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Experiencing the Holy Spirit: A Pentecostal reading of the Early Church Fathers: The Spiritual World of Isaac of Nineveh

Olga Zaprometova

Abstract

Experiences of a person on his journey towards God appear also in the Syrian Christian literature. One of the outstanding representatives of the Syrian tradition of the Eastern Church is Isaac the Syrian. Isaac of Nineveh (Syrian) is unique in the history of Eastern Christianity. This modest bishop from a remote Persian province became the holy father of the Orthodox Church of Chalcedonian tradition. His writings were already widely available in monastic circles in the XIV century and attracted the attention of many who sought guidance for their spiritual lives. In 1911 a new translation from Greek into Russian of his writings was completed. Isaac’s personal spiritual experience will now be examined further, paying special attention to the similarities between his own description and those of both his predecessors and followers, including contemporary ones.

1. Repentance and tests

Spiritual life starts with the turning of a soul to God and a rejection of the ways of this world. According to the teaching of Isaac the Syrian the world is the sum of a human's passions, his distraction and absent-mindedness of

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1 Part 1: Gregory the theologian (JEPTA 2009.2, pp4-13
2 Olga Zaprometova lectures at the ETS-Moscow, Russia. Her e-mail address is omz@etsmoscow.org.
3 The Greek translation was done in VIII-IX centuries by the monks of St. Savva the Blessed’s monastery in Palestine, the Slavic one - in XIV century. See Hieromonach Ilarion (Alfeyev), The World of Isaac the Syrian, Moscow, 1998, pp. 30-31. (in Russian)
soul, and the wanderings outside of himself, seen by Isaac as the soul betraying its own nature. Rejection of the world involves a soul entering within itself, such self-concentration and restoration of the whole spiritual essence, resulting in fellowship with God. Such a turning inwards is done freely, in the same way that sin is committed freely, and is therefore defined as a voluntary separation from God.\(^4\) We have already seen that for Gregory the Theologian prayer was an encounter with the living God. Isaac the Syrian claimed that life in God was a sensation or feeling of His presence. When for some reason this presence is lost, the believer is unable to find peace until he/she feels His presence again.\(^5\) Isaac's discourse is about the different tests man encounters on the way to God (temptations, God-forsakenness) and about their sources (lack of patience, pride, wrong thoughts/intentions, depression, etc.). The tests themselves are given to a human being to enable him to feel the nearness of God and to perceive God's providence.\(^6\) The usual advice for moments of temptation is to pray until darkening (loss of sight) will not pass by (until the power and light will not come from heaven\(^7\), which are strengthening faith in the heart), to read the Holy Scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers. It is important to remember that temptation will be replaced by nearness to God, and forsakeness by the experience of His presence. Isaac the Syrian refers to three stages along the way to a human's unification with God: repentance, purification and perfection - in other words: change of will, freedom from passions, and the acquisition of the perfect love and fullness of God's grace. Repentance\(^8\) starts when one feels sinful, thanks to the intervention of God's grace.\(^9\) This is a continual state for those who truly endeavour to come back to God. This second birth is a chance to return to the Father, given to us by God in baptism. It is a perpetual coming out of oneself, and has the power to change our nature. Such a state of soul is the opposite to self-satisfaction. It is a feeling of every 'righteous', who considers him or herself to be in a 'state of grace' because he or she does not yet know him/herself. Like ascending to God, repentance has no limits.\(^10\)

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8 Greek – μετανοη, means 'change of thoughts, change of mind'.
9 Augustine, Wesley and many others wrote about the same, Pentecostals preach about this as well.
2. Tears and Prayer

Teaching on repentance and on the encounter of a human soul with God is closely related to Isaac's teaching on tears. Tears also have an important place in the traditional Syrian ascetic writings from Ephrem the Syrian\(^\text{11}\) and it was his earlier doctrine that was been developed later by Isaac. When referring to the Saviour's words: *Blessed are they that mourn* (Matt 5:4), Isaac adds that the one who is in the love of God will never lack the grace of tears because he/she is never lacking the source that is feeding in him/her: the remembrance of God. That is why even when he/she is sleeping he/she is talking with God. Isaac distinguishes between bitter and sweet tears, tears of repentance and tears of affection given to a person when he or she reaches purity of heart. At the same time he makes the point that shedding tears and weeping, is a special gift or privilege of Impassives. Tears in prayer testify that a prayer is accepted by God. According to Isaac, endless crying may start for any of the following three reasons:

- ... from awe and wonder occasioned by the mystery of revelation that is revealed to mind only rarely – tears begin to pour unbidden and without the will of a person and without forcing ...;
- ... from the love to God that inflames the soul to such an extent that a person cannot bear this love without continuous crying from pleasure because of its sweetness ...;
- ... from great humbleness of heart.\(^\text{13}\)

Unification with God is impossible without prayer because prayer is a personal encounter with God. Isaac underlines how one has to pray: attentively, with deep feeling and with tears (because *the grace of tears is the fullness of prayer*), with fervour and faith. Petitionary prayer, that is full of fears and worries, is a preparation for a spiritual prayer, a gradual ascension to God that represents one's efforts and searching for His presence. Gradually the soul becomes concentrated, an focussed; personal requests are given up, and the person instead of asking, is giving him or herself up to the

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\(^{11}\) Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306 – 373), was the outstanding representative of the Syrian Church, the author of numerous biblical commentaries, sermons, hymns and dogmatic treatises. His writings were translated into Greek and Armenian languages. He is known as the 'Father of Repentance' and 'the Harp of the Spirit'.

\(^{12}\) Quoted according to Alfeyev. *The World of Isaac the Syrian*, p. 145.

\(^{13}\) Alfeyev. *The World of Isaac the Syrian*, p. 147. At the same time, according to Alfeyev, Isaac not always defines the line between the two types of tears, they are (it is) more likely two aspects of the same experience. See *The World of Isaac the Syrian*, p. 148.

will of God. Thus pure prayer and silence of mind are reached\(^\text{15}\), this is the crown of prayer, when nothing diverts the will of a person from turning to God and becoming united with the divine will. This amazement, wonder, and rapture of mind under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and the seeing of the Divine Light in a state of silence and peace is sometimes called ecstasy. When realizing that one does not belong to oneself but rather to God, one is going out of oneself and no longer knows whether one exists in present time or in eternity.\(^\text{16}\) When the control and supervision of the Spirit rules over mind ... then the freedom is taken from nature and the mind is led rather than itself leading.\(^\text{17}\) An intense personal fellowship between a human being and God is taking place. What a soul is praying for is no longer represented by the words of the prayer itself, but rather by feeling and experiencing the spiritual realities of the world yet to come. These realities are beyond human understanding, except by the power of the Holy Spirit. ... From this experience of prayer the Holy Spirit lifts the soul up to meditation that is called spiritual vision.\(^\text{18}\)

3. Spiritual ‘drunkenness’

The experiences of the apostles Peter (Acts 10:10) and Paul (2 Cor 12:2-4) may serve as examples of mystical ecstasy\(^\text{19}\). Such a state is called also amazement, wonder, rapture in God or being in Spirit (Rev 1:10; 4:2 and oth.). Moreover, in the days of the early Church such a state was often associated with glossolalia.\(^\text{20}\) One of the pre-Christian authors, Philo of Alexandria, wrote about drunkenness, about sober ecstasy and intellectual rage /fury.\(^\text{21}\) In the Bible such a state of praying is compared to drunkenness (1Sam1:13-16; Acts 2:12-15; Eph 5:18).

The first among the Byzantine theologians who paid attention to the ecstatic state was Gregory of Nyssa, who described the experience in similar words: sober ecstasy, rapture, etc.\(^\text{22}\) In the works of Isaac the Syrian which

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\(^{15}\) Alfeyev. The World of Isaac the Syrian, pp. 221-224.


\(^{17}\) Quoted according to Alfeyev. The World of Isaac the Syrian, p 230.


\(^{19}\) Ecstasy - Greek, exit, exodus, furor, rage.

\(^{20}\) From Greek glossa – unclear meaning, lalein - to speak; theological term for definition of the ‘talk’ with God in ‘other tongues’ during the outpouring the Holy Spirit on a person (Acts 2:4 et al.).


\(^{22}\) Alfeyev. The World of Isaac the Syrian, p. 394.
were written in Syrian language in Syriac, there is no equivalent term to the Greek one. Terms used by him were translated from Syrian into Russian by the contemporary Orthodox scholar, Metropolitan Ilarion (Alfejev) as amazement. However, he also points out that several Greek translations of Isaac the Syrian repeatedly use the term:

... Quite often it happens that a person bows his knees in prayer, his hands are lifted up to heaven, his face is turned to the Cross of Christ and all his thoughts are brought together in prayer to God, and at the same time, as a human being is praying to God with tears and affections, suddenly a spring starts to jet in his heart, outpouring pleasure; then parts of his body are weakened, his eyes close, the face bows to earth, his thoughts are changing in a way that he cannot bow from the joy that is exciting his whole body.23

... From time to time however the mind is taken from the prayer and carried to heaven as a captive and involuntary tears like springs of water pour over the face and water it. At the same time the person himself feels at peace, is speechless and filled with amazing vision and truly this is a ceasing of prayer; it is a state that is above prayer - a state of constant amazement in the face of every one of God's creatures, like those who have lost their senses because of wine.24

The image of drunkenness caused by wine helps Isaac to describe the experience of mystical encounter, which is in itself the introduction to the heavenly joy and pleasure of the Kingdom of Heaven. When the soul is drunk with joy of hope and the joyfulness of God, the body does not feel sorrows. ... It happens when the soul enters into the joy of the Spirit.25 This experience is frequently associated with the Eucharist, in which the true love of God is revealed to a human being.

Pentecostals always emphasize the importance of the Holy Spirit experience and see the experience of the Pentecostal spirituality as the cornerstone of their theology.26 Here we have to bear in mind that although ‘theology’ was never defined as a term in Greek Patristic writings, it was introduced into the Christian context and later legalized by Origen and

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23 Quoted according to Alfeyev, St. Simeon the New Theologian and the Orthodox Tradition, Moscow. 1998, p. 396-397. (in Russian)
24 Quoted according to Alfeyev. The World of Isaac the Syrian, p. 259.
25 Alfeyev. The World of Isaac the Syrian, p. 262.
Clement of Alexandria. Patristic theology stands for the idea that a human being is able to join himself to God only through the Son in the Holy Spirit. It emphasizes that this is an experience of intercourse with God. Maxim the Confessor expresses this in the following words:

A studious mind in an active life achieves discretion, and the studious mind in a contemplative life achieves knowledge. The first of the two enables ascetics to discern between virtue and imperfection; the second introduces its communicant to the knowledge of properties of incorporeal and corporal creatures. The mind is only considered to be worthy of the gift of theology when, on the wings of love, it has flown beyond the above and found itself in God, seeing His properties to the ultimate extent that is possible for a human mind through the spirit.

Theology - the knowledge of God as God is in Himself - is achieved in the mysterious unification with God at the last stage of higher unification with God. Gregory the Theologian gives as examples the deification granted to Moses on the Mount Sinai and to the apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration. Pentecostals begin their history from the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and their doctrine, which is still in the process of formation, relies on the cooperative experience of the Holy Spirit, including the two elements: listening (a sound ... as of a rushing mighty wind, v.2) and seeing (tongues, as of fire, v.3). One of the theologians who influenced the holiness movement, a direct predecessor of Pentecostalism, is John Wesley. After Wesley's conversion he started to preach about salvation through faith, stating that the testimony of the Spirit is the inner experience of one's soul: the Spirit of God testifies directly to my spirit that I am a child of God.

For Protestants the problematic question is, What may be taken as the main authority in the question of salvation. The highest authority for Luther and Protestantism that followed him, was Holy Scripture; for the Russian Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism it was Holy Scripture and the Tradition of the Church; for the ‘Enthusiastic’ Christians - Holy Scripture and the

28 A. Nesteruk, Light from the East. Theology, Science, and the Eastern Orthodox Tradition, Moscow, 2006, p. 45. (in Russian)
30 John Wesley (1703- 1791) an Anglican priest and the founder of Methodist church. It is well known that he was greatly influenced by the Writings of the Early Eastern Church Fathers. His doctrine on sanctification testifies to it.
experience of the Holy Spirit. But this theme is beyond the scope of this paper and requires a separate detailed examination.

Pentecostal hermeneutics is building its foundation upon the experiential aspect of theology, since Pentecostals regard it as impossible to talk about the existence of God without using the concept of fellowship, and without accepting the importance of believers' participating in a community led by the Holy Spirit. Each congregation is not just a human organization; its life and the life of every single believer must conform one to Holy Scripture. In this way, the three components (the community of believers, the Holy Scripture and the activity of the Holy Spirit) exist in a permanent interdependent dialogue, and the unification of Pneumatology and Ecclesiology come to be.

Experiencing the Holy Spirit: A Pentecostal Reading of the Early Church Fathers

Part Two: Mystical Theology of Simeon the New Theologian

Prior to Simeon the New Theologian, only the apostle John and Gregory of Nazianzus the Junior held the title ‘Theologian’, which was given to them for their writings on the doctrine of God. Simeon the New Theologian is regarded in the West as the most outstanding of the medieval mystics, for his charismatic approach to Christian life and continuity of the Patristic tradition. His uniqueness can also be seen in the openness with which he shares his spiritual experience, which is of special value for anyone seeking their own personal encounter with God.

31 By doing this Pentecostal theologians refer to the Old Testament: yadah (Hebrew) - (get to) know, be(come) acquainted, have intercourse, perceive, etc. W. Holladay, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1988, PP. 128-129. This emphasizes the experiential character of knowledge in contrast to the Greek oida - to know, understand, etc. (that is close to eido - to see) - Gen 4:1; M. Becker, ‘A Tenet Under Examination: Reflections on the Pentecostal Hermeneutical Approach’ JEPTA, v. XXIV, 2004, pp. 30-48.

1. Divine Light and Tears.

It is a well known fact that Simeon was greatly influenced by his spiritual father Simeon the Studit, the monk of the Studit's Monastery in Constantinople. Simeon the Studit encouraged his disciple to follow the voice of his own conscience, to pursue God’s commandments for the sake of earning the gifts of the Holy Spirit and to seek the spiritual knowledge that is gained through prayer. In the following poetic section Simeon the New Theologian mentions his tutor, calling him a slave of God and an apostle, and talks about his own spiritual experiences:

> Inside myself I am worshiping Thee.
> I am visioning Thee from a distance,
> I see Thee in myself and visualize Thee in heaven!
> But how this might happen? Thou, only Thou knowest this,
> Shining in the heart, as the Sun - in worldly (earthly?) - unworldly (unearthly).
> O God, Who hath lighted me up with the radiance of glory,
> The One Who hath brought me to all-saint father Simeon,
> Thy slave and apostle, shine on me Thyself
> And teach me, O God, by the Holy Spirit to sing Him hymns,
> That are heavenly, mystical, new and ancient!
> So that everyone will be amazed by the wisdom of God
> And all, who heard it, will glorify Thee, O my Christ,
> For I am speaking in other tongues in grace.
> Amen, and let it be according to Thy will, O my Lord!
> I am sick and suffer within my humble soul,
> When Thy light, shining so bright, appears in it,
> Love for me becomes an unceasing pain,
> My soul suffers and weeps, because I have no strength
> To embrace Thee and to be saturated by Thee which is what I yearn for.34

Like Gregory the Theologian, Simeon speaks about his experiences of the Divine Light. He mentions it in all his writings, without hiding the fact that with the years his experiences of seeing the Light became more frequent. The description is given in a very personal way, in line with the passage quoted above. Besides his experiences with light, Gregory mentions prayer in other

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33 Greek - the one who has profound respect for God
tongues and how much his soul suffers and cries. Following Isaac the Syrian, Simeon speaks about permanent repentance and the necessity to weep for salvation, because ... it is impossible for us to be saved without repentance - repentance from the depth of the soul, that the Word requires from us.³⁵ Tears that follow repentance lead to purification and deification:

Blessed are those who are illuminated by the Divine light and who see their own infirmity and realize the ugliness of their spiritual garments, because they will weep constantly and will be washed by the floods of tears.

Blessed are those who approach the Divine light and who enter into it and all who become light themselves, completely dissolved in it, since they take off all their defiled garments and will never more weep with bitter tears.³⁶

Tears as a theme in Simeon's writings are associated with the themes of love for God and vision, as in Isaac's writings. Simeon gives testimony regarding the process of a person's transfiguration, which takes place in turning to God in prayer, and in shedding bitter tears of repentance and grief. Once the state of clean heart and the vision of the Divine are reached, there is a consolation, and the person experiencing it sheds sweet tears (Matt 5:8). When envisioning God and listening to His revelations, the person him/herself becomes a light. All of Simeon's personal experiences, which form the basis of his theology, are not just an individual search for God, but rather the very revelation of God Himself to a human being. He perceives this experience as a feeling of light and a flood of tears, - a reaction to God's presence unseen by his earthly sight.

The same experience was reported during the Welsh revival of 1904:

I fell on my knees ..., my face was bathed in perspiration, and the tears flowed in streams ... . It was God commending His love which bent me, while I saw nothing to commend. After I was bent, what a wave of peace flooded my bosom.³⁷

This is a testimony of a 19-year-old boy, Evan Roberts, who described his experiences at a meeting which took place not far from his school on September 29, 1904. With a flood of tears running down his face Evan cried out 'Bend me! Bend me!'. The Holy Spirit came upon him, filling him with the love for the Crucifixion and stamped in his heart the image of Calvary. During one of the following nights Evan's neighbour noticed that his face was shining with light during prayer, and others as well felt the presence of God.

³⁵ Alfejev. Prayer to God, P.431.
³⁶ Quoted according to Alfejev. Prayer to God. 349.
³⁷ E. Evans, The Welsh Revival of 1904, Evangelical Press of Wales, p. 70
2. Ecstasy and Deification

Simeon the New Theologian experienced ecstasy throughout his whole life. However, in contrast to Isaac, he claimed that temporary experiencing of light followed by tears, the sensing of joy and sweetness, being free from self-consciousness and removal from the world, relaxation of the body extremities and trembling - are just the beginnings of a spiritual pilgrimage. This view shows how cautious he is when relating to this kind of an experience. According to him, a soul that advances in spiritual life puts aside such temporary experiences, and experiences constantly the divine reality in which it lives.

The one that has within himself the light of the Holy Spirit ... is becoming like a man whose inner being is set on fire for some reason ... . Having no strength whatsoever to control himself, being watered constantly by tears and refreshed by them, he stirs even more the fire of love. That is why he sheds more tears and is washed by their flood, shining even brighter ... . After being in this state for a long time [a person] considers it to be natural ... and it stays always with him ... . Afterwards he remains in the light, or more accurately, with the light, and is no longer in ecstasy but is able to see himself, and to see his surrounding, and his neighbors ...

For Simeon the conscious mystical experience was important to a degree that made him insist that the perception of grace, and of the enlightenment which grace brings about following the envisioning of God, has to be recognized as the norm for every Christian. He even raises the question of whether those who have not had such experiences can truly be called Christians. The experiences include knowing and envisioning such goodness, and seeking it even more persistently with sobbing and tears in order to pursue purification and, on reaching Him, to unite with Him, and to have fellowship with Him. This confidence of Simeon's that without such a spiritual experience the goal of Christian life is not achieved, means that everybody has to make his way to salvation, through repentance and tears which lead first to ecstasy, and in turn to deification. In line with the tradition of Gregory the Theologian, Simeon saw the achievement of deification as the final goal of the entire Christian life. Such a total transformation, is sometimes called by Simeon a spiritual birth, a mystical resurrection or a spirit baptism. Simeon's concept of deification is defined by archbishop Vasilyi (Krivosheyn) as 'the state of total transformation of a person by the Holy

38 Quoted according to Alfejev. Prayer to God, pp400-402.
Spirit, when a person is following God's commandments, acquiring Christian virtues and becoming a participant of Christ's sufferings'.

Give me an answer, O restless people:
Who among you, having Christ,
Will need the perishable goods
Of this swift-passing earthly life?
Having constantly the grace of the Holy Spirit
Who will not become the dwelling place of the Trinity,
That enlightens, sanctifies
And transforms you to god?

The doctrine of deification sums up the theological system of Simeon the New Theologian, whose entire life testified that this deification is a reality experienced in our world. According to the Eastern Church tradition, the final goal of Christian life as well as the eternal beatitude in the Kingdom of Heaven, is a fellowship with the Holy Trinity - a deified state of co-heirs of the Divine essence. This is the goal of Christians, as gods created after the uncreated God and possessing, due to His grace, everything that the Holy Trinity has by nature. Salvation itself, as understood by Christians as a fellowship or communion, speaks about a free response, of love, through which one's fellowship with God becomes deeper and more intense. Simeon saw the fruit of the Holy Spirit's deification process and the climax of perfection in the Divine Love, which he called grace acquired by our inner being. He saw in the love for a neighbor a testimony to a person's acquiring true love for God.

Even in his lifetime, Simeon's doctrine provoked much discussion. His controversy with Bishop Stephen of Nicodemia, the official theologian of the emperor's court, resulted in Simeon's exile in 1009. This was essentially a conflict between two approaches to theology: the abstract and philosophical approach of Stephen, and the experiential and spiritual approach of Simeon. It can also be taken as an example of a clash between ‘institutional’ and ‘charismatic’ approaches. Having such a rich spiritual experience behind him, Simeon confronted nominal Christianity, insisting that there is

40 Archbishop Vasilyi (Krivoshein), St. Simeon the New Theologian p. 429.
41 The Teaching with Theology, in which it speaks about the Priesthood and about the impassive Meditation. 19:38. Quoted according to Alfejev, The Prayer, p. 610.
43 V. Losskyi, Essays pp. 160-161.
44 It is compared to the controversy between St. Bernard from Clairvaux and Abelair.
no value whatsoever in water baptism, unless a person also bears the fruits of a holy life. For Simeon the fruit of sanctification was inseparable from the Holy Spirit, the producer of this fruit. Official theology ignored Simeon's writings and his works have been preserved mainly by the monks of Mt. Athos.\textsuperscript{45}

One can also mention among the spiritual followers of the mystical branch of the Orthodox tradition, Sergyi from Radonezh, Nilus of Sor and Seraphym of Sarov, who maintained that \textit{the true goal of a Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit}.\textsuperscript{46} Alfejev who pointed out the ‘unconventionality’ of Simeon's mystical theology in the Patristic tradition, discusses the whole nature of Eastern Christianity, and comes to a remarkable conclusion: the cornerstone of the Orthodox tradition is nothing but the personal mystical experience of a Christian - an experience of a direct personal fellowship with God.\textsuperscript{47}

\textbf{Conclusion}

While the Christian East, in seeking a solution to the question of salvation continually emphasises that the concept of \textit{theosis (deification)} is inseparable from a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit for anyone who calls him/herself a Christian; the West pays more attention to the legal aspect of the same question as expressed in the doctrine of grace, and emphasizes such ideas as ‘adoption’, ‘restoration’, ‘redemption’ and ‘justification’. A Pentecostal often accuses Orthodox believers of being unsure of their Christian salvation, and of failing to draw any clear line between salvation and sanctification.

According to the Orthodox doctrine, a person receives the new birth through water baptism, and \textit{deification} is reached mystically through liturgy and sacraments. Pentecostals in turn, point to the challenge of a personal study of Scripture, and stress the need for a personal conversion through an encounter with the Holy Spirit. As Pelikan has noted, ‘historically, the relation between the doctrine of grace and the doctrine of means of grace has been ambiguous. The doctrine of grace as justification and forgiveness developed slowly and unsteadily, the doctrine of the means of grace, given

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\textsuperscript{45} Especially during the time of Hesychasm (XIV century) – Gregory Palamas and oth., Siluan from Mt. Athos and archimandrite Sophronius (Sakharov).

\textsuperscript{46} S. Burgess, The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions, p. 79

\textsuperscript{47} Alfejev, St. Simeon the New Theologian and the Orthodox Tradition, p. 443.
through the church sacraments, developed very rapidly’. Moreover, as was already mentioned, for the Greek Patristic tradition, especially with regard to its mystical forms, the final goal and the desired outcome of one's knowledge of the Word, which brings about salvation, forgiveness, and rescue from death and sin is *deification*. This teaching underlines the dynamic character of salvation and sees it as a process of sanctification, love and holiness, rather than a salvation from sin and death which remains permanent after the moment it is granted - as static, once-and-forever adoption and redemption.

Western theologians, however, claim that grace produces a real change in a human being as well. The doctrine of ‘transfiguration’ as developed by the Anglican church might be taken as an example

Western theologians, however, claim that grace produces a real change in a human being as well. The doctrine of ‘transfiguration’ as developed by the Anglican church might be taken as an example. Similar tendencies may be noticed in contemporary Lutheran theology. Luther, who himself insisted that Christ can be present in a believer and who stressed the unity between Christ and a Christian, did not hesitate to use the concept of *deification* (*Vergöttlichung*) in the same sense as it was used by the early Church.

... a Christian lives not within himself rather in Christ and in his neighbor. In the opposite situation he is not a Christian. He is living in Christ by faith, in his neighbor by love. By Faith he is ascending to God and by Love he is descending to his neighbor. And still he abides always in God and in His love ...

In the recent dialogue between Orthodox and Lutheran theologians, which took place in Finland, understanding was reached that for Luther faith was partaking in the existence of God. In the Holy Spirit outpouring of the love of God upon a person, that person becomes a means of transmission of the divine grace. Luther emphasised that this is the work of God in a person and that the person himself is just an instrument in His hands. Grace Brame, a contemporary Lutheran theologian, in one of her recent books defines theology as faith expressed in statements, propositions, and creeds and spirituality as faith based on our relationship to God through prayer and letting

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49 It is possible to trace the connection between Anglican and Orthodox methodology enrooted in the Eastern Church Fathers' writings. E. Zaitzev *Losskyi’s Teaching on Theosis*, Moscow, 2007. P. 127. (in Russian)

50 German – deification.

God live and love through us[^52]. Faith filled with love produced in a human being by God's grace, is at the core of John Wesley's theology, with the concept of sanctification in its very heart. Like Patristic tradition, Wesley's teaching stresses that likeness to Christ is achieved gradually by a process of conscious response to the calling of God and acceptance of the grace offered by Him. Wesley emphasizes that the goal of Christian life (Christian perfection, or renewal of the *image of God*) is inseparable from the way of Christian life. In experiencing new birth, a person puts on a new human nature (Col 3:9). The renewal of a human soul in righteousness and true holiness is taking place, - the renewal of God's image in us. In this image God's love guides feelings, inclinations, needs and passions, as was the case with Adam before the Fall.[^53]

The more a contemporary Pentecostal is introduced to the writings of the Holy Fathers, the more he/she feels ‘at home’ - he/she understands their language, their means of expression and their spiritual experiences. Due to the mystical encounter with the living God experienced in prayer a person may visualize the Truth in the Holy Spirit as a product of a post-modern era. According to the contemporary theologian, Steve Land: ‘Pentecostalism is more Catholic than Protestant in emphasizing sanctification-transformation more than forensic justification, but more Protestant than Catholic in the conviction that the Word is the authority over the church and tradition for matters of faith, practice, government and discipline.’[^54] The similarity between spiritual experiences described in the Patristic heritage and those described today has been noticed by many. The bishop Ilarion (Alfejev) when pointing to the special role of mystical experience in the apology (defending ideal) of Christian life, maximalism and radicalism of the outstanding Christian mystics, makes it a point not to discuss the mystical experience of groups that are outside the official Church. Examples such as Montanism he calls ‘heretical’ mysticism, claiming that the main criterion for differentiating ‘true’ from ‘heretical’ mysticism is whether or not it conforms to the tradition of the Church[^55]. Archbishop Vasilyi (Krivoshein), the monk from Mt. Athos, noted with regret that there are only few Orthodox writings on Simeon the New Theologian. He was also unwilling to make of Simeon any sort of predecessor of contemporary Pentecostalism, as has been


suggested by the American Jesuit G. Maloney\textsuperscript{56}. Orthodoxy insists that it is first necessary to reach the spiritual level of the Church Fathers, and only then to speak about spiritual gifts. This is, to some extent, a repeat of the arguments of the Jewish zealots, who being among the members of the Early Church, refused to let pagan converts join them (see examples of Cornelius' house and others, discussed already at the first council in Jerusalem - Acts 15).

Christianity allows incredible freedom to everyone who searches for a Truth that requires faith, originating not only in the mind but also in the heart. Contemporary Orthodoxy understands the importance of communion with God and regards it as the main criterion for all spiritual life.\textsuperscript{57} Trinitarian theology may be interpreted as theology of communion, theology of mystical union with God, implying experience, and the gradual change of a human nature which results from the encounter with the Holy Spirit, as described by Gregory the Theologian, Isaac the Syrian and Simeon the New Theologian, for whom the foundation of faith is the encounter with God ‘face to face’.

Some contemporary Pentecostals define their own personal experiences as Charismatic manifestations or deeds of the Holy Spirit. For them an encounter with Christ the Saviour is a reality, but we must not forget that we have to learn what it means to live a Christian life. After all, it is the life of a person that testifies to a conversion of a heart to God. It is an encounter with Christ that awakens in the heart of a believer a desire to know God, to love Him and seek His fellowship before anything else. This is the human response to God's searching for the true worshipers, who worship Him in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:23).

Pentecostalism and Orthodoxy in Russia regard each other with a certain suspicion. Pentecostals see the majority of Orthodox believers as nominal Christians (thus sharing the opinion of Simeon the New Theologian about the Christianity of day) and regard worshiping icons and relics as features of pagan cults. The Orthodox, in turn, view Pentecostals as a Western Christianity, alien to the national culture, even just a cult, where extreme emotions may turn out to be dangerous. It is remarkable how in secular societies, both Eastern and Western, interest to the mystical part of Christian life appears to be growing quickly. Pentecostalism in the West is indebted to its direct predecessor - the holiness movement and its leaders (Finney, Archiv Bishop Vasilyi (Krivoshein), P. 10-11.

\textsuperscript{56} Petr Hegumen (Mezcherjaninov), Problems of Joining the Church. Moscow, 2007, p. 87. (in Russian)
Moody, Palmers and others) who advocated sanctification and baptism of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals differ from evangelical fundamentalists in their search for truth not only in the sphere of the mind, but rather in spiritual experiences, which are followed by a change of conduct - the essential part of true conversion.

The Pentecostal worldview is characterized primarily by the emphasis it puts on the importance of communion with God, and by claiming constantly that love is an emotional experience. Salvation, when understood as communion, involves a response of free love, and a sincere turning of the human will towards God and His ways, which makes the communion with God deeper and deeper. An interest in Eschatology and Ecclesiology is typical for Pentecostals. One can compare the three components of the Eastern Church Fathers' mystical encounter with the Holy Spirit which were mentioned above with the three major characteristics of Pentecostal theology: orthodoxy, orthopathy and orthopraxy. Orthodoxy concerns prayer, in which an encounter with a living God is taking place. Its goal is envisioning God, knowing His will and accepting it freely. Orthopathy corresponds to experiencing the presence of God, as expressed in various ways (tears, ecstasy, etc.). Orthopraxy is the transformation of a believer's way of life (deification, transfiguration into His image). In its understanding of experiential or mystical theology, Pentecostalism seems closer to the Patristic tradition than one might originally have supposed, especially when Maxim the Confessor's definition of a theological gift is taken into account. Despite all our differences, it is of great importance to learn to recognize each other as Christian churches, as brothers and sisters in Christ, the children of the same Lord. It is important to respect the image of Christ in each other and to have fellowship with each other, according to what we testify to the world about our common Christian faith.

59 J.D. Johns, Pentecostalism and the Postmodern Worldview, JPT 7 (1995), pp. 73-96.
60 In the teaching of the Eastern Church Fathers on deification Alfejev emphasizes the pronounced eschatological and anthropological components. The final deification will take place in the Kingdom of Heaven, while here on earth we are preparing for this event for the purpose of reaching the partaking in the divine Light in the world to come. The same idea is expressed by the Jewish thought of the Tannaim era. An example from Pirke Avot might be given: R. Jacob said: This world is a vestibule to the world to come; prepare yourself in the vestibule to enter the chamber (palace) (3.16). R. Jacob is the teacher of R. Jehuda ha-Nasi (the Patriarch) under whose leadership the formation of Mishna was terminated (second century A.D.).
Nowadays Pentecostals (including the Charismatic movement which some Russian authors call Neo-Pentecostalism) are growing in number in Russia, and have become a visible phenomenon in both religious and social spheres, attracting the attention of the media and provoking considerable controversy.\textsuperscript{61} It seems that one is forced to agree with Sergey Scherbak's thesis that willingly or not, all those of us who are facing complex problems of contemporary social and religious life, had better stop dealing with them using such exclusive categories as my- alien - a community of believers - sect, etc.\textsuperscript{62} All of us, faculty members and theological students alike, have to remember that the goal of every education, secular as well as religious, is the intellectual and spiritual growth of a person.

Dialogue between Jews and Christians, Orthodox and Lutherans is already taking place. Why not now initiate a dialogue between Orthodox and Pentecostals who have common roots in the Holy Scripture and in the spiritual experience of the Patristic tradition? V. Lossky, the famous representative of Neo-Patristic theology, asserts that all the provisions given by the Church for a Christian are necessary for reaching the final goal of unification with God. This unification, however, is not a result of an unconscious process; it is rather accomplished by our freedom in the Holy Spirit. All we are lacking is personal determination and boldness.\textsuperscript{63} Contemporary Pentecostal theologians observe that the Pentecostal movement, which at its dawn was open for others to join, and later in its history preferred exclusivism, is now turning back to its own origins. T. Richie underlines the importance of the Pentecostal heritage of ecumenism and inclusivism, as an answer to the religious diversity and the pluralism of opinion in our contemporary world.\textsuperscript{64} The search for a more solid and constructive dialogue between followers of Eastern and Western Christian traditions is one of mankind's most urgent tasks. This has already been eloquently pointed out by the contemporary Orthodox theologian Zizioulas,

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\textsuperscript{61} It is a surprise that the denomination, whose history might be traced in Russia since the beginning of the XX century and experienced all the difficulties of religious persecution, equally with the representatives of the Orthodox Church and other confessions, recognized all over the world, in Russia is still considered sometimes to be a cult.


\textsuperscript{63} V. Losskyi, Essays on the Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, (Moscow: SEI Center’s Press, 1991), (in Russian) p. 163.

who maintains that, as Orthodoxy increasingly embraces Western culture, the problem of the church institutions will soon obtain an ecumenical dimension. In this context he invites others to develop an ontology of communion as a provision for Church being, that appears to designate the turn to Pneumatology at the theological level. It is impossible to conclude without mentioning the development of spirituality in contemporary Russian society. As a phenomenon, spirituality is a complex manifestation of a human spirit which changes its character from generation to generation, from nation to nation, from individual to individual. As a free being, each human being is seeking the restoration of perfection of the being-eternity. Inevitably, this is also a process of realization of one's own personal goals and of overcoming the finality of earthly existence. Escaping a dead end is possible only by creating a new spirituality of a kind which enables the integration in one's self of the whole manifold historical experience of mankind and of one's nation, without excluding multivariability and pluralism when assessing the past, present and future.

‘Enthusiastic Christianity’, while not overlooking the experiential component of conversion in the process of salvation and full communion with God, has also begun to seek its roots not only in Holy Scripture and in Church tradition. Will the ‘Enthusiasts’, in common with some contemporary Orthodox theologians, choose to follow the way of Neo-Patristic synthesis? Or will they claim that this represents only an escape from the problems imposed by modernity - that it is no more than a slavish imitation of tradition, which rejects any theological development? Will the Orthodox Church in contemporary Russia be ready to recognize the reality of the encounter with Christ, which ‘Enthusiastic Christianity’ advocates and testifies to? These must remain open questions and ones to which Christians, of whatever persuasion, will no doubt wish to return in the future.

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65 Church unity, understood as a Eucharistic union, depends on the valuable synthesis of Christology and Pneumatology in the frames of Ecclesiology. Zizioulas, p. 141.

66 Spirituality is an example of modelling words after foreign patterns - following the concept of mentality. However, the last one refers more to the intellectual aspect of culture, analyzing it mostly from the rational positions. Its moral-aesthetic content of the concept is retiring to the background, although in the Russian tradition it is vice versa. O. Ezhov, ‘Spirituality as a principle and a mechanism of mastering time’ in Spirituality: Traditions and Problems, Ufa. 1991, pp. 13-19. (in Russian)

67 This includes the Charismatic movement and Neo-Pentecostalism although some scholars insist on separation of these terms from each other.