartial tribunal, good citizens (*politai*) of the land of repentance, when one of them observed himself in all these circumstances, he entreated the great one through the man who was in charge of them not to deem him worthy of human (*anthropines*) funeral rite but rather of that of an irrational (animal) (*alogou*): to be given over to the wild beasts (*theriois*) either in the flow of the river or in the field.[91]

Interestingly, in this paragraph John's narrative to some extent follows the patterns of the language of Early Christian martyrdom to describe the desirable death experience of the penitent subjects. *Damnatio ad bestias* was a type of Roman execution practice used against Christians in the public theatres.[92] Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. 140) wrote in his letter to the Romans on the way to execution:

[89] Chryssavgis, *John Climacus*, 75.

[90] Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City* (London: University of California Press, 1996), 127-129.

[91] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:772: Μέλλοντες τοίνυν πρὸς Κύριον πορεύεσθαι, καὶ τῷ ἀδεκάστῳ βήματι παρίστασθαι, καλοὶ ἐκεῖνοι τῆς χώρας τῆς μετανοίας πολῖται, ὁπηνίχα τις αὐτῶν ἐν τῷ παντὶ ἐθεώρει ἑαυτὸν, τοῦτο διὰ τοῦ προεστῶτος αὐτῶν ἐδυσώπει μεθ᾽ ὅρκων τὸν μέγαν, τοῦ μὴ καταξιωθῆναι αὐτὸν ἀνθρωπίνης ταφῆς, ἀλλὰ ἀλόγου, ἤ ἐν τῷ ῥείθρῳ τοῦ ποταμοῦ, ἤ ἐν τῷ ἀγρῷ τοῖς θηρίοις παραδοθῆναι·

[92] Gilhus, "Animals in Late Antiquity and Early Christianity," chap. 21, Kindle.

> Allow me to become food for the wild beasts (*therion*), through whose instrumentality it will be granted me to attain to God. I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts (*therion*), that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts (*theria*), that they may become my tomb, and may leave nothing of my body (*somatos*); so that when I have fallen asleep [in death], I may be no trouble to anyone. Then shall I truly be a disciple of Christ, when the world shall not see so much as my body (*soma*). Entreat Christ for me, that by these instruments I may be found a sacrifice [to God].[93]

This language implies that the martyr transforms into food. The difference is that body, or flesh, is transcended and sanctified while being consumed; it is analogous to the transformative process of the Eucharist. For our penitent subjects the same practice acquires a different meaning; it is a sign of humiliation and unworthiness rather than Godlike self-sacrifice. The shame of the heroic martyrdom spectacle is juxtaposed here with the shame of a humiliating death. For the pure flesh of a martyr and for the impure flesh of a sinner, the transformation through devouring has a different symbolical outcome. Ignatius's inspiration and hope on the way to prison resonates with the despair and hopelessness of the penitent monks in the prison. Yet, in addition to humiliation, the act of them being devoured by the animals is parallel to Ignatius's to some extent. The penitents claim aloud: "We should run (*dramomen*) not sparing this filthy and wretched flesh (*sarkos*) of ours. But, just as responsible blessed men did, we should kill it, as it killed us."[94] Ignatius, on the other hand, says "but if you show your love to my flesh (*sarkos*), I shall again have to run (*trechon*) my race."[95]

[93] Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Romans* 4; *PG* 05:689; trans. Roberts and Donaldson, 75: Ἄφετέ με θηρίων εἶναι βορὰν, δι᾽ ὧν ἔνεστιν Θεοῦ ἐπιτυχεῖν. Σῖτός εἰμι Θεοῦ, καὶ δι᾽ ὀδόντων θερίων ἀλήθωμαι, ἵνα καθαρὸς ἄρτος εὑρεθῶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Μᾶλλον κολακεύσατε τὰ θηρία, ἵνα μοι τάφος γένωνται, λαὶ μηδὲν καταλίπωσι τοῦ σώματός μου, ἵνα μὴ κοιμηθεὶς βαρύς τινι γένωμαι. Τότε ἔσομαι μαθητὴς ἀληθῶς το σῶμά μου ὁ κόσμος ὄψεται. Λιτανεύσατε τὸν Χριστὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ, ἵνα διὰ τῶν ὀργάνων τούτων θυσία εὑρεθῶ.

[94] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; PG 88:769; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 125: δράμωμεν μὴ φειδόμενοι ταύτης τῆς ῥυπαρᾶς καὶ μοχθηρᾶς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν· ἀλλ᾽ ἀποκτείνωμεν αὐτὴν, ὡς ἀπέκτεινεν ἡμᾶς, ὥσπερ καὶ ἐποίουν οἱ μακάριοι ὑπεύθυνοι. This is quite a problematic paragraph because of the conjunction ὥσπερ. Norman Russel in his translation divided the sentence into two, making the last part a clause related to our penitent subjects. I translated it as a part of speech-in-character which John uses.

[95] Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Romans* 2; *PG* 05:688; trans. Roberts and Donaldson, 74: ἐὰν δὲ ἐρασθῆτε τῆς σαρκός μου, πάλιν ἔσομαι τρέχων.

The endless running in pursuit of mortification in John's passage can be compared to Ignatius's desire for martyrdom, which puts an end to the athletic run of material existence but in different ways.[96] The sacrificial language is reversed: the sanctification of flesh and its transubstantiation into the bread (*artos*) of God is replaced with the inglorious transformation into ordinary fodder for the beasts. This idea may also reflect the Adamic repentant lament on the postlapsarian submission to the beasts in the sixth-century hymn about the Fall.[97]

For John, all the bodies will be resurrected in the end but not all will be saved. The potential for the flesh to be saved exists only when it is turned towards God in the process of ascetic practice.[98] That is why John distances himself from Origen at the very end of the chapter on penitence. Origen's transformative potential of flesh in the process of Salvation leads to its inevitable glorification and becoming of *logos*, and therefore sure salvation.[99] John openly doubts this idea, still considering the salvation as a mystery not guaranteed:

> All of us – but especially the lapsed – should be especially careful not to be afflicted with the disease of the godless Origen. This foul disease uses God's love for man as an excuse and is very welcome to those who are lovers of pleasure.[100]

Besides Evagrius Ponticus, Origen of Alexandria is the only author whom John engages in open polemics.[101] John's criticism of Origen (d. ca. 253) in the seventh century reveals the traces of still ongoing polemics on the process of salvation. As shown earlier in John's words about imitation of the prisoners, true repentance (*metanoia*) comes only after resurrection (*anastasis*).

[96] In the accounts of martyrdom, martyrs were usually depicted as the athletes of Christ. For a substantial analysis of this literary construction see Brent D. Shaw, "The Passion of Perpetua," *Past & Present* 139 (May 1993): 28-33.

[97] See, Romanos Melodos' hymn about Adam's Lament.

[98] Chryssavgis, *John Climacus*, 71.

[99] Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 71-72.

[100] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 14; *PG* 88:780; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 167: Πρόσχωμεν πάντες, ἐπὶ πλείω δὲ οἱ πεπτωκότες μὴ νοῆσαι ἐν καρδίᾳ τὴν τοῦ Ωριγένους τοῦ ἀθέου νόσον · τὴν γὰρ Θεοῦ φιλανθρωπίαν, ἡ μιαρὰ προβαλλομένη, εὐπαράδεκτος ἐν τοῖς φιληδόνοις γίνεται.

[101] In the *Ladder*, Origen is mentioned in the fifth step while Evagrius in the fourteenth: Climacus, *The Ladder* 14; *PG* 88:780, 865; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 166-167.

With all the gloomy descriptions of penitence, John's joy and preoccupation with the sublime state of mind is a welcome twist at the end of the parable. His experience led him to inevitable inward and even outward *self-transformation*:

> And I, o friends, have not noticed how I was joyfully dwelling (*emphilochoron*) in that mourning (*penthei*), and whole I was carried away with my mind (*noi*), not being able to control myself (*katechein*).[102] But I must return to the discourse (*logon*). Thus, after biding in the prison over thirty days, I, the impatient,[103] return into the cherished common habitation to the great [*hegoumenos*]. And looking at me, as I was wholly changed and displaced, this wisest man understood the reason of my alteration.[104]

John's authorial persona does not allow emotionality. When describing the feelings with which John was carried away, he immediately prevents himself from speaking further about his own impressions. This may be regarded as part of the humble authorial subjectivity. In the end, by witnessing the penitent subjects John obtained a discourse (*logon*), an instrument that transforms the audience into the community of penitent subject.

1.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how John connects corporeality and penitence in his parable about penitent prisoners in *The Ladder*. I did so to outline the background for understanding Symeon's discourses on penitence, corporeality, and salvation in the eleventh century which are in certain ways connected to his reading of John. The possibility of this connection can reveal the ways in which Symeon's urban theology of body and monastic discipline was transformed by and against John's views.

[102] This word can also mean "keeping someone in the prison."

[103] ἀνυπομόνητος can have considerably different meanings here. While it can refer to a person who is unable to endure something because of harshness, Luibheid and Russel translate it as "impatient" and I follow this reading.

[104] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 5; *PG* 88:776; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 128: Ἐγὼ δὲ, ὦ φίλοι, λέληθα ἐμαυτὸν ἐν τῷ ἐκείνῳ ἐμφιλοχωρῶν πένθει, καὶ ὅλος τῷ νοῖ συνηρπάγην, κατέχειν ἐμαυτὸν μὴ δυνάμενος. Ἀλλ᾽ ἐπανακτέον τὸν λόγον. Τοίνυν προσμείνας ἐν τῇ φρουρᾷ ἐπὶ ἡμέρας τριάκοντα, ἐπανέρχομαι ὁ ἀνυπομόνητος εἰς τὸ μέγα κοινόδον πρὸς τὸν μέγαν. Ὁ δὲ θεασάμενός με, ὥσπερ ἠλλοιωμένον ὅλον καὶ ἐξεστηκότα, ἔγνω ὁ πάνσοφος ἀλλοιώσεως τὸν τρόπον.

I have analysed John's narrative strategies, his humbling authorial subjectivity and the way in which he switches between the modes of narration to provoke the imagination of the audience and to inspire them to imitate the penitent subjects of his narrative. The multivocality and the multi-layered character of the text provide the audience with a variety of archetypes to follow, ranging from David and Adam to those penitent monks whom John describes.

As I attempted to show, John's seventh-century narrative about penitence still relates to the discourse of Eucharistic language of the Early Christian martyrdom. At least, reading John's ascetic narrative about penitent subjects through the prism of martyrdom reveals considerable parallels. In describing the prisoners' self-imposed restrictions on taking food in the ordinary way and their desire to be transformed into food for animals, John presents the dark depths of humility using the metaphors and narrative style which resemble Early Christian texts about martyrs. John's descriptions of his spectacle of voluntary punishment and suffering as well as the exploration of human limits in the process of repentance still rely on the same patterns of Early Christian literary discourse. *Logos* as a Platonic part of the soul, as speech, as a quintessential component of humanity, and as a predisposition towards self-control and analysis, works in John's parable in close metaphorical relation with the concepts of the discourse on incarnation of Christ (*Logos*).

The corporeality of penitence and negativity of flesh are main themes of John's fifth step of the *Ladder*. John's rhetoric is embedded into the tradition of desert monasticism, but at the same time it still relies on the imagery and literary structures of earlier texts on martyrdom. This observation unlocks a more complex reading of the *Ladder* not only from the perspective of unintended intertextuality but also from the perspective of how different discourses and narrative modes were used consciously or unconsciously to shape the penitent selves of both author and audience.

Chapter 2: Symeon the New Theologian and Climacus' *Ladder*: monastery and penitence

In this chapter, I focus on Symeon's writings about penitence addressed to the monks at his monastery. There are several discourses in which Symeon extensively discusses this topic because, as I will argue, penitence is one of the main self-transformative practices in Symeon's spiritual guidance and theology. I will explore the diachronic connection between Symeon and John Climacus, whose discourse on penitence I have analysed in the previous chapter. There, I discussed questions of corporeality, food consumption, and the construction of the penitent self within the framework of penitence in John's work. Here and in the following chapter, I will explore the same subjects in Symeon's works. Thus, I will pay special attention to the questions of the connection between body and penitence, Eucharist and, moreover, to the performative side of penitence in Symeon's discourses.

It is worth pointing out in the beginning that for Symeon, penitence is a powerful instrument of discipline, emotional control, and transformation within a monastic community. Penitence is, as it was also for John, a bodily performance aimed at deep introspective and sometimes painful self-analysis, remembrance of the individual's past sins, bodily estrangement and appropriating the role of penitent sinner.[105] In his discourses, Symeon aspires to bring his monks to a self-imposed control which concerns both internal (soul) and external (body/flesh) sides of subjectivity. However, I will argue, Symeon's view of body is almost deprived of the negativity that we find in John's descriptions, and, interestingly, the notion of flesh is not that substantial for Symeon's discourses on penitence which touch the question of

[105] Derek Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 212.

monastic behaviour. I will show that the notion of flesh regains significance in Symeon's texts in the theological discourse about history of creation which I will analyse in the third chapter.

2.1. Symeon as *hegoumenos* and author

In the *Catechetical Discourses*, Symeon shapes his authorial persona mostly from the perspective of power and authority. The way the text is being constructed is parallel to the way of spiritual guidance which Symeon offers to his monks – writing and reading these *Catechesises* means giving and receiving spiritual guidance. Here, I mostly concentrate on Symeon's writings produced while he was *hegoumenos* in the monastery of St. Mamas (approx. 990s – 1005).[106] Some parts of the *Discourses* are written in a highly polemical tone introducing the abstract examples of inappropriate monastic behaviour which seem to rely heavily on the everyday life practice of the community. In *the Fourth Catechetical Discourse* about tears and penitence, for example, Symeon discusses how the unruly monastic behaviour subverts and spoils the whole community and makes stones out of monks' hearts. Stone-hearted subjects (*lythokardioi*) resist to compunction and repentance. Drawing on the abstract example of two hard-hearted (*sklerokardioi*) brothers who come to the monastery as novices Symeon goes further and further in the examples from monastic life which seem to be not that abstract.[107]

Unregulated feasts and disobedient companionship are extremely distractive activities which violate the rules of monastic life together. Symeon describes how one of the abovementioned brothers valued the pleasures of food and chatting more than the rules of the

[106] For Symeon's biography, see: Hilarion Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradtion*, 27-42; Hannah Hunt, *Joy-Bearing Grief*, 171-179.

[107] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourse* 4 (ed. Krivochéine); trans. de Catanzaro, 71.

monastery. At the same time, this discourse seems to reflect the real precedents that might have happened:

> From then on an unceasing concern enters the minds of them both, and they do not cease to seek occasions on which they may cultivate and strengthen their apparent friendship by gorging themselves on food. […] After he has a drink his appetite is aroused. Imperceptibly he is as it were led astray by the tasty food; without realising it he eats it greedily and fattens his stomach and makes it inattractible so that it does not respond to the impulse of the soul.[108]

With a help of this abstract discourse, Symeon, as *hegoumenos*, shows that he is well aware of the things that might be happening in the community and in this particular paragraph he denounces the sin of gluttony. Through the negative examples, he maintains control over the conscience of the monks. The *Catechetical Discourses*, which were read aloud in front of the whole monastic community, thus show which models of behaviour were appropriate and which were not.[109] He denounces talkativeness which distracts a monk from concentration on the self and at the same time distracts others:

> "Have you heard how the abbot treated brother so-and-so? But what will you say if I tell you how he treated that poor fellow?" – he who occupies himself and others with such nonsense, when will he attain to the perception (*synaisthesin*) of his own faults and bewail himself?[110]

Here, Symeon shows that remeberence of personal sins and mourning over the self should be the primary tasks of a monk. H. J. M. Turner shows in his work that for *hegoumenos* the primary aim was salvation of his monks.[111] Thus, Symeon condemns the thoughts about mere ritualism demonstrating that the way to salvation should be a constant and hard process:

[108] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 4, 280-283; 299-305 (ed. Krivochéine); trans. de Catanzaro, 77: Ἔκτοτε οὖν παρεμπίπτει ἐν ἑκατέροις τούτοις φροντὶς ἀνεξάλειπτος, καὶ οὐ παύονται πόρους ἐπιζητοῦντες, ὅθεν ἂν καὶ προσγένηται αὐτοῖς διὰ τῆς τῶν βρωμάτων δαψιλείας τὴν δοκοῦσαν ἀγάπην βεβαιότερον ἐμπεδώσασθαι. […] Ὃς καὶ μετὰ τὸ πιεῖν ἅπαξ πρὸς ὄρεξιν αὖθις διεγείρεται βρωμάτων καὶ λεληθότως τῇ τῶν βρωμάτων ἡδύτητι ὥσπερ ὑποκλεπτόμενος, ἀνεπαισθήτως κορέννυται καὶ παχεῖαν ἀπεργάζεται τὴν ὑπείκουσαν.

[109] H. J. M. Turner, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Spiritual Fatherhood*, 221.

[110] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 4, 148-154 (ed. Krivochéine); trans. de Catanzaro, 74: "Ἠκούσατε, φησί, τί τὸν δεῖνα πεποίηκεν ἀδελφὸν ὁ ἡγούμενος;" ὁ δέ · "Λοιπόν, ἐὰν εἴπω ὑμῖν τί τὸν δεῖνα πεποίηκε τὸν ταπεινόν, τί ἔχετε εἰπεῖν;" – καὶ οὕτω τοιαῦτα καὶ χείρονα τούτων ΄ὁ ὁμιλῶν καὶ ἀπασχολῶν καὶ ἀπασχολούμενος εἰς φλυαρίας τοιαύτας, πότε εἰς συναίσθησιν ἔλθῃ τῶν οἰκείων ἁμαρτημάτων καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἀ˜πκλαύσεται;

[111] Ibid., 234.

"They thought that they would be saved without any further effort, without prayer, silence, vigil, abstinence, poverty of spirit (Mt. 5:3), humility, or love, but merely by attending the Offices."[112]

Symeon, as *hegoumenos* and author, employs different illustrative examples throughout the text to show his concern about behaviour of his monastic community and its salvation. Regardless of how abstract these examples may seem, they show that Symeon manifests himself within the text of this *Catechesis* as a *hegoumenos* who is well aware of actual or potential thoughts (*logismoi*), movements of heart and delusions of every community member. Repentance which goes hand in hand with compunction are the main things monks should pursue in course of their life.

Symeon's discourses are called to frame monastic thoughts and behaviour. To some extent these texts are instruments of exercising power within the monastery. Addressing the public through a discourse allows Symeon to keep a hierarchical distance and at the same time gives him an opportunity to demonstrate univocally the authoritative and strict awareness of the leader. To some extent, a monastic community is not only shaped by discipline but also by rhetorical and ritual performance of various texts.[113] In this sense, a monastery is a textual community that is shaped by the constant transmittion, production and reproduction of texts. Slightly more than a century before Symeon, Theodore the Stoudite exiled from Constantinople during the Iconoclastic controversy wrote to his moks who were dispersed all over the empire:

> Those of you, brethren, who come alongside here and there take care for yourselves where and how you settle and dwell. Do not be like dissolute people, but like ones bound by the spirit; not like ones without supervision, but like ones under the supervision of the Lord, who oversees your every movement and action; not ones being driven randomly here and there, but remaining in stillness

[112] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourse* 4, 197-201 (ed. Krivochéine); trans. de Catanzaro, 75: […] καὶ οἰομένους σωθήσεσθαι ἄνευ τινὸς ἄλλης ἐργασίας, εὐχῆς λέγω καὶ σιωπῆς χειλέων καὶ ἀγρυπνίας καὶ ἐγκρατείας καὶ πτωχείας πνευματικῆς καὶ ταπεινώσεως καὶ ἀγάπης, μετὰ μόνης τῆς ἁπλῶς οὕτω γινομένης ἐν ταῖς συνάξεσιν ὑπαντῆς.

[113] Here I refer to Margaret Mullett's definition of rhetoric as a tool for the effective communication of ideas and ideologies. Margaret Mullet, "Rhetoric, theory and the imperative of performance: Byzantium and now," in *Rhetoric in Byzantium*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 153.

> in your cells, attending to your manual work, your prayers and psalmody; not amassing treasure for yourselves from love of money, but content with what you have now.[114]

Thus, in the exile, as in everyday life, monastic community is united by text which transmits the power and will of *hegoumen*os. In this excerpt, the gaze of the *hegoumenos* is replaced by the gaze of the Lord. Feeling this the power of this gaze upon themselfes monks should maintain their ordinary life style on their own, even being in exile.

In Symeon's writings, as I will demonstrate, the power of gazing and *hegoumenos'* control reaches its limit in the *hegoumenos'* desire to transform and control the bodies and emotions of the monastic subjects through the staged and scripted performance.[115]

2.2. Climacus' *Ladder* in Symeon's writings and monastic reading

In the very beginning of the previous chapter, I discussed the problem of the reception of John's text in Symeon's writings: Symeon read Climacus and, as Niketas Stethatos claims, was influenced and moved by the *Ladder*.[116] In what follows, I explore Symeon's textual borrowings from Climacus to make the connection between these two figures even clearer, before proceeding to the analysis of Symeon's discourses on penitence.

In the *Eleventh Ethical Discourse,* Symeon provides his audience with two metaphors. Roughly they can be called horizontal and vertical. The first one refers to a sequence of islands of virtues, which are connected by bridges and lead to the Throne of "the King of Glory, He Who is invisible to all creation."[117] The second one is the metaphor of the ladder, which

[114] Theodore the Stoudite, *Catechesis* 2; trans. Lash at https://web.archive.org/web/20070213231546/http://web.ukonline.co.uk/ephrem/ths02.htm.

[115] Krueger, "Divine Fantasy and the Erotic Imagination in the *Hymns* of Symeon the New Theologian," 316.

[116] Niketas Stethatos, *Life of Symeon the New Theologian* I.6 (ed. Hausherr); trans. Greenfield, 17.

[117] According to Dionysii Shlenov, Symeon's insular metaphor resembles the ancient mythological metaphor of the islands on which the souls dwell after the death; almost the same metaphor is employed by Hippolytus of Rome (*Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9.27). See: Dionysii Shlenov, "Uchenie o voskresenii Dushi

Symeon frequently uses to desscribe the monastic ascent towards heaven. For him this ladder is a coherent step-by-step linear structure depicting the process of spiritual growth:

> To take another comparison, the ascent of those who hurry toward heaven is like a ladder (*klimaki*) and its steps. While each of us is to be more zealous in climbing up the ladder's steps than the other so as to catch up with our neighbour, it is altogether impossible and beyond human power to avoid beginning at the bottom and going up step by step, and instead somehow by-pass the first rungs in order to get to the higher ones. […] Just as it is never possible to climb up into an elevated house without a ladder (*klimakos*), or to enter the royal chamber itself where the emperor lives without passing through the forecourts of the palace, so it is impossible for the man who does not place his feet according to the order described to enter into the Kingdom of heaven.[118]

In this paragraph, Symeon, without explicitly mentioning John, refers to the structuring metaphor of John's work. Symeon depicts the process of spiritual growth as a competition and in the end, he compares the whole procedure of spiritual transformation to entering a royal palace. Obviously, taking into account Symeon's own service at the court in his youth,[119] he draws a parallel here between the strict ceremonial order of the imperial palace in Constantinople and a similar strictness in the life of a monk who endeavours to outdo his colleagues in climbing the ladder.

Again, Symeon uses the metaphorin the *Fourth Catechetical Discourse* "Of penitence and compunction, and by what kind of deeds it is possible to achieve it. How it is impossible for anyone without tears to achieve purity and freedom from passion."[120] Here, he explicitly refers to John, even though not to John's discussion of the practice of repentance but to his

u svv. Simeona Novogo Bogoclova i Nikity Stifata," v Prepodobnyi Simeon Novyi Bogoslov i ego duhovnoe nasledie (Moscow: Obshecerkovnaya aspirantura i doktorantura im. svv. Kirilla i Mefodiya, 2017), 342.

[118] Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* XI, 94-107 (ed. Darrouzès); trans. Golitzin, 2:133: Ἄλλως δὲ κλίμακι καὶ βαθμῖσιν ἡ ἄνοδος ἔοικε τῶν ἐπειγομένων πρὸς οὐρανόν. Τὸ γοῦν σπουδαιότερον τῇ προαιρέσει ἄλλοω ἄλλου γενέσθαι καὶ συντομώτερον ἀνελθεῖν ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ προλαβεῖν τὸν πλησίον, ἡμέτερόν ἐστι · τὸ δὲ μὴ ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης βαθμῖδος ἄρξασθαι καὶ κατὰ τάξιν ἀνέρχεσθαι τὴν κλίμακα, ἀλλά ποθεν ὑπερβῆναι τὴν πρώτην βαθμῖδα καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἑτέραν γενέσθαι, πάντῃ παρὰ ἀνθρώποις ἀμήχανον καὶ ἀδύνατον. […] Ὡς γὰρ οὐκ ἔστι δίχα κλίμακος εἰς οἶκόν ποτε ἀνελθεῖν ὑψηλόν, ἢ ἔνδον ἐκείνου αὐτοῦ εὑρεθῆναι τοῦ βασιλικοῦ κοιτῶνος, ἔνθα ὁ βασιλεὺς αὐτὸς καταμένει, πρὸ τοῦ γενέσθαι ἐν τοῖς βασιλικοῖς προαυλίοις, οὕτως ἀδύνατον τὸν μὴ κατὰ τὴν εἰρημένην τάξιν βαδίσαντα εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐραωῶν.

[119] Niketas Stethatos, *Life of Symeon the New Theologian* I.2 (ed. Hausherr); trans. Greenfield, 5.

[120] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 4, 1-4 (ed. Krivochéine 1963-1965, 1: 312; trans. de Catanzaro 1980, 70): Περὶ μετανοίας καὶ κατανύξεως. Καὶ ἐκ ποίων ταύτην ἔργων κτήσασθαι δυνατόν. Καὶ ὅτι ἄνευ δακρύων ἄδύνατον εἰς καθαρότητα καὶ ἀπάθειαν ἐλάσαι τινά. Λόγος Δ᾽.

words about the thirst and vigil which provoke tears from the oppressed heart (*kardia*): "Saint John of "The Ladder" says, "Thirst and vigil have oppressed the heart, and from the oppressed heart waters have sprung forth." He who wishes to find out how many other passages he tells us of this will learn it from the book (*biblio*) itself."[121]

In Symeon's discourse, this quotation from John is surrounded by the quotations from the Psalms and Symeon's own reflections on the penitent figure of David which he gives his monks as an example to follow. Vigils and thirst, as they had it once done to David, cause the physical pressure upon the heart of a monk. This pressure provides a monk with tears to weep. Symeon reminds the monks of David's experience of penitence:

> I will not climb up into my bed; I will not suffer mine eyes to sleep […] (Ps. 132:3-5). […] for my wounds stink and are corrupt through my foolishness, I am brought into so great trouble and misery, that I go mourning all the day long; […] I have roared for the very disquietness of my heart (Ps. 38:4-8 LXX). […] for I have eaten ashes as it were bread and mingled my drink with weeping (Ps. 102:9).[122]

This sequence of quotations from the Psalms takes much space in Symeon's discourse. These descriptions taken from the Psalms are close to those used by John for constructing his narrative about penitent subjects in the prison that I discussed in the previous chapter.[123] In John's text, quotations from the Psalms describe the state of being of penitents and the setting of their dwelling; at the same time, further, the Psalms work as the words of penitent prayer that the prisoners pronounce.[124] So, Symeon provides the monks with ready verbal patterns of

[121] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 4, 540-543 (ed. Krivochéine 1963-1965, 1:358; trans. de Catanzaro 1980, 84): Φησὶ δὲ καὶ ὁ τῆς Κλίμακος ἅγιος Ἰωάννης · "Δίψα καὶ ἀγρυπνία ἐξέθλιψαν καρδίαν · καρδίας δὲ θλιβείσης ἐξεπήδησαν ὕδατα." Ὁπόσα δὲ καὶ ἄλλα περὶ τούτων ἡμῖν διαλέγεται, αὐτῇ τῇ βίβλῳ ὁ θελήσας ἐγκύψαι μαθήσεται.

[122] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 4, 524-525; 531-533; 534-535; 536-537 (ed. Krivochéine 1963-1965, 1: 356; trans. de Catanzaro 1980, 84): Εἰ ἀναβήσομαι, φησίν, ἐπὶ κλίνης στρωμνῆς μου, εἰ δώσω ὕπνον τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς μου […] προσώζεσαν καὶ ἐσάπησαν οἱ μώλωπές μου ἀπὸ προσώπου τῆς ἀφροσύνης μου. Ἐταλαιπώρησα καὶ κατεκάμφθην ἕως τέλους, ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν σκυθρωπάζων ἐπορευόμην. […] ὠρυόμην ἀπὸ στεναγμοῦ τῆς καρδίας μου […] ὅτι σποδὸν ὡσεὶ ἄρτον ἔφαγον καὶ τὸ πόμα μου μετὰ κλαυθμοῦ ἐκίρνων.

[123] To be precise, here Symeon refers to the Psalms 38, 102, 132. In John's narrative it is Psalms 37 and 101 that are quoted in the text to describe the state of being of the prisoners (see above, p. 20).

[124] In this case, I am speaking about the Psalms 66, 78, 79, 123. For this, see: John Climacus, *the Ladder* 5; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 123.

penitent behaviour; as practical guidance in pursuing this behaviour he offers them the *Ladder* of John, which the monks should consult to find out what else John says about tears as an outcome of true penitence.

There is another reference to the *Ladder* which is relevant for my further analysis. In the *Thirtieth Catechetical Discourse*, "On penitence and the beginning of a life that is worthy of praise. How he who is penitent ought to behave every day. Of tears and compunction," Symeon returns to John's text.[125] The reference to John serves to introduce the method of penitence which Symeon is about to set forth in his discourse:

> He who has kept himself (*fulaxas)* spotless for God after his Baptism and preserved himself undefiled in accordance with the image (*eikona*) of Him who made him (*Gen.* 1:27) and formed him needs nothing further to recall him from his condition, for he is in God. But he who after Baptism has defiled himself with unsuitable actions and lawless deeds and has made the temple of his body (*somatos*) - or, rather, the house of God - into a house of pleasures, passions, and demons (*1 Cor.* 3:16) by his profligacy stands in need of repentance (*metanoian*). He needs not only the method (*tropon*) I am about to tell you and advise you, but also many other methods and ways of reflection (of penitence – *metanoias*). By means of them he may propitiate God and recover that divine dignity which he has lost through his sinful life. Let the discourse "On Penitence (*metanoias*)" from "The Ladder" by our father, the divine John, persuade you (*se*), for it contains many things on this subject.[126]

Interestingly, here, Symeon changes the person of his addressee from the second person plural to the second person singular speaking in this way only to one monk, or rather to every monk present in front of him or reading this text individually. In the beginning, Symeon used the verb (*fulaxas*) to describe the temperate and chaste life of a subject. This word has multiple

[125] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 30, 1-3 (ed. Krivochéine 1963-1965, 3:194; trans. de Catanzaro 1980, 318): Περὶ μετανοίας καὶ ἀρχῆς ἐπαινετοῦ βίου, ὅπως δεῖ τὸν μετανοοῦντα καθ᾽ ἑκάστην ποιεῖν. Ἐν ᾧ καὶ περὶ δακρύων ἅμα καὶ κατανύξεως.

[126] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 30, 129-142 (ed. Krivochéine 1963-1965, 3:204; trans. de Catanzaro 1980, 321): Ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἑαυτὸν *φυλάξας* μετὰ τὸ βάπτισμα ἄσπιλον τῷ Θεῷ καὶ τὸ κατ᾽ εἰκόνα διατηρήσας τῷ ποιήσαντι καὶ πλάσαντι ἄχραντον, οὐδενὸς ἑτέρου πρὸς ἀνάλκησιν ἐπιδεηθῇ τῶν ἱσταμένων, τυγχάνων ἐν τῷ Θεῷ. Ὁ δὲ μολύνας ἑαυτὸν ματὰ τοῦτο πράξεσιν ἀτόποις καὶ ἀνομίαις καὶ τὸν ναὸν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, τὸν οἶκόν φημι τοῦ Θεοῦ, οἶκον ἡδονῶν καὶ παθῶν καὶ δαιμόνων ἀσώτως ἀπεργασάμενος, οὐ μόνον οὖ μέλλω εἰπεῖν σοι καὶ συμβουλεύσασθαι τρόπου πρὸς μετάνοιαν χρῄζει, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἑτέρων μεθόδων πολλῶν καὶ ἐπινοιῶν μετανοίας εἰς τὸ ἐξιλεώσασθαι τὸν Θεὸν καὶ ἀνακαλέσασθαι πρὸς ἑαυτόν, ὅπερ διὰ τῆς ἐφαμάρτου ζωῆς ἀπώλεσε, θεῖον ἀξίωμα. Καὶ πειθέτω σε τοιαῦτα πολλὰ περιέχων ὁ "Περὶ μετανοίας" λόγος τῆς Κλίμακος Ἰωάννου, τοῦ θείου πατρός.

semantic connotations of keeping watch, guarding and imprisoning (as I pointed out earlier John used the word *fulake* for designation of his prison) which play a substantial role in Symeon's discourse of penitence too, as I will demonstrate further. Also, Symeon speaks about other methods and ways of reflection (*methodon kai epinoion*) about penitence which monks can find in the *Ladder* and which are appropriate only for those who made the temple of body into the house of pleasures, passions and demons. So, it seems, that Symeon himself considers the penitence depicted in John's narrative special.

The last point to discuss before proceeding to the analysis of Symeon's method of penitence is the significance of reading in the monasteries of the Stoudite tradition. In both excerpts given above, Symeon proposes monks to turn to the book he mentions in his discourse on their own. This voluntary study through reading is a significant part of monastic life and ascetic practice. The *Stoudios Typikon* dated to the ninth century has a passage about collecting and returning books to the monastery library:

> It should be known that on the days when we rest from our corporal work, the keeper of the books sounds the wooden semantron once, and the brothers assemble at the book station; each one takes a book and reads it until the evening. Before the signal for the office of lamplighting, the man in charge of the books sounds the semantron again, and all the brothers come to return their books in accordance with the register. If anyone is late in returning his book, he should suffer some penalty.[127]

Alternating between corporal labour and reading corresponds to caring for body and soul respectively. At the same time, reading is subjected to strict discipline, according to this passage. In Symeon's work reading is also a part of strict self-discipline, since reading (as well as reciting prayers and Psalms) occupies the self with repetitive and focused practice that prevents the stream of occasional and distractful thoughts (*logismoi*). According to Symeon, a monk should not "turn on the other side" when he wakes from sleep. Rather, he should "rise at

[127] Stoudios: Rule of the Monastery of St. John Stoudios in Constantinople (trans. Timothy Miller) in *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, ed. John Thomas and Angela Constantinides Hero (Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks Library and Collection, 2000), 108, ch. 26.

once and pray again in the aforesaid manner and sleep no longer, but persevere in prayer and reading until the semantron sounds.[128] So, for Symeon, reading becomes a necessary self-control part of the penitent subject. Monks should not only follow well-known penitent archetypes, such as David, provided by Symeon but also consult other texts with practical guidance for the construction of the repentant self.

The question could be raised whether rehearsing scripted thoughts and physical postures really produces an authentic subject.[129] According to Symeon, there were also monks who learnt parts of any text by heart and recited them but without any spiritual commitment or understanding: "What use is it, if his activity is not spiritual (*pneumatike*) and with knowledge (*gnoseos*), but he sits to read something to learn it by heart so that he may recite it at the time of the Office, or even so in the presence of his friends and thus appear to be clever."[130] Such occupation of conscience was either unworthy. Thus, it appears that repetition as such is not enough and simple replications and recitations of textual excerpts should be accompanied by the real commitment which, as Symeon notices, often does not appear instantly. In that case, one should never seize searching: "Even if he has not tears, at least he ought to seek them with all his power and soul. In no other way can he become sinless, nor may his heart become pure."[131]

[128] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 30, 185-187 (ed. Krivochéine); trans. de Catanzaro, 323: Ὅτε δὲ ἔξυπνος γένῃ, μὴ στραφῇς ἐπὶ τὸ ἕτερον μέρος, ἀλλ᾽ εὐθὺς ἀναστὰς πάλιν εὖξαι τῷ προειρημένῳ τρόπῳ καὶ μηκέτι ὑπνώσῃς, ἀλλὰ εὐχῇ καὶ ἀναγνώσει καρτέρησον […]

[129] Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 212.

[130] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 4, 337-341 (ed. Krivochéine); trans. de Catanzaro, 79: τί οὖν ὁ ὄφελος αὐτῷ, ἐὰν μὴ πμευματικὴ ὑπάρχῃ καὶ μετὰ γνώσεως ἡ ἐργασία αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ κάθηται ἀναγινώσκων πρὸς τὸ ἀποτηθίσαι τι, ἵνα ἔχῃ τοῦτο λέγειν ἐν καιρῷ συνάξεως ἢ καὶ παρουσίᾳ φίλων, ὥστε φαίνεσθαι αὐτὸν γνωστικόν.

[131] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 4, 571-574 (ed. Krivochéine); trans. de Catanzaro, 85: Εἰ γὰρ καὶ μὴ ἔχει δάκρυά, ἀλλὰ τέως ζητεῖν ὀφείλει ταῦτα ἐξ ὅλης ἰσχύος τε καὶ ψυχῆς. Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἄλλως δύναται γενέσθαι ἀναμαρτητος, οὐδὲ τὴν καρδίαν ἁγνός.

2.3. Penitence as self-transformative performance

After referring to John's *Ladder*, Symeon turns to a step-by-step exposition of a repentance practice which involves prayer and corporeal activities. Symeon starts his description with an important warning: "But what is the method of penitence (*metanoias*) I will expound to you by way of fatherly advice? Listen, brother, with understanding and without taking offense (*askandalistos*)."[132] This is an interesting remark, since it shows that the following words could be perceived as provocative in the given context. Symeon again addresses the whole community with the second person singular as if turning to a private conversation with one monk. The remark about offense (or scandal) could be connected to other aspects of Symeon's biography such as the revolt of his own monks against him in 998.[133] The exact circumstances remain unclear but it is certain that Symeon as well as his spiritual father Symeon Eulabes stirred controversies throughout their lives. For instance, in the very beginning of his *Fourth Catechetical Discourse* which I mentioned above, Symeon mentions the amazed reaction of the audience at the words once pronounced by his spiritual father:

> Brother, never receive communion without tears." At this his hearers— and they were many, both laymen and also monks who were well known and renowned for virtue (*arete*) — were amazed (*ethaumasan*). As they looked at one another they would say, gently smiling (*hypomeidiontes*), with one accord and with one voice, "Well then, we shall never again receive communion, but we shall all go without it.[134]

It is obvious that both laity and the monastic audience renowned for its virtue were quite surprised and confused by such a statement. Weeping was declared as a census for

[132] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 30, 143-145 (ed. Krivochéine); trans. de Catanzaro, 322: Τίς δέ ἐστιν ὁ τρόπος, ὅν σοι πατρικῶς συμβουλεύων ὑποτίθημι, τῆς μετανοίας, ἄκουσον ἀσκανδαλίστως καὶ συνετῶς, ἀδελφέ.

[133] Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 198. For more details, see also: Golitzin, *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 3, 30-31.

[134] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 4, 11-18 (ed. Krivochéine); trans. de Catanzaro, 70 (modified): "Ἀδελφέ, ἄνευ δακρύων μὴ κοινωνήσῃς ποτέ." Τοῦτο οἱ ἀκροαταὶ ἀκούσαντες – πολλοὶ γὰρ παρῆσαν οὐ μόνον λαῖκοί, ἀλλὰ καὶ μοναχοὶ τῶν ὀνομαστῶν καὶ περιδόξων ἐπ᾽ ἀρετῇ –, ἐθαύμασαν ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ καὶ ἀλλήλοις ἐνατενίσαντες εἶπον, ὡς ὑπομειδιῶντες, ὁμοθυμαδὸν μιᾷ τῇ φωνῇ · "Λοιπὸν ἡμεῖς οὐδέποτε κοινωνήσωμεν, ἀλλὰ μείνωμεν ἅπαντες ἀκοινώνητοι!"

receiving communion in the end of liturgy. In my opinion, Symeon does the same in his *Catechesis*: he is about to say something extraordinary which is against the expectation of the monastic community present.

Then Symeon proceeds to the description of the method itself. After recitation of Trisagion and "Our Father" a monk should turn to the next prayer and focus on the self-examination, both internal and external:

> When you come to say "Lord, have mercy" and wish to stretch out your hands to the light of heaven look upwards with your physical (*aisthetois*) eyes and fix your sight on your hands. Concentrate your thoughts (*dianoia*) and recall your wicked actions and how much you have sinned with your hands.[135]

This self-examination exposes a monk to two gazes: his own and the gaze of God which is supposed to be reduplicated within the conscience of the penitent self.[136] To recognise the own body as an instrument of sin is an important task on the way to the estrangement of the body which reaches its climax in penitent self-beating:

> Then turn your hands behind your back and join them, as though you were being led off to death, and sigh from the depth of your soul and say with a pitiful voice, "Have mercy on me, a sinner (*Lk. 18:13*) who am not fit to live, but who am truly worthy of all punishment," together with any other words that the grace of God gives you to utter. As you call to mind your sinful acts strike yourself violently and unsparingly and say, "How, O sinful and wretched man, could you do such and such?" Again, turn your hands [behind your back] and stand, imploring God. Then beat your face, pluck at your hair and pull it, as though some terrible enemy had plotted against you, and say, "Why did you commit such and such a sin?" Then, when you have sufficiently beaten yourself, join your hands in front of you and stand with joyful soul (*hilara te psyche*).[137]

[135] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 30, 149-154 (ed. Krivochéine); trans. de Catanzaro, 322: Ὅτε δὲ εἰπεῖν ἔλθῃς τὸ Κύριε ἐλέησον καὶ ἐκτεῖναι θελήσῃς τὰς χεῖράς σου εἰς τὸ ὕψος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐμβλέψας τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ προσχὼν αὐταῖς καὶ τῇ διανοίᾳ ἑαυτὸν ἐπισυνάξας, μνήσθητι τῶν φαύλων σου ἔργων, καὶ ὅσα ἥμαρτες δι᾽ αὐτῶν <…>.

[136] Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 206.

[137] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 30, 160-173 (ed. Krivochéine), trans. de Catanzaro, 322: Στρέψας οὖν αὐτὰς εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω καὶ συνδήσας, ὡς ἐπὶ θάνατον ἀγόμενος, ἐκ βάθους στενάξας ψυχῆς εἶπον ἐλεεινῇ τῇ φωνῇ · "Ἐλέησόν με τὸν ἁμαρτωλὸν καὶ ἀνάξιον τοῦ ζῆν, ἄξιον δὲ πάσης ὄντως κολάσεως" καὶ ἄλλα ὅσα ἡ τοῦ Θεοῦ χάρις δώῃ σοι τοῦ εἰπεῖν. Ἀναμνημονεύων δὲ τῶν ἐφαμάρτων σου πράξεων, τύπτε σφοδρῶς καὶ ἀφειδῶς σεαυτὸν λέγων · "Πῶς τὰ καὶ τά, πονηρὲ καὶ ἄθλιε, πέπραχας;" καὶ πάλιν στρέψον τὰς χεῖρας καὶ ἵστασο δεόμενος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Εἶτα ῥάπιζε πάλιν τὸ πρόσωπόν σου, τίλλε τὰς τρίχας σου, σύρων αὐτάς, ὡς ξένου τινὸς καὶ ἐπιβούλου σοι γεγονότος ἐχθροῦ, καὶ εἰπέ · "Διατί τὰ καὶ τὰ πεποίηκας;" καὶ οὕτω μαστίξας σεαυτὸν ἱκανῶς, δῆσον τότε τὰς χεῖράς σου ἔμπροσθεν καὶ στῆθι ἐν ἱλαρᾷ τῇ ψυχῇ.

This performed spectacle happens in the cell where a monk is alone. A monk thus constructs his own penitent self through these scripted acts and employs the body to influence the self from the outside as if it is not the monk himself but someone else who is punishing him. [138] This self-castigation eventually results in a joyful humbleness or, rather, cathartic pleasure and calmness, which are the diametrical opposites of the initial furious beating and interrogation. According to Derek Krueger, a biblical text underlies these acts of penitence. Symeon imitates the Apostle Paul and follows his words from 1 Corinthians 9:27: "but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after preaching to others I would not be disqualified."[139] Of course, for Symeon, apostles and prophets are prominent archetypal figures. However, here I would like to propose an additional source for Symeon's extraordinary practice of penitence and suggest that his ideas draw on John Climacus' penitent subjects from my first chapter.

Let me claim once again that John's views on penitence are extremely corporeal. His parable about prisoners contained the severest descriptions of wounded and tormented flesh. Symeon avoids depicting flesh as negative and sinful matter in the process of penitence. However, he also employs the image of prisoner in his writing who is being convicted to death with his hands being tied behind the back, even though in the case of Symeon it is a mere semblance.[140]

In Symeon's case, monastic cell becomes a nocturnal place of imprisonment where the penitent subject prepared for death dwells – the purification ritual of repentance happens before monk is going to bed. Self-beating and interrogation about past sins precedes sleeping while John's prisoners try to drive their sleep away by beatings and insults. Symeon moves the monk's focus to the hands as an instrument of sin. For John, as I argued in the first chapter, the whole bodily surface represented by flesh is responsible for sinful behaviour. Hands kept

[138] Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 207.

[139] 1 Cor. 9:27: ἀλλὰ ὑπωπιάζω μου τὸ σῶμα καὶ δουλαγωγῶ, μη πως ἄλλοις κηρύξας αὐτὸς ἀδόκιμος γένωμαι.

[140] See above, p.19.

behind the back is the most significant parallel connecting the two descriptions, but, of course, for Symeon, the scene is staged, there is no real rope but only the power of imagination which demands concentration and constant self-control.

Symeon's imagery is, of course, less violent. As I argued above, Symeon referred to John's works and then continued to set forth his own method of penitence which can be considered as parallel to John's but at the same time very different. In my opinion, the difference lies in the notion of flesh (*sarx*) which is absent from Symeon's discourse. Symeon locates the sins of the past in the hands, while for John those sins are located over the whole surface of the material body making human flesh a map of sinfulness. For Symeon, rather, flesh is a matter that participates in salvation and this is reflected not only his allegory of rebel but in the theology of flesh to which I turn in the following chapter.[141]

In the same discourse, later, Symeon describes how after these nocturnal practices a monk should behave during the liturgical service in the morning. Appearance of penitent monk in public involves his constant remembrance of the things he did in private. Thus, this individual nocturnal experience which is hidden from everyone except God shapes the behaviour of the subject in the daylight. With thoughts about prayers and fulfilled performance of repentance such monk should pursue his obligations in the Office with zeal, trembling and fear in order not to "fail to give to anyone the life-giving bread (*arton*), or, as we have said, God's word (*logon*)."[142] So, Symeon compares the public reading of canon (prose hymn) here to the process of giving Eucharist. A penitent monk becomes a worthy giver of God's bread.

[141] Here, I mean Symeon's allegory of the repentant subject in the *Tenth Ethical Discourse*, which alludes to the parable of the prodigal son. The allegory is famous for its explicit sexual imagery and gender ambiguity. A rebel returns to the Christian emperor and wins his forgiveness with humbleness. The emperor redresses him and takes him to bed, kissing and pressing his face upon all the members of the penitent's body. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* X (ed. Darrouzès), trans. Goltzin, 1:141-170. For an analysis of this parable, see: Krueger, "Homoerotic Spectacle and the Monastic Body," 99-118.

[142] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* 30, 214-216 (ed. Krivochéine), trans. de Catanzaro, 324: καὶ φοβοῦ μη τινι καταφρονητικῶς παραλείψῃς δοῦναι τὸν ζωοποιὸν ἄρτον ἤτοι τὸν λόγον, ὡς εἴρηται, τοῦ Θεοῦ.

2.4. Repentant confession

This section aims to explore how confession is represented in Symeon's writing and what place it occupies in the construction of the penitent self. The practice of confession is a promising way to explore the problem of individualit? in the middle ages. Marc Lauxtermann, revising his earlier views on individuality inspired by the works of Alexander Kazhdan, argues that the Byzantine self was communal even when written in the first person singular. Even when one voice is speaking it stands for the multitude of such voices confessing sinful subjectivity.[143]

I would like to connect Symeon to John once again to explore the way they stage the act of confession. In the fourth step of the *Ladder* "On obedience,"[144] John gives an interesting example of public confession performed by a robber who wanted to enter the monastery and become a monk. Before being allowed to enter the monastery and renounce lay life, however, the *hegoumenos* wanted to make him confess the evil deeds. In one of the upcoming liturgies, he thus decided to stage the same act of confession with the same robber who earlier had told him that he was ready to be an example of confession for others: "I will confess in the middle of Alexandria itself, if you wish."[145] The *hegoumenos* then decided to let this novice do his confession in the midst of liturgy. This performance was supposed to set an image to imitate for all the monks present:

> And so, the superior gathered his flock into the church. There were 230 of them, and when the holy service was in progress, and the gospel had been read – for it was Sunday – this irreproachable convict was led out by some of the brethren who hit him, but lightly. He had his hands tied behind his back, he was wearing a hair shirt, and ashes had been sprinkled on his head. Everyone was amazed, and there were some shouts, for it was not clear what was happening. But when the robber appeared at the doors of the church, that very charitable superior said loudly to him: "Stop! You are not worthy to come in here." The robber was

[143] Marc Lauxtermann, "Hymns, Prayers and Poems to Oneself," in *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres*, vol. 2 (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2019), 168.

[144] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 4, PG 88:677: Περὶ τῆς μακαρίας, καὶ ἀειμνήστου ὑπακοῆς.

[145] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 4; PG 88:681; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 94: Καὶ εἰ βούλει, φησὶ, κατὰ μέσον Ἀλεξάνδρου τῆς πόλεως

> shocked by the voice of the superior coming from the sanctuary (He swore afterwards that he thought he heard thunder and not a human voice). At once fell on his face and trembled and shook with fear. While he lay on the ground, moistening the floor with his tears, the marvellous healer (*iatrou*) turned to him, trying everything so as to save him and to give everyone else an example of salvation and true humility. Before all, he exhorted him to describe in detail everything he had done. Shivering, the robber confessed all, sins of the flesh (*somatika*), natural and unnatural, with humans and with beasts; poisonings, murders, and many other deeds too awful to hear or to set down on paper. But when he had finished his confession, the superior allowed him to be given the habit at once and to be included in the ranks of the brethren."[146]

This long excerpt illustrates the staged performance of confession in the middle of liturgy. It seems that the sacred space of a church could function as a kind of *theatron* where the hegoumenos could stage the spectacle of penitent obedience. This performance was introduced to the public to inspire mass confession among the monks. As John describes, not everyone could understand immediately what was happening. The novelty of such an unexpected provocation caused amazement among the monks present in the liturgy. The *hegoumenos* transgressed the boundaries of usual and well-known sequence of liturgical parts. The liturgy was reshaped and turned into theatre to transmit a message and an example to the audience.

The *hegoumenos* himself took the role of judge. He is also called a *physician* (*iatrou*) (cf. Luke 4:23) in the text and his voice is confused with the sound of thunder. With these multiple functions and roles attributed to the same person in the text John illustrates the

[146] John Climacus, *The Ladder* 4; PG 88:681, 684; trans. Luibheid and Russel, 94: Εἶτα συναθροίζει ὁ ποιμὴν ἐν τῷ Κυριακῷ πάντα τὰ πρόβατα τὸν ἀριθμὸν τριακόσια τριάκοντα, καὶ τῆς θείας συνάξεως τελουμένης · ἦν γὰρ Κυριακὴ τῶν ἡμερῶν, μετὰ τὴν συμπλήρωσιν τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου εἰσφέρει λοιπὸν τὸν ἄμεμπτον κατάδικον ἐκεῖνον ὑπό τινων ἀδελφῶν συρόμενον καὶ μετρίως τυπτόμενον, τὰς χεῖρας δι᾽ ὄπισθεν δεδεμένον, καὶ σάκκον τρίχινον ἠμφιεσμένον, καὶ σποδὸν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλης, ὡς καὶ ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς θεωρίας ἅπαντας καταπλαγέντας εὐθέως τῷ κλαυθμῷ ἀλαλάξαι · οὐ γὰρ ἔγνω τις τὸ γινόμενον. Εἶτα ὡς πλησίον τῶν τῆς ἐκκλησίας πυλῶν ἔφθασε, προσφωνεῖ αὐτῷ ἡ ἱερὰ ἐκείνη τοῦ φιλανθρώπου κεφαλὴ μεγάλῃ τῇ φωνῇ · Στῆθι, ἀνάξιος γὰρ ὑπάρχεις τῆς ἐνταῦθα εἰσόδου. Ἐκπλαγεὶς οὖν ἐπὶ τῇ τοῦ ποιμένος ἐξ ἱερατείου ἐναχθείση πρὸς αὐτὸν φωνῇ · ἐνόμιζε γὰρ, ὡς ἔσχατον ἡμᾶς ὄρκοις ἐπληροφόρει, οὐκ ἀνθρώπου, ἀλλὰ βροντῆς ἀκηκοέναι · πίπτει μὲν εὐθέως ἐπὶ πρόσωπον ἔντρομος γενόμενος, καὶ ὅλος τῷ φόβῳ κλονηθείς. Χαμαὶ τοίνυν ὑπάρχων, καὶ τὸ ἔδαφος τοῖς δάκρυσι βρέχων, ἐπιτρέπεται πάλιν παρὰ τοῦ θαυμασίου ἰατροῦ τοῦ τὴν σωτηρίαν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἅπασι πραγματευομένου, καὶ τύπον σωτηρίας καὶ ἐνεργοῦς ταπεινώσεως πᾶσι παρέχοντος, εἰπεῖν πάντα τὰ πεπραγμένα αὐτῷ κατ᾽ εἶδος ἐπὶ πάντων. Ὁ δὲ μετὰ φρίκης ἐξομολογεῖ τὰ ἅπαντα καθ᾽ ἓν πᾶσαν ἀκοὴν ξενίζονται · οὐ μόνον τὰ σωματικὰ κατὰ φύσιν, καὶ παρὰ φύσιν, ἐν λογικοῖς τε ζώσις, καὶ ἀλόγοις · ἀλλά γε καὶ ἄχρι φαρμακειῶν, καὶ φόνων, καὶ ἑτέρων, ὧν οὐ θέμις ἀκοῦσαι, ἢ γραφῇ παραδοῦναι. Ἐξομολογησάμενον τοίνυν ἐπιτρέπει εὐθέως ἀποκαρθῆναι, καὶ τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς συγκαταριθνηθῆναι.

powerful and transgressive role of the hegoumenos in the life of the monastery. Interestingly, in the beginning of the quoted passage the image of prisoner appears again. The sinful subject who is about to confess plays the role of a prisoner who is led to execution. The staged act of repentance provokes robber for even more powerful confession. This cathartic action is accompanied by a state of shock (*ekplageis*) and shivering (*frikes*). Fear of the sublime caused a physical reaction in the penitent subject. In the end, the list of confessed sins seems to be rather exaggerated. We encounter the same manner of confession in Symeon's *Hymn* 24:

> I will tell you only what the book of my conscience bears,
> and the storehouses of my memory contain,
> but the others, You alone know the sum.
> I had become a murderer – listen everyone
> so that you may weep sympathetically – but the manner
> "of murder" I leave aside, begging too long a speech.
> Alas, I had also become an adulterer at heart, (Mt 5:28)
> and a sodomite in deed and by free choice.
> I became a philanderer, a wizard, and a corrupter of boys, (1 Cor 6:9-10)
> a perjurer, a blasphemer, a money grabber,
> a thief, and a liar, shameless and rapacious – Woe is me!
> abusive, brother hating, exceedingly jealous,
> and money-loving, reckless, and also every
> other form of wickedness I have committed.
> Yes, trust me, I say these things truly,
> and not in imagery, not in clever metaphor![147]

[147] Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymns* 24.68-83 (ed. Koder); trans. Griggs, 184: [λέξοιμι] ἀλλ᾽ ἅπερ βίβλος φέρει τοῦ συνειδότος / καὶ ἀποθῆκαι μνήμης ἐμπεριέχουσι · / τὰ δ᾽ ἄλλα μόνος ἀριθμεῖν αὐτὸς οἶδας. / Τέγονα φονεύς, ἀκούσαντε οἱ πάντες, / ἵνα κλαύσητε συμπαθῶς, τὸν δὲ τρόπον / εἴασα, λόγου παραιτούμενος μῆκος. / Γέγονα, οἴμοι, καὶ μοιχὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ / καὶ σοδομίτης ἔργῳ καὶ προαιρέσει. / Γέγονα πόρνος, μάγος καὶ παιδορθόρος, ἐπίορκος ὀμότης καὶ πλεονέκτης, / κλέπτης, ψεύστης τε ἀναιδής, ἅρπαξ – φεῦ μοι! – / λοίδορος,

Symeon also performs a confession, albeit a textual one, even though the text, probably, was supposed to be read aloud. Here, he recounts the striking list of sins, even though it may seem improbable to the reader, as improbable as the above confession in John's *Ladder*.[148] Both lists of sins appear to be literary devices of textual personae. It seems that Symeon confesses the sins of humanity, taking all their weight on his penitent monastic self. The robber confessing the same things is accepted as a monk. Through such a performative act of explicit repentance, a monastic penitent self is shaped in accordance not with individual biography but rather with the human postlapsarian existence and, as a result, the whole history of humanity. Hannah Hunt's short definition of a monk as mourner can be observed at work here again: a monk grieves not only about himself but also about the death of others' innocence through sin.[149] Therefore, through the work of historical archetypes, staged performances and communal confessions the penitent self becomes deeply embedded into the eschatological process of Christian historical linearity.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I aimed to demonstrate that John Climacus' *Ladder* is worth considering as one of the main sources for understanding Symeon's performative doctrine of penitence. In his own texts, Symeon repeatedly refers to the *Ladder* and exploring the connections of his works with the *Ladder* can lead to interesting conclusions.

Firstly, I focused on the question of monastic reading, since Symeon in his discourses recommended his monks to explore books on their own. This part of monastic practice is important for understanding monastic discipline, self-transformation and the way in which

μισάδελφος, φθονερὸς πάνυ, φιλάργυρός τε, ἰταμος τε καὶ πάσης / ἄλλης κακίας εἶδος διεπραξάμην. / Ναί, πιστεύσατε, ἀληθῶς λέγω ταῦτα καὶ οὐ πλάσματι, οὐδε σεσοφισμένως!

[148] Krueger, "Homoerotic Spectacle and the Monastic Body," 116.

[149] Hunt, "Monk as Mourner," 23.

community functions. I argued that a monastery is a space in which textuality – repetition and declaration of texts – plays an important role. In the *Discourses*, Symeon's authorial persona performs the role of hegoumenos who is aware of the feelings and thoughts of his monks. At the same time, *hegoumenos* desires to bring his community to salvation. The latter question is linked to Symeon's instruction about true repentance.

In this guidance, monastic bodies and thoughts are subdued to the *hegoumenos*' control. Symeon constructs penitent subjects out of his monks by introducing bodily practices of visible penitence (including self-beating) which intermingle with prayers and recitation of sacred texts. Such private performances were intended to transform a monk's inner self. In this doctrine of corporeal penitence, Symeon relies on John's text. The whole staging of individual penitence looks less violent but still very similar when compared to the prisoners from John's parable. It is important to notice that for Symeon, the representation of corporeality was different. Flesh (also as notion) is almost absent from his work. For him, sin is located in the hands of the monk while of John the whole flesh is responsible.

The chapter's last section explored performative confession by comparing an interesting episode from the *Ladder* to Symeon's "exaggerated" confession in the *Hymn 24*. The pattern at the core of both excerpts consists of an exaggerated expression of personal guilt. Such performativity of guilt might constitute a part of the monastic identity in Christian discourse. A monk grieves not only for himself but also for all the sins of humanity. Thus, such confession could be interpreted as sorrow about the whole history of humanity. Such a view accentuates the penitent subject's awareness of his place on the Christian eschatological timeline which began as a consequence of Adam and Eve's transgression. This brings us to the discussion of Symeon's interpretation of the Book of Genesis, which occupies an important place in his *Ethical Discourses* as the narrative about the beginning of human history and sinful existence.

Chapter 3: Symeon the New Theologian and the role of repentance in the History of Creation

In this chapter, I continue my discussion of Symeon's views on penitence (*metanoia*), moving from "practice", on which the previous chapter focused, to theological issues. My focus here will move from penitence within the monastic community to Symeon's understanding of how tragedy of Adam and Eve's failed repentance is manifested in the whole history of creation. Thus, in this chapter I leave aside the connections with John Climacus and proceed to more theoretical questions in Symeon's interpretation of Scripture. In other words, this chapter explores several questions which are connected to Symeon's specific view of creation history and transgression.

I analyse another side of Symeon's writings in which his authority is manifested through the identity of theologian rather than *hegoumenos* of the monastery. To understand Symeon's theological significance, idiosyncrasy and innovation I have chosen to compare his interpretation of the beginning of the Book of Genesis with the homilies of John Chrysostom (d. 407) on the same subject. The fact that Chrysostom was widely read in eleventh-century Byzantium is justifying my comparison of his ideas with Symeon's point of view. Symeon, as well as Niketas in Symeon's *Vita,*[150] refers to the authoritative texts of Chrysostom in numerous cases. This creates a perspective for Symeon's views showing how they relate to the views expressed in the canonical texts of Byzantine spiritual life such as Chrysostom's homilies.

At the end of the chapter, I will turn to the summary and analysis of Symeon's theological understanding of flesh again in the context of history of creation and salvation. His

[150] For example, see: Niketas Stethatos, *Life of Symeon the New Theologian*, X.84 (ed. Hausherr); trans. Greenfield, 193. Niketas gives two long excerpts from the Chrysostom's eulogy of Philogonios as an example of apologetic writing about sainthood. For a short summary of the debate about sainthood and Niketas's (and, as follows, Symeon's posthumous) relation to it, see: *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 149.

view of human history as both a history of *failed repentance* and a history of a chosen *portion of flesh* is significant for a better understanding of his eccentric theology and allegorical interpretation of the Scripture in the Origenist and Antiochian intellectual traditions.[151] In other words, I would like to demonstrate that for Symeon the notion of flesh appears to be significant predominantly in the theological context while the idea of penitence is a key for almost all his writings.

3.1. Symeon's authorial persona of theologian

Among Symeon's writings, his discussions of Genesis, which can be found in both *Ethical* and *Catechetical Discourses*, are most relevant within the framework of my study, since they reveal how the history of creation should be understood and interpreted in Symeon's complex theological system. For Symeon, the failed repentance of Adam and Eve is a prelude to the whole history of humanity as a history of return to God. In the previous chapter, I considered Symeon as an author who textually reveals himself as hegoumenos of monastic community. Here, first, I would like to concentrate on the structural particularities of these discourses in question and to analyse how Symeon reveals himself through the practice of authorship in these theological writings which also had other purposes besides didactic and prescriptive.

Through the interpretation of the book of Genesis Symeon affirms his authority as theologian and places himself in a long tradition of interpreting the first passages of Scripture. Symeon's labelling of *Neos Theologos* by his contemporaries establishes his historical relationship with two other writers of the past being designated as Theologians: John the Apostle and Gregory of Nazianzus. I would assume that the label of theologian also explicitly

[151] István Perczel, "The Bread, the Wine and the Immaterial Body," 136.

influenced the credibility and authority of Symeon's writing in the eleventh-century context. Divine inspiration underlies the creation of text and this is reflected in the identity of authorial persona. Interpretation of Scripture is in a sense an act of revelation: the text should be understood not only literarily but also in a spiritual sense, revealed to those who are willing to hear. Symeon's, as an author, also tends to speak expressively about the power of humility:

> All you who think highly of yourselves, learn from me here to humble yourselves and to moderate your self-opinion, and never to exalt yourselves, be you the mightiest kings of kings, or the most noble of nobles, or wealthier than all the other rich men put together.[152]

This is a minor example of how Symeon's manner of writing combines humbleness with a prophetic vim. In these discourses, Symeon manifests himself in a very different way when compared with the texts discussed in the previous chapter. The authority of hegoumenos is replaced with the authority of a theologian and divinely inspired interpreter or prophet who speaks through the workings of grace (*charis*): "From this point, however, without straying from the word of the Gospel, grace gives me something else to understand and compels me to say it, to speak of that whichever occurs mystically and in all the sons of light."[153]

In a way, here, Symeon is not an author but rather a filter through whom the revelation happens. The divine grace produces the discourse through Symeon's mediation. This idea interestingly overlaps with Symeon's lack of education which Niketas Stethatos emphasised in his hagiographic narrative, following a widespread hagiographical *topos*.[154] A saint does not have to be educated to produce a sophisticated theological discourse:

> He never hellenised his speech by assimilating secular learning, however, nor mastered rhetoric. Rather, since Symeon was very intelligent from his boyhood, he fled this [learning] and its defilement and, even if he did not totally avoid it, only brushed with his fingertips what was beneficial in it. Thus, when he had completed what is known as primary education, he avoided what remained, or

[152] Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* I.9, 28-32 (ed. Darrouzès); trans. Golitzin, 1:53-54: Μάθε μοι τοίνυν ἐντεῦθεν, πᾶς ὁ μεγάλα περὶ ἑαυτοῦ οἰόμενος, ταπεινοῦσθαι καὶ μετριοφρονεῖν βασιλικώτατος, κἂν ἀρχόντων περιφανέστερος, κἂν πλουσίων ἁπάντων πλουσιώτερος ᾖς […].

[153] Ibid., 71-73; trans. Golitzin, 55: Ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἐντεῦθεν ὅσον ἀπὸ τοῦ εὐαγγελικοῦ ῥήματος νοεῖν μοι καὶ ἕτερόν τι δίδωσιν ἡ χάρις καὶ εἰπεῖν κατεπείγει, ὃ μυστικῶς ἀεὶ γίνεται καὶ ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς υἱοῖς τοῦ φωτός.

[154] Thomas Pratsch, *Der hagiographische Topos* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 92-103.

rather the entirety of secular education, and fled the harmful influence of his schoolfellows.[155]

Niketas in his text mirrors Symeon's self-fashioning as mouthpiece of God. It is important to notice that Niketas also speaks about the absent "hellenisation" of Symeon's language which can be a good example of Byzantine high style writing. At the same time, it is also obvious that Symeon's theological views were influenced by Plato[156] and the whole story about the debate with Stephen of Nicomedia perfectly illustrates the apogee of humble self-representation in which the *topos* of divine inspiration fits perfectly.[157] It would be truism to say that Niketas's Symeon is an idealised literary construction, and that often Niketas hides, manipulates and reinterprets certain aspects of Symeon's biography. At the same time, the image created by Niketas corresponds with the way Symeon presents himself as an author through the prism of divine inspiration and humbleness in his own theological writings.

3.2. John Chrysostom in the Eleventh Century

As I showed above, both Symeon in his own texts and Niketas in Symeon's *Vita*, refer to the works of Chrysostom as authoritative texts. It is therefore relevant to put Symeon's ideas

[155] Niketas Stethatos, *Life of Symeon the New Theologian* I.2, 19-26 (ed. Hausherr); trans. Greenfield, 5. Ἐλείπετο δὲ αὐτῷ ἐξελληνισθῆναι τὴν γλῶτταν τῇ ἀναλήψει παιδείας τῆς θύραθεν καὶ λόγου εὐμοιρῆσαι ῥητορικοῦ. Ἀλλὰ τοῦτο μὲν ἐκ παιδὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ πολὺς τὴν σύνεσιν ὢν καὶ τὸν μῶμον ἐκφεύγων εἰ καὶ μὴ καθόλου ὅμως οὐχ εἵλετο, ἄκροις δὲ ψαύσας δακτύλοις τῆς ἐκεῖθεν ὠφελείας καὶ μόνεν μεμαθηκὼς τὴν οὕτω λεγομένην γραμματικήν, τὸ λοιπὸν ἢ καὶ τὸ πᾶν ὡς εἰπεῖν τῆς ἔξωθεν ἀπεσείσατο παιδείας, καὶ τὴν ἐκ τῶν συμφοιτητῶν βλάβην ἐξέφυγεν.

[156] Manolis Patedakis, "Quotations and Allusion in Symeon the New Theologian," in *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond*, ed. Teresa Shawcross and Ida Toth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 291-292.

For example, see: Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* I.12, 319-415 (ed. Darrouzès); trans. Golitzin, 1:74-77. See also Alexander Golitzin's commentary to Symeon's use of allegory of the prisoner on pages 19-20.

[157] Niketas describes this conflict between Symeon and ecclesiastical authorities. Symeon was asked to provide an answer for a theological question about distinction between the Father and the Son in the Trinity. Symeon, of course, provided it in a rhetorically distinguished manner composing a written answer. For this, see: *Vie de Syméon*, X.74-78 (ed. Hausherr); trans. Greenfield, 167-179. It worth mentioning that Niketas described in his narrative how Stephen was mocking at Symeon calling him "ignorant and an utter peasant" (ἀμαθῆ […] ἀποκαλῶν καὶ πάντη ἄγροικον).

on repentance in the history of creation into dialogue with those of John Chrysostom, with which he was undoubtedly familiar. Chrysostom's writings were still widely read and commented on in eleventh-century Byzantium. One finds an evidence for this in the poems which John Mauropous (d. ca. 1070) composed in the middle of the eleventh century. Mauropous wrote about the triad of the most important interpreters of the Scripture for the Eastern tradition. His laudatory poems for John Chrysostom, Gregory the Theologian and Basil the Great reveal still existing influence of the ancient authors.[158] The voices of these authoritative figures from the past, and particularly John Chrysostom, call him to reject the lay life:

> Yes, he calls aloud and utters admonitions,
> but his voice is weak from fasting.
> It is my fault – I did not lend my ear.
> But now listening attentively, I will grasp what he tells me.
> Alas! He persuades me to reject this life.[159]

Mauropous's focus on asceticism proclaimed in Chrysostom's writings. At the same time, the poet speaks about the person who lived many centuries before in the present tense presenting him as living contemporary whose life and will are in the texts preserved. The importance of John Chrysostom for Byzantine liturgical practice and theology of the period can be emphasised by the fact that it is in the eleventh century that the Liturgy of Basil the Great being for centuries the principal liturgy of the Byzantine church was replaced with that of John Chrysostom.[160]

[158] *The Poems of Christopher of Mytilene and John Mauropous*, trans. Floris Bernard and Christopher Livanos (London: Harvard University Press, 2018), 347-349.

[159] John Mauropous, *Poems* 14.343-346 (ed. Bernard and Livanos): Καὶ φθέγγεται μὲν καὶ λαλεῖ παραινέσεις, / ἀλλ᾽ ἐστὶν ἰσχνόφωνος ἐξ ἀσιτίας. /Ἐμὸν τὸ λεῖπον · οὐ γὰρ οὖς παρεσχόμην. / Νῦν οὖν ὑποσχὼν γνώσομαι τί μοι λέγει. / Βαβαῖ · καταφρονεῖν με πείθει τοῦ βίου.

[160] Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 115.

3.3. Symeon and John Chrysostom on the making of human being

In his *First Ethical Discourse* (*biblos ton ethikon*), Symeon begins the narration by retelling the history of divine creation and elaborately commenting on the beginning of the Book of Genesis. His comment on *Genesis 1:27* deserves special [161]attention.[162] Symeon briefly retells the creation of Adam and Eve:

> 'And God made the human being (*ton anthropon*), He made them male and female'. It [that is, Scripture] says 'male (*arsen*) and female (*thelu*),' not as if Eve had already been born but as being in Adam's rib and being with him.[163]

Here it is important to notice that for Symeon the simultaneity of creating male and female is important. Eve was created at the same time as Adam, but within him, as a part of his body; she had not yet been born as a separate subject. Here, the notion of *anthropos* is significant for the theological understanding of human nature, since, in a way, it is not gendered. Male (*arsen*) and female (*thelu*) are rather attributes of *anthropos* as a being which possesses both these categories.

Let me now turn to the commentary on the same passage in the John Chrysostom's Tenth Homily. Chrysostom clearly dismisses the idea of Eve's simultaneous creation:

> He says, "Male and female he made them." Do you see how he describes what is not yet created as though already created? That's the way, you see, with the eyes of the spirit; I mean, these bodily eyes cannot see visible things in the same way that the eyes of the spirit can see things that are not visible and things that have no subsistence.[164]

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[161] E. g., see Paul McGuckin's introduction to his translation of Symeon's Practical and Theological chapters in: Symeon the New Theologian, *The Practical and Theological Chapters and the Three Theological Discourses*, trans. Paul McGuckin (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1982), 11.

[162] Gen. 1:27: So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (καὶ εποίησεν ὁ Θεός τὸν ἀνθρώπον κατ᾽ εἰκόνα Θεοῦ ἐποίησεν αὐτόν, ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς).

[163] Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* I.1, 25-27 (ed. Darrouzès): 'Καὶ ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, κατ᾽ εἰκόνα Θεοῦ ἐποίησεν αὐτον, ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς.' Ἄρσεν δὲ καὶ θῆλυ λέγει οὐχ ὡς τῆς Εὔας ἤδη γενομένης, ἀλλ᾽ ὡς ἐν τῇ τοῦ Ἀδὰμ πλευρᾷ οὔσης καὶ αὐτῷ συνούσης.

[164] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 10; *PG* 53:85; trans. Robert C. Hill, 134: Ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς. Εἶδες πῶς τὸ μηδέπω γεγονὸς ὦς γεγονὸς διηγήσατο; Τοιοῦτον γὰρ οἱ πνευματικοὶ ὀφθαλμοί· οὐδὲ γὰρ οὕτως οἱ σωματικοὶ οὗτοι ὀφθαλμοὶ τὰ ὁρώμενα βλέπειν δύ νανται, ὡς οἱ τοῦ πνεύματος ὀφθαλμοὶ τὰ μὴ ὁρώμεναι, μηδὲ τὰ ὑφεστῶτα.

In his denial, Chrysostom's interpretation is the perfect opposite of Symeon's. According to him, Genesis revolves around the sequential temporality of creation where Adam being created as a king of all irrational animals (*aloga*) lacked a "helpmate of his own kind" (*homoion auto*)[165], the rational helpmate, who was created in the end to fill the absence. Symeon does not pay any attention to this sequential and thus hierarchical structure of creation. It seems that for him the act of creation works according to other premises. Symeon's views on this divine procedure may be influenced by Platonic discourse on the creation of humans/humankind found in the Plato's *Symposium*:

> In the first place, let me treat the nature of man and what has happened to it; for the original human nature (*anthropinen physin*) was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman, and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which had once a real existence, but is now lost, and the word "Androgynous" is only preserved as a term of reproach.[166]

In this dialogue, Plato attributes these words to Aristophanes, a comedian. Later, in Christian authors such as Eusebius, Plato's discourse was described as a perverse history of creation of which Plato "was evidently not ignorant".[167] Symeon's reference to the Platonic view of creation is important, since it shows the equality of Adam and Eve in agency and importance in the sense that Eve is not secondary to Adam. For Symeon subordination is absent from this discourse. Equality of Eve and Adam in symbolical power is a key idea for the development of Symeon's further interpretation of history of humanity as history of God's portion. As I will show further, for Symeon, Christ was fashioned in the same way as Eve.

It is also important to notice that in contemporary queer theology, Genesis 1:27 is a passage open to interpretation: it is often argued that the human being that God created was not

[165] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 15; *PG* 53:120; trans. Robert C. Hill, 197.

[166] Plato, *The Symposium* 189d-e: δεῖ δὲ πρῶτον ὑμᾶς μαθεῖν τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν καὶ τὰ παθήματα αὐτῆς. ἡ γὰρ πάλαι ἡμῶν φύσις οὐχ αὐτὴ ἦν ἥπερ νῦν, ἀλλ᾽ ἀλλοία. Πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ τρία ἦν τὰ γένη τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, οὐχ ὥσπερ νῦν δύο, ἄρρεν καὶ θῆλυ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τρίτον προσῆν κοινὸν ὃν ἀμφοτέρων τούτων, οὗ νῦν ὄνομα λοιπόν, αὐτὸ δὲ ἠφάνισται: ἀνδρόγυνον γὰρ ἓν τότε μὲν ἦν καὶ εἶδος καὶ ὄνομ α ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων κοινὸν τοῦ τε ἄρρενος καὶ θήλεος, νῦν δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλλ᾽ ἢ ἐν ὀνείδει ὄνομα κείμενον.

[167] Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, XII.12.

sexed and defined.[168] In Symeon's view, Eve was paradoxically created at the same time as Adam but did not yet fully come into being. Symeon's interpretation can thus be understood as if Adam's body encompassed also femininity in the very beginning as if it was pregnant.

To summarise: According to John Chrysostom, Eve was not yet created in the moment of Adam's creation but was foreseen. The presence of Eve in the substance of Adam's body, which was the only one existing with Eve inside it, is the main difference of Symeon's view on the point. Chrysostom cherishes the established hierarchical relation between man and woman emphasising the subordination of the latter to the power of the former, while Symeon does not pay any attention at all to this subordination in the text under discussion. Now, I will turn to Symeon's and Chrysostom's views on the transgression to which this different treatment of Adam and Eve also applies. For Symeon, Eve's equality to Adam plays an important role in his discussion of the failed repentance of both. He uses it to show the common for all human failure to repent and confess the sin.

3.4. Symeon and John Chrysostom on the transgression of Adam and Eve

Both theologians have different approaches to the description of Adam and Eve's interrogation by God and represent the aftermath of the Fall in different ways. As I will show, in Symeon's text, the transgression is postponed and the souls of Adam and Eve suffer from insensitivity (*anaesthesia*), which brings with it the impossibility of penitence (*metanoia*).[169] In the *Fifth Catechetical Discourse*, Symeon shows elaborately how both failed to repent:

> Will you not say 'I have sinned' (*hemarton*)? Say, O wretch, 'Yes, it is true, Master, I have transgressed Thy command, I have fallen by listening to the

[168] Elizabeth Stuart, "Sacramental Flesh," in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 65-76.

[169] On anaisthesia, see also my chapter I where I discuss how Symeon, after reading John's *Ladder*, was struggling with insensitivity (anaisthesia).

> woman's counsel, I am greatly at fault for doing what she said and disobeying Thy word, have mercy upon me!'" But he does not say this. He does not humble himself, he does not bend. The neck of his heart is like a sinew of iron *(Is. 48:4),* as is mine, wretch as I am! For had he said this he might have stayed in paradise. […] God said to Adam, "At the hour when you eat from the tree of which alone I commanded you that you must not eat, you will surely die" *(Gen. 2:17, 3:11).* Obviously this is the death of the soul (*to psychiko*), and this is what took place the same hour. By this Adam was stripped of the robe of immortality. […] I wretched and miserable man do the same, and I am unwilling ever to be humbled and to say with my heart that I am to blame for my undoing. […] Now you have known that Adam was condemned after his transgression because he did not repent (*metanoesai*) and say "I have sinned (*hemarton*)." He was exiled and commanded to spend his days in toil and sweat and to return to the earth from which he had been taken. The following will make this clear. When He had left him God came to Eve. He wanted to show her that she too would justly be cast out, if she was unwilling to repent (*metanoesai*). So, He said, "What is this that you have done?" *(Gen 3:13),* so that she at least might be able to say, "I have sinned." (*hemarton*) Why else did God need to speak these words to her, unless indeed to enable her to say, "In my folly, O Master, I, a lowly wretch, have done this, and have disobeyed Thee, my Master. Have mercy upon me!" But she did not say this. What did she say? "The serpent beguiled me" *(Gen. 3:13).* How senseless! (*anaesthesias*) […] So, when Eve too was unable to say, "l have sinned," both were cast out from the place of enjoyment. They were banished from paradise and from God. But consider how deep are the mysteries of God's love for men. Learn and be instructed that had they repented (*metanoesan*), they would not have been expelled. They would not have been condemned, they would not have been sentenced to return to the earth from which they had been taken *(Gen. 3:19).* How? Listen further.[170]

Symeon summarises the narrative of Genesis adding to it the concept of repentance. Both Adam and Eve when approached by God failed to confess the sin and at the same time

[170] Symeon the New Theologian, *Catechetical Discourses* V.213-219; 225-229; 237-240; 252-264; 268-274 (ed. Krivochéine); trans. de Catanzaro, 96-97: Οὐ λέγεις τὸ ‘Ἥμαρτον’; Εἰπέ, ταπεινέ · ‘Ναί, ἀλήθεια, Δέσποτα, παρέβην τὴν ἐντολήν σου, ἔπταισα ἀκούσας τῆς συμβουλῆς τῆς γυναικός, ἐσφάλην μεγάλως ποιήσας τὸν ἐκείνης λόγον καὶ παρακούσας τὸν σόν, ἐλέησόν με!’” Ἀλλ᾽ οὐ λέγει τοῦτο, οὐ ταπεινοῦται, οὐ κάμπτεται, νεῦρον σιδηροῦν ὁ τῆς καρδίας αὐτοῦ τράχηλος – οἷος δὴ καὶ ὁ ἐμός, τοῦ ἀθλίου, ἐστίν. Εἰ γὰρ εἶπε τοῦτο, ἔμεινε ἂν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ […] Εἶπεν ὁ Θεὸς τῷ Ἀδάμ · “Ἦν ὥραν φάγεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου, οὗ ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν τούτου μόνου μὴ φαγεῖν, θανάτῳ ἀποθανεῖσθε”, δηλονότι τῷ ψυχικῷ, ὃ καὶ αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἐγένετο, δι᾽ ὃ καὶ τῆς ἀθανάτου στολῆς ἐγυμνώθη […] οἷα καὶ νῦν ἐγὼ πάσχω, ὁ ταπεινὸς καὶ ταλαίπωρος, καὶ οὐ θέλω ταπεινωθῆναί ποτε καὶ εἰπεῖν ἀπὸ ψυχῆς ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι αἴτιος τῆς ᾽μῆς ἀπωλείας […] Ἤδη οὖν ἔγνως ὅτι μετὰ τὴν παράβασιν διὰ τὸ μὴ μετανοῆσαι καὶ εἰπεῖν “Ἥμαρτον”, καὶ ἐξορίζεται καὶ ἐν κόπῳ καὶ ἱδρῶτι διάγειν κελεύεται καὶ εἰς τὴν γῆν, ἐξ ἧς ἐλήφθη, διὰ τοῦτο κατεκρίθη. Τοῦτο δὲ δῆλον ἐκ τῶν ἑξῆς. Τοιγαροῦν καὶ ἀφεὶς αὐτὸν ἔρχεται πρὸς τὴν Εὔαν, θέλων δεῖξαι ὅτι δικαίως καὶ αὕτη συνεκβληθήσεται, μετανοῆσαι μὴ θέλουσα, και φησι · “Τί τοῦτο ἐποίησας;” ἵνα κἂν αὕτη εἴπῃ τὸ “Ἥμαρτον”. Ποίαν γὰρ καὶ ἄλλην χρείαν εἶχεν, εἰπέ μοι, ὁ Θεὸς λαλεῖν πρὸς αὐτὴν ταῦτα τὰ ῥήματα, εἰ μὴ πάντως ἵνα εἴπῃ ὅτι · “Ἐν ἀφροσύνῃ μου, Δέσποτα, τοῦτο ἔπραξα, ἡ ταπεινὴ καὶ ἀθλία, σοῦ τοῦ Δεσπότου μου, παρακούσασα. ἐλέησόν με!” Ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ εἶπε τοῦτο. Τί δέ; “Ὃ ὄφις ἐξηπάτησέ με.” Ὢ τῆς ἀναισθησίας! […] Ὡς δὲ οὐδὲ αὕτη εὗρεν εἰπεῖν “Ἥμαρτον”, ἐκβάλλονται τῆς τρυφῆς, ἐξορίζονται τοῦ παραδείσου καὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀλλὰ σκόπει μοι τὸ βάθος τῶν μυστηρίων τοῦ φιλανθρώπου Θεοῦ καὶ μάθε καὶ διδάχθητι ἐντεῦθεν ὅτι εἰ μετενόησαν, οὐκ ἂν ἐξεβλήθησαν, οὐκ ἂν κατεκρίθησαν, οὐκ ἂν εἰς τὴν γῆν, ἐξ ἧς ἐλήφθησαν, ἀποστραφῆναι κατεδικάσθησαν. Πῶς; Ἄκουσον!

they failed to repent. I also would like to emphasise that it is not clear from Symeon's discussion what could have happened if only one of the two repented. It seems that in the end, Eve's repentance was crucial for the couple since it was the last chance to avoid condemnation. After this passage, the history of creation can be imagined as a history of a failed repentance. Sin and transgression are not terrible and irreversible for Symeon. For him, the Fall decisively happens not after the tasting of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge but after the failure to repent. Repentance could have made Adam and Eve remain in paradise. Thus, through the introduction of a new concept (*metanoia*) into an interpretation of the Biblical narrative, Symeon postpones the transgression and ascribes to repentance a deeper eschatological meaning; repentance thus is an instrument of salvation and restoration of the defiled body in Symeon's text. In a sense, such an interpretation transforms the history of salvation significantly, since the only word *hemarton* (I have sinned) pronounced in the first person, a performative act, according to Symeon, could have restored Adam and Eve to their initial undefiled existence in paradise. Transgression's consequences were thus easy to avoid through the act of repentance, but this idea makes the Biblical story even more tragic. Therefore, for Symeon, the real transgression is in the absence of repentance rather than in the sin itself, and at the same time repentance can be a cure for the consequences of the human free will. This idea is powerfully and explicitly elaborated in Symeon's writing; it is aimed at questioning the premises of sin and salvation at large.

Moreover, in this text, Symeon's authorial figure appears to identify with Adam and Eve through the self-humiliating exclamatory intrusions. These intrusions present Symeon in the text as a wretched sinner who is also unable to repent. Symeon intrudes into the Biblical text with scripted speeches which Adam and Eve could have pronounced to repent and then to avoid the Fall. This rhetorical intrusion into the dialogue between God and the first couple makes a parallel with Symeon's method of repentance discussed in my previous chapter.

Scripted repentant speech is an important instrument for the construction of penitent subjectivity.[171] With a help of such rhetoric Symeon explains that he is also partaking of this story. He accuses Eve of insensitivity (*anaisthesia*), death of the soul before the death of the body, the same vice that he had started to struggle against, according to Niketas, by praying among the tombs after reading John Climacus' *Ladder*.

Going back to the comparison of Symeon and Chrysostom, it is interesting to explore how the latter treats the same subject in his *Homily* 17. I focus more specifically on his representation of Eve's interrogation:

> God said to the woman," the text goes on, "What is this you have done?" (Gen. 3:13) You heard your husband, he says, transferring the responsibility to you and putting all the blame on you, given to him though you were as his helpmate and created for the purpose of providing him with comfort from your person inasmuch as you have the same being as he and share in the same nature. So why did you do this, O woman? For what reason did you become the cause of such dreadful shame to yourself and your husband? What advantage did you gain from such intemperance? What benefit came to you from the deception which you willingly embraced and made your husband sharer in? So, what did the woman reply? "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Gen. 3:13).[172]

Chrysostom's main emphasis here is on the guilt and transmission of responsibility. Chrysostom's approach towards the judgement of Eve is more elaborate and outrageous than that of Symeon. There are no hierarchies in Symeon's interpretation; rather, Symeon interprets Eve as a separate being for whom the only authority is God, without man as a mediator. Chrysostom says nothing about the concept of repentance; it is simply absent from his discussion. Therefore, his way of constructing penitent subjects is very different from that of Symeon. Being a patriarch of Constantinople, Chrysostom manifests himself in the text as more preoccupied with the questions of law, obedience, guilt and judgement. His presence in the text

[171] Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 197-198.

[172] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 17; PG 53:140; trans. Robert C. Hill, 232: Καὶ εἶπε, φησὶν, ὁ Θεὸς τῇ γυναικί · τί τοῦτο ἐποίησας; Ἤκουσας, φησὶ, τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἐπὶ σὲ τὴν αἰτίαν μεταφέροντος, καὶ τὸ πᾶν ἐπιγράφοντός σοι τῇ πρὸς βοήθειαν αὐτοῦ δεδομένῃ, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο παραχθείσῃ, ἵνα τὴν παρὰ σαυτῆς παραμυθίαν εἰσαγάγῃς αὐτῷ, οἵα δὴ ὁμογενὴς καὶ τῆς αὐτῆς αὐτῷ φύσεως κινωνοῦσα. Τινος οὖν ἕκενεν τοῦτο ἐποίησας, ὦ γύναι; καὶ διὰ τί καὶ σαυτῇ καὶ τῷ ἀνδρὶ τοσαύτης αἰσχύνης αἰτία κατέστης; Τί σοι τὸ ὄφελος γέγονεν ἀπὸ τῆς τοσαύτης ἀκρασίας; τί σοι τῆς ἀπάτης τὸ κέρδος, ἣν ἑκοῦσα ἠπατήθης, καὶ τὸν ἄνδρα κοινωνὸν τῆς ἀπάτης εἰργάσω; Τί οὖν ἡ γυνή; Ὁ ὄφις ἠπάτησέ με, καὶ ἔφαγον.

is also explicit in his interrogatory rhetoric towards Eve, and to some extent his authorial persona takes on the role of judge. At the same time, for him, the sin of transgression is an unavoidable and inerasable fact, which happens at the very moment the fruit was tasted.

Now, before proceeding to Symeon's discussion of divine portion of flesh, I would like to summarise my findings. The comparison of the interpretations of Symeon and Chrysostom demonstrates the different approaches of both theologians. In his views on creation, Symeon made a reference to the Platonic idea of an *androgynous* original human being, by depicting Adam's body as encompassing Eve from the beginning. For Chrysostom, Eve was the last part of the creation, a rational helper for Adam who up to then had been surrounded by irrational creatures (*aloga*), animals, only. Symeon does not pay any attention to the hierarchical relation between Adam and Eve, while Chrysostom depicts Eve as secondary to Adam. In the Homilies on Genesis, Chrysostom retells the Biblical narrative of transgression by focusing mostly on the issues of law, accusation and judgement. In Symeon's writing, the original Biblical story is transformed. By introducing the concept of repentance (*metanoia*) into the narrative, Symeon presents the consequences of transgression as avoidable if Adam and Eve had shown repentance. Symeon treats Adam and Eve as equals and individuals showing how both subjects were unwilling to repent in the presence of God. The concept of repentance is crucial for Symeon's interpretation of Genesis since through this concept he questions the irreversibility of sin and the premises of human salvation. Questions of corporeality are an important aspect of Symeon's views on repentance. He addresses them separately when, after discussing the transgression, he turns to the question of salvation.

3.5. The history of Divine portion in Symeon's text

This part of the chapter focuses on Symeon's views on the corporeal in his theological discourse on on the incarnation of Christ and the consequences of the Adamic fall. In Symeon's text, the history of creation and transgression signals the beginning of the history of fleshed existence. As soon as Symeon completes the part about transgression, he moves immediately to the part about incarnation of the Word (*Logos*). He begins with these words:

> Now, pay attention, I beg you, to my exact words (*logou*) here, for I would have this treatise (*logos*) be useful to future generations. We will require the use of images (*eikonos*) in order to contemplate (*theoresai*) the Incarnation (*sarkosin*) of the Word (*Logou*) and His ineffable birth from Mary the ever-Virgin, and in order to know truly the mystery of the economy from on high, which was hidden before the ages, for the salvation of the world.[173]

In this passage, Symeon promises the experience of visual revelation to his audience. As he says, the spectacle of Incarnation and the whole mystery of divine economy of salvation demands the use of examples which are rather visual than verbal. The process of knowing thus is similar to the idea of Incarnation: invisible mysteriously becomes visible. Symeon uses the word *logos* several times in this passage. In this way, incarnated *Logos* becomes a parallel to Symeon's discourse (*logos*) delivered to the audience. Then, interpretation of Scripture in this passage is a method which turns the invisible into visible just like during the process of Incarnation when invisible God becomes visible human.[174] Discourse about Incarnation also becomes the repetition of Incarnation, since the words are being materialised in the text or in the imagination of the audience. To some extent, one can see here the traces of allegorical way of interpreting Scripture in the manner of Origen (d. ca. 254) who considered the Gospel being

[173] Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* I.2, 141-147 (ed. Darrouzès); trans. Golitzin, 1:31: Ἀλλὰ προσέχετε, παρακαλῶ, τῇ ἀκριβείᾳ τοῦ λόγου · ἔσται γὰρ ἡμῖν τε ὠφέλιμος ὁ λόγος καὶ ταῖς μετέπειτα γενεαῖς. Χρεὼν δὲ ἐξ εἰκόνος τινὸς τὴν τοῦ Λόγου σάρκωσιν καὶ τὴν ἐκ τῆς ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας ἀπόρρητον γέννησιν αὐτοῦ θεωρῆσαι καὶ γνῶναι καλῶς τὸ τῆς οἰκονομίας ἐκεῖθεν μυστήριον τὸ ἀποκεκρυμμένον πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων εἰς σωτηρίαν τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν.

[174] Symeon often accentuates how the process of Incarnation turned invisible (aoratos) Son of God into visibility. For example, see: Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* I.9, 37 (ed. Darrouzès); trans. Golitzin, 1:54.

flesh of Jesus.[175] Symeon, as an author, often asks his audience to listen but in this case, he focuses on contemplation. This is an Origenist statement, which refers to the allegorical way of interpreting Scripture.[176] For Origen *theoria* (contemplation), in opposition to *historia* (literal meaning), refers to a hidden meaning which had to be unveiled by means of allegorical interpretation. Holy Scripture is the flesh of Logos incarnated in words and turned into a material narrative.[177] Therefore, by interpreting Scripture, by taking part in the making of meaning, Symeon also takes part in the body of Christ.

In these discourses about creation, flesh (*sarx*) appears as a significant concept, it is a matter of which Adam and Eve were created. I have emphasised in the previous chapter that flesh does not have any significant meaning for Symeon in the *Catechetical Discourses* where he writes about the attitude to the self and corporeal practice of repentance. In the *Ethical Discourses*, it plays a role of a material which historically forms our bodies and, arguably, the world itself, since the incorruptible properties of creation disappeared when Adam's body seized to be incorruptible.[178] So, for Symeon, history of salvation is revealed through the history of one portion of flesh which God once borrowed from the Adam's side.

After retelling the history of transgression in the beginning of the *First Ethical Discourse*, Symeon turns immediately to the question of Incarnation. He compares the incarnation of Eve from Adam's flesh with the Incarnation of Christ from the flesh of the Theotokos:

> Just as He made the woman from the man's side, as we said above, just so He borrows flesh (*sarka*) from Adam's daughter, Mary the Theotokos and ever-Virgin, and, having adopted it, is born without seed like the first man. So that, as Adam was through his transgression the source of birth into corruption and

[175] Hilarion Alfeyev pointed out the significance of this method for Symeon's interpretation. For this, see: Hilarion Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 44-45.

[176] Ibid.

[177] Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, 7-8.

[178] For this, see: Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* I.3, 52-93 (ed. Darrouzès); trans. Golitzin, 1:28-29. According to Symeon, the whole creation will be transformed from being the copy of Adam's postlapsarian corruptible body to being equal in properties to the body of Christ resurrected.

> death, just so may Christ God become through the fulfilling of all righteousness the first-fruits of our re-fashioning in incorruption and of our immortality.[179]

This idea of creational parallelism between Eve and Christ is expressed in Symeon's writings in various ways. In the discourse on creation analysed above, Eve might have received significance in Symeon's writing because it was her into whom the portion of Adam's flesh initially was built. Symeon makes her equal to Adam in agency because she is an important character for his interpretation of the whole history: she encompasses the part of flesh which will bring humanity to salvation.

Later on, in Symeon's discourse, the body of Adam turns into the tribe of Israel, which becomes defiled through idolatry or, in other words, veneration of material creatures. Just as in the Creation of Adam and Eve, God takes the same part of flesh from the body of Adam (meaning the people of Israel) and turns it into Ever-Virgin Mary, thus creating once again the woman out of Adamic flesh. Interestingly, the flesh which God then takes from the Theotokos and for the divine Incarnation appears not to belong to the Theotokos:

> God then, knowing this beforehand – since He is God and knows all things – took again from the same part set aside, I mean from the side of Adam, and preserved it for Himself as His portion (*merida*), His "lot" (*kleron*), from the tribe of Judah. And, because all the rest were bound up together in faithlessness, He took His part set aside and built it up into a woman, I mean Mary the all-undefiled. Then, possessing in Himself, as a seed of the faith in God, the flesh (*sarka*) assumed from the holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, the most holy God built for Himself a temple, became Himself the God-Man (*theanthropos*). Now, since this flesh which He assumed from the pure Theotokos was not of the woman, but was built up within a woman from Adam, Christ is said to bear Adam, and He becomes a second Adam taken from the first, and is called this by Scripture [cf. I Cor 15:48-49]. He is Son of God and son not of the woman but of Adam.[180]

[179] Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* I.3, 19-27 (ed. Darrouzès); trans. Golitzin, 1:32: Ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐκ τῆς ἐκείνου πλευρᾶς τὴν γυναῖκα ἐποίησε, καθὰ πρόσθεν εἰρήκαμεν, οὕτως ἐκ τῆς αὐτοῦ θυγατρὸς Μαρίας τῆς ἀειπαρθένου καὶ θεοτόκου σάρκα δανεισάμενος καὶ ἀναλαβὼν ἄνευ σπορᾶς ὁμοίως ἐγεννήθη τῷ πρωτοπλάστῳ, ἵνα καθάπερ ἐκεῖνος διὰ τῆς παραβάσεως ἀρχὴ τῆς ἐν φθορᾷ καὶ θανάτῳ γενέσεως ἡμῶν ἐχρημάτισεν, οὕτως ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ Θεὸς διὰ τῆς ἐκπληρώσεως ἁπάσης δικαιοχύνης ἀπαρχὴ τῆς ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ ἀναπλάσεως καὶ ἀθανασίας ἡμῶν γένηται.

[180] Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* II.2, 99-114 (ed. Darrouzès); trans. Golitzin, 1:92: Τοῦτο οὖν προειδὼς ὁ Θεός, ἅτε Θεὸς ὢν καὶ τὰ πάντα εἰδώς, πάλιν ἐκ τούτων αὐτῶν τὴν μερίδα, τὸν κλῆρον, αὐτὸ τὸ λῆμμα, τὸ τῆς πλευρᾶς φημι τοῦ Ἀδάμ, ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Ἰούδα φυλῆς λαβὼν ὃ ᾠκοδόμησεν εἰς γυναῖκα, ἤγουν Μαρίαν τὴν ὑπεράμωμον, ἐξ αὐτῆς δὲ τῆς ἁγίας θεοτόκου καὶ ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας τὴν προσληφθεῖσαν σάρκα

Here, Symeon describes the process of transmitting the chosen portion (*merida*) through the generations of Israel. Eventually, Symeon says nothing at all about the Nativity itself and the widely discussed issue of Mary's labour pains.[181] He simply omits the question of labour, thus making the process of incarnation truly mysterious and undefiled. Significant is also Symeon's use of the Origenist notion God-Man (*theanthropos; Deus-homo*). This word is preserved in Rufinus's Latin translation of Origen's *On First Principles* and there is no doubt that it also occurred in the original. Origen used it to explain that two natures (God and flesh) could be united only by the mediation of the soul.[182] Returning to my claim about the textual Incarnation in the beginning I would assume that the use of this word again demonstrates through the mediation of text the mystery of Incarnation. The invisible Logos becomes a word in the text which morphologically unites two substances: divine and human.

Symeon summarises his idea several times showing how the portion is transformed into Christ in the womb of Mary, even though the natural maternal role of Mary in Symeon's text is significantly diminished. As it was with Eve through whom the portion of flesh was transmitted, the Theotokos is also a container for the same portion which was changed in substance within her body:

> God took from the Virgin flesh (*sarka*) endowed with a mind and soul, the [same] flesh which He had taken from Adam and replaced it with other flesh in its stead. Having taken this same from her, He gave it His own Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and enlarged it with what its soul had not had before: life everlasting (*aionian zoen*).[183]

σπέρμα τῆς εἰς Θεὸν πίστεως ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔχων, ἀνῳκοδόμησεν εἰς ναὸν ἑαυτῷ ἅγιον ὁ ὑπεράγιος Θεός, ἀνὴρ θεάνθρωπος γεγονώς. Ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἐπεὶ καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ προσληφθεῖσα σὰρξ ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς ἁγνῆς Θεοτόκου οὐκ ἐκ τῆς γυναικὸς ἦν ἀλλ᾽ ἐκ τοῦ Ἀδὰμ εἰς γυναῖκα οἰκοδομηθεῖσα, τὸν Ἀδὰμ φορέσαι λέγεται ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ δεύτερος Ἀδὰμ ἐκ τοῦ πρώτου γεγονέναι καὶ καλεῖσθαι γέγραπται, υἱὸς ὢν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ υἱὸς οὐ τῆς γυναικὸς ἀλλὰ τοῦ Ἀδάμ.

[181] Earlier this issue was discussed, for instance, by Gregory of Nyssa and slightly later also by Oecumenius. For this see Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Song of Songs* 13:409-412; Oecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* VI.19, 7.

[182] Origen, *On First Principles* 2.6, 3.

[183] Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* II.7, 144-149 (ed. Darrouzès); trans. Golitzin, 1:110-111: Ὁ Θεὸς ἐκ τῆς Παρθένου σάρκα ἔννουν καὶ ἐψυχωμένην ἔλαβεν, ἣν ἔλαβεν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἀδὰμ καὶ ἄλλην ἀντ᾽ αὐτῆς ἀνεπλήρωσε · καὶ ταύτην ἐξ ἐκείνης λαβὼν δέδωκεν αὐτῇ τὸ Πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ τὸ ἅγιον καὶ ἀνεπλήτωσεν ἣν οὐκ εἶχεν αἰωνίαν ζωὴν ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτῆς.

In this paragraph, Symeon again speaks about the transmission of the portion through the body of the Theotokos. I assume that such interpretation also presents a different interpretation of the role of Mary in the Incarnation. Symeon's accent on the transmission of materiality extinguishes certain aspects of Marian cult which were emphasised in other Byzantine texts treating the same subject.[184] It is important to notice that further Symeon's discourse on Incarnation is filled with multiple quotation from the Gospel of John which is prominent for its accent on the sensory perception of incarnated Christ,[185] at the same time Symeon brings repentance back to his discourse because, as I will demonstrate a bit later, partaking of Christ's flesh is impossible without repentance. So, the undefiled flesh becomes food but in a very sophisticated way. Symeon says that "[…] we conceive the Word of God in our hearts, like the Virgin."[186] However, according to Symeon, it is impossible for Christ to take flesh once again to be born of everyone of us. Therefore, we should take the Christ's flesh which He accepted from Mary:

> And when we eat of it, when we eat worthily of His flesh, each one of us receives within himself the entirety of God made flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God and son of the immaculate Virgin Mary […]. As He said: "Who eats My flesh and drinks My blood, abides in Me and I in him." […] He is present in the body bodilessly, mingled with our essence and nature, and deifying us who share His body, who become flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone.[187]

This consumption of Christ's flesh in Eucharist deifies the human body and elevates it in a way that it becomes united in the end with the body of Christ. In Symeon's text, the paradox

[184] I would like to point out here that Symeon's view of Mary is much more different from that presented, for instance, in the Hymns of Romanos Melodos written five hundred years before Symeon. Of course, Romanos's texts treat another subject and were written in a very different context. I do not attempt to make an explicit argument here, but it seems that such a difference in theological representation of Mary worth noticing. For instance, Symeon does not say anything about the Nativity at all through-out his writings. Eve and Mary serve as corporeal transmitters of the divine portion of flesh. For the analysis of Romanos's representation of Mary, see: Thomas Arentzen, The Virgin in Song: Mary and the Poetry of Romanos the Melodist (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

[185] Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame*, 47-52; see also: Karmen MacKendrick, Word Made Skin: Figuring Language at the Surface of Flesh (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 25-48.

[186] Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* I.10, 54-58 (ed. Darrouzès); trans. Golitzin, 1:57.

[187] Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* I.10, 58-61; 64-66; 68-72 (ed. Daroouzès); trans. Golitzin, 1:57.

is in the relation between internal and external. Christ's flesh cannot be conceived within the human body, since once it was, but it can be taken as food to transform the whole materiality of the human flesh. Symeon stresses this ambiguity once again in the end of the *Second Ethical Discourse* juxtaposing Adam's eating from the Tree of Knowledge and his failed repentance with a humble and repentant consumption of Eucharist:

> "Have you eaten of the tree of which I told you not to eat?" (Gen. 3:9 and 11). Yet, when he heard this, he did not want to repent, or to weep, or beseech forgiveness. […] "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has everlasting life" (Jn. 6:54), and: "He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life" (Jn. 5:24). […] On this account, therefore, God also placed within this Paradise the saving medicine of repentance, such that those who fall from everlasting life of sloth and inattention may ascend to it again with a brighter and more resplendent glory. For, unless the God Who loves mankind had arranged for this, no flesh would be saved. (Mt. 24:22).[188]

Repentance is a performative act which allows to participate in the body of Christ and salvation. Without repentance flesh cannot be saved and incorruptibility achieved. Bascially, without repentance Eucharist is just food. So, Symeon's linear history of flesh culminates in repentant Eucharistic partaking of Christ's body. Adam's insensitive partaking of fruit's flesh and refuse to repent which happened in the past are replaced by sensible and repentant consumption of Christ's flesh in the world which knew the mystery of Incarnation.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused primarily on two themes in Symeon's writing: (1) his interpretation of creation and transgression; (2) his understanding of human history until incarnation as the history of a selected divine portion of flesh. In the first part of the chapter, I put Symeon's texts about creation and transgression into comparison with John Chrysostom's

[188] Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* II.7, 226-229; 267-269; 305-311 (ed. Daroouzès); trans. Golitzin, 1:113-115.

homilies on the Book of Genesis. In his understanding of creation, Symeon draws on, without articulating it explicitly, the Platonic idea of an androgynous human being to describe the simultaneous existence of Adam and Eve in the Adamic body. For John Chrysostom, the creation of Eve was a later event, intended to fill Adam's need for a rational companion. Symeon presented the history of transgression as a history of failed repentance. In his discussion, he even allows for the possibility for Adam and Eve to stay in paradise had they shown repentance (*metanoia*). These ideas have no parallel in Chrysostom's works. For him, the question of transgression is mostly connected to problems of law, obedience and judgement. In Symeon's view, the fall is postponed, and the real transgression happens when Adam and Eve fail to repent. By making the performative act of repentance a milestone in the narrative of Genesis, Symeon redefines the very concepts of sin and salvation. Further, he presents the history of creation as a history of divine portion of flesh. This portion taken from Adam's side was transmitted through Eve into Mary. In the womb of the latter, Christ through incarnation absorbed and transfigured this flesh which initially belonged to Adam. Thus, Symeon describes the process of salvation after the Fall as a linear history of materiality. Transfigured flesh of Christ becomes an instrument for deification of human flesh in the process of Eucharist. However, as Symeon points out, Eucharist and repentance should go together. In the end of his *Second Ethical Discourse*, Symeon draws a comparison between Adam's insensitive eating of fruit's flesh and his failed repentance on the one side and repentant and sensitive partaking of body of Christ in Eucharist on the other. Thus, for Symeon, Eucharistic consumption of Christ flesh is a ritual which is deeply imbedded into the whole history of human existence. According to him, salvation is a process that goes on here and now, the only thing one need to do to participate in it is to repent before the communion remembering the Adam's fault.

Conclusion

In the first chapter of my study, I analysed John Climacus' discourse about penitence as found in the parable about the prisoners. This analysis was intended to provide grounds for further comparison with Symeon's discourse on the same topic. I argued that John's text is a complex structure in terms of narrativity and levels of language. By switching between modes of narration and introducing multiple speeches-in-character John, as an author, intends to stir an emotional and mimetic response from his audience. As he says in the end, he provides the images (*eikon*) of true penitence for his audience to imitate. His *Ladder* presents a textual spectacle of penitence, in the process of which the flesh of the prisoners is tormented and interrogated (*basanizo*) for past sins. Drawing these gory pictures of humility and self-punishment, John introduces his prisoners as losing their *logos*, the rational part of the soul. Behaving like irrational beings (or animals) (*alogoi*) John's penitents exceed the limits of humanity in their torture of sinful flesh (*sarx*); they refuse sensible eating (*logikes broseos*). I have interpreted this passage as a voluntary refusal of the Eucharist, which, according to Jn. 6:55, is the flesh (*sarx*) of God transubstantiated into food (*brosis*). Thus, defiled flesh does not deserve the deified flesh. Further, I have read the penitent prisoners' desire to be devoured by animals in the context of Early Christian martyrdom, pointing to significant metaphorical resemblances between John's narrative and the Epistle to the Romans by Ignatius' of Antioch (d. ca. 140). The sanctified flesh of the martyr, devoured by beasts, turns into the bread (*artos*) of Christ, while the defiled flesh of the penitents in prison turns into ordinary fodder for the beasts. Comparing the voluntary martyrdom of Ignatius' to the voluntary desire of the prisoners

to avoid human (*anthropines*) funeral rites, I intended to draw the readers' attention to the similarities and differences between John's language of penitence and the Early Christian language of martyrdom. Thus, my aim was to point out how John, as an author, consciously or unconsciously relied on the metaphorical structures of the discourse of Early Christian martyrdom.

In the second chapter, I turned to the comparison of Symeon's discourse of penitence with John's text as analysed in the previous chapter. Speaking about penitence (*metanoia*) in the *Catechesis* to his monks, Symeon openly referenced to the parable of the prison in John's *Ladder*. I have argued that Symeon borrowed the outline of John's corporeal penitence and introduced it in a transformed way to his monks in the manner of an actual step-by-step instruction to follow. In his description of the performance of penitence, Symeon employs the image of the prisoner which penitent monks should use as a role model to follow. The core of Symeon's performance consists of the recitation of prayers combined with self-beating, self-interrogation, and the remembrance of sins. In the same chapter, I aimed to demonstrate, with Foucault as my starting point, how the monastery is a space of the undivided power of the *hegoumenos* and how Symeon's discourses functioned as a means of communicating and exercising this power over his monastic audience. At the end, I discussed performative repentant confession by analysing the scene of the staged repentance of a novice from the *Ladder* and the repentant confession of multiple sins in Symeon's *Hymn* 24. I interpreted both cases as examples of how the communal identity of sinner functions within the texts. In both cases, confession did not mean expression of personal sins but rather the acceptance of the weight of all the sins of humanity. My reading thus supports the claim of Hannah Hunt that such a partaking in sin (and thus diminishing of its weight) was a part of the monastic communal identity. At the same time, I pointed out that for Symeon, the penitent subject is deeply embedded into the whole eschatological linearity of the Christian history. In order to

expand this idea further, I turned to Symeon's interpretation of the beginning of the corruptible existence of humanity – the transgression of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis.

Symeon's commentary on the creation of human beings and the transgression was the subject of my last chapter. I compared Symeon's discourse to that of John Chrysostom and concluded that Symeon introduced a new notion into the original Biblical narrative – the notion of repentance (*metanoia*). Adam and Eve's fall happened when – and because – they failed to repent. Had they repetended, they would have been able to stay in Paradise. Throughout the discourse, Symeon identifies with Adam, thus showing that he is actively partaking in the story. After the discussion of transgression, Symeon immediately turns to the discussion of the history of creation as the history of one divine portion of flesh once taken from the Adam's side and transmitted through all generations to become the flesh of Christ's Incarnation within the womb of the Theotokos. In his discussion of this history of materiality, Symeon relies on the metaphorical language of transubstantiation in the Gospel of John. He draws a parallel between Adam's insensitive eating of the fruit and the repentant's eating of the divinized flesh of Christ in Eucharist. Thus, for Symeon, the history of flesh and the history of salvation culminate in the repentant subject's partaking of divinized flesh. Then, the long history of flesh ends in salvation, open to those who repent "for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

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