

# Preface

WITHIN THE LAST CENTURY there has been a renewed interest in the writings of the Cappadocian Fathers and particularly their understanding of deification or theosis. The Cappadocian Fathers, building upon the work of Origen, took a pagan Greek concept and Christianized it so that by the fourth century, the goal of Christians was to be transformed into the image of God by living a life of virtue in imitation of Christ. This was their concept of theosis.

Basil, Gregory and Gregory did not write about their theological concepts in a vacuum, but rather, they were influenced by their social contexts. Quite specifically this included the women in their lives. Much has been written about Macrina, the elder sister of Basil and Nyssen. She is the perfect unsullied virgin who is transformed into the bride of Christ. While Macrina's story has received considerable attention, little has been written regarding the remaining women who are found within their texts. These include Basil and Nyssen's grandmother, Macrina the Elder and their mother Emmelia. Both of these women had deification or theosis as the telos for their lives and they became living models of Basil and Gregory's theology. Not only were they models, but also the home they created was an incubator for the development of future saints. Within Basil and Gregory's texts we find other women as well, including their sister Theosebia and another unnamed "Fallen Virgin." Each one of these lives exemplifies what it means to be living a life with the goal of theosis.

Basil's friend, Gregory of Nazianzus, was also greatly affected by the women in his life. He wrote the panegyric on his sister, Gorgonia, in which he shares in great detail about her life and that of their mother. His mother Nonna and his sister Gorgonia are both presented as the new Eve as they become models for the restoration of female flesh. Throughout Nazianzen's writings we see these women as models for deification. This study explores

the way in which the women exemplify and bring greater understanding to their theology of deification.

When combined these seven females, six of whom we know are canonized as saints, present a picture of deification which takes one beyond the purely theological language of the Cappadocian Fathers. Instead, a complex sociological and theological picture develops and ultimately it becomes impossible to separate the women from their theology or their theology from the women. The Cappadocian Mothers bring new life to the Cappadocians' theology which places it within a realistic milieu and provides differing perspectives on theosis.

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