Introduction

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I would like to begin the introduction to this book with a quote from A. M. Allchin:

> The Christian tradition is thus full of an affirmation of God's nearness to humankind, and of our unrealized potential for God. The basic affirmations that Jesus is Lord, Jesus is the Christ, are affirmations about the possibilities of [hu]man, about the intimacy of relationship between human and divine, no less than about the mystery of God. They speak about the meeting, a union of God with humankind which alters our understanding, our deepest experience of what it is to be human, which gives us a new vision of the whole creation and alters the substance of our living and dying. They open up the full meaning of our calling to become partakers of the divine nature, to become sons in the one Son, to be filled with the Holy Spirit. They speak of deification.[1]

This quote eloquently sums up the main magnetism behind the Christian understanding of theosis. It never ceased to lure theologians throughout two millennia of Christian heritage, in spite of occasional uneasiness, ambiguity about its particular content, terminological diversity, and at times, open criticism and dismissal. The theme of deification intimately touches on human identity and actualization of humanity's ultimate purpose. It is predominantly an anthropological and soteriological expression of Christian theology. At the same time, it testifies to the identity of a Christian God, divine universal design, and God's economy, where the trinitarian and christological apprehension receives the central place. Theosis, both on an individual and cosmic scale, is not exiguous in its eschatological perspective, either. Theosis testifies to the inexplicably grand mystery of God's divine intimacy with

1. Allchin, *Participation*, 63.

human beings. Deification penetrates all spheres of human existence, and can be seen as an answer to most pending ultimate questions. It is essentially practical in its manifestation and uplifting in its content, but nevertheless, always evasive and arcane in its comprehension. Being such an interconnecting tenet of different fields of Christian theology and diverse Christian traditions, deification, by no surprise, continues to be an attractive subject in theological discourse on academic and popular levels. It can amply be seen in numerous publications on the subject since the publication of our first volume in 2006.

The main interest in theosis is traditionally associated with Eastern Orthodox spirituality and the modern Orthodox literature is by no means a stranger to the discussion on theosis. On the popular side, there is a sermonic-like booklet *Achieving Your Potential in Christ: Theosis: Plain Talks on a Major Doctrine of Orthodoxy* (1993) by Anthony Coniaris that draws insights from Orthodox tradition, along with catchy quotes and references to a wide range of sources, including Meister Eckhart, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Ford, Thomas Merton, and Hasidic sayings, among others. Another popular, but more comprehensive, short book on theosis in English is *Partakers of Divine Nature* by Christoforos Stavropoulos, that was published in 1976.[2] In that book Stavropoulos presents deification in the context of the general Eastern Orthodox understanding of salvific workings of the divine economy, the sacramental life of the church, and the spiritual life of prayer. Archimandrite Sophrony's (Sakharov) book *We Shall See Him as He Is* (2006) offers insightful, deeply testimonial witness to the Orthodox spiritual life, where deification is one of the central themes. Anthropological, cosmological, and economic aspects of theosis received additional attention in a recent essay by Hieromonk Damascene, "Created in Incorruption: The Orthodox patristic Understanding of Man and the Cosmos in Their Original, Fallen, and Redeemed States," *Orthodox Word* 44 (2008) 9–99. In this extensive essay, Damascene, in almost patristic catena style, attempts to delineate the main characteristics of the prelapsarian, current, and eschatological elements of the human and cosmic soteriological process. Fr. Bijesh Philip offers an intriguing account of the contemporary Orthodox appropriation of theosis, with a peculiarly Indian cultural and spiritual flavor. In his book, *Theosis and Mission: An*

2. See also Anstall, *Aspects of Theosis* and Capsanis, *The Deification as the Purpose of Man's Life*.

Orthodox Perspective of Christian Spirituality in the Age of Globalisation (2004), he emphasizes the importance of theosis in the mission of the church in the context of modern challenges of globalization, secularism, HIV/AIDS epidemic, consumerism, exploitation in the third world countries, environmental concerns, and with many other issues "that seem to unsettle our lives in the present world."[3]

From a more comprehensive theological point of view, the works of Vladimir Lossky and his influence on the re-vitalization of deification discourse in modern Orthodox thought are well known and, for the purpose of our bibliographical survey, do not require an introduction. The works of Romanian theologian Dumitru Staniloae, that are only now becoming more readily available in English, also extensively address the teaching of the Orthodox Church on deification. In this regard, I would like especially to refer to the second volume of his *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: The World: Creation and Deification* (2005) and to his *Orthodox Spirituality* (2003). Predominantly the Neopalamite approach to deification that was inaugurated in the works of Florovsky and Lossky that substantially inspired above mentioned books by Coniaris, Stavropoulos, and Staniloae, was to some degree consolidated by Georgios Mantzaridis in his *The Deification of Man: St Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition* (1984).

Panayiotis Nellas's book, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspective on the Nature of the Human Person* (1987) contributes significantly to the development of a christocentric anthropological approach to theosis, which often the author terms "christification." In the comprehensive and constructive assessment of a long list of patristic authorities on the subject, he gives particular preference to the late Byzantine theologian Nicolas Kabasilas. This book presents a theologically anthropological outlook on deification that is not only informative in an historical perspective on the deification theme, but also provides an interesting and insightful theological appropriation of theosis, that places its author, Panayiotis Nellas, among leading modern and original Eastern Orthodox theologians in the twentieth century.

More recently, another attempt to express the predominantly Palamite view of deification as the "classical" or standard understanding of theosis in Eastern Orthodoxy was offered by Stephen Thomas

3. Philip, *Theosis and Mission*, 9.

in *Deification in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition: A Biblical Perspective* (2007). The main objective Thomas attempts to accomplish in his book is to show the importance and vitality of the biblical foundation for the Greek Fathers and Orthodox tradition on theosis. He hopes to spark a biblical revival for Orthodox Christians living in the West. Thus, the book is purposefully not designed for academicians and does not pretend to be original. Nevertheless, in his not always "classically" Neopalamite discourse, Thomas presents a rather intriguing and engaging synthesis of specifically Western biblical scholarship, adopted and complemented with distinctive theological characteristics of Eastern Orthodox theology and spirituality. The book seems to accomplish its intention and can be read not only as an overview of the Orthodox understanding of deification, but as an introduction to Eastern Orthodoxy aimed for biblically-minded, evangelical, Western readership. It is an interesting attempt to combine modern biblical scholarship with Orthodox spirituality.

In the context of such seemingly abundant literature on deification in the Orthodox tradition, we especially welcome the recent book by Norman Russell, *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis* (2009). Russell is mostly known as the prominent translator of theological and patristic works from modern and ancient Greek into English, and for his significant contribution to the field of patristic studies, especially to the discourse on theosis. His *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek patristic Tradition* (2004) is a most comprehensive survey on deification in the Greek Fathers, expanding broad groundwork started by Roman Catholic theologian Jules Gross,[4] and further explored by Andreas Theodorou.[5]

Russell's *Fellow Workers with God* begins with the survey of the revival of the interest in theosis in twentieth-century Orthodox theology, that was due to several factors: the rediscovery of Gregory Palamas, the impact of Russian religious philosophy, recovery of the *Philokalia*, and renewal of interest in the Greek Fathers. As was the case in the patristic period, in modern Orthodox thought there are a variety of emphases when it comes to theosis. However, this apparent diversity,

4. Gross, *Divinization*.

5. Theodorou, *Ἡ περὶ θεώσεως τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* [*The Teaching on the Human Deification*].

according to Russell, is "fundamentally convergent."[6] The importance of deification comes in the context of the divine economy of salvation, with culmination in the incarnation of Christ, "To see Christ is to know what it means to be God."[7] It is not simply a reflection on the historical role of Christ in the salvation of humankind, as Christ's soteriological presence in the process of the divine economy that impacts everyday human life. The process of the reconciliation and glorification that was accomplished by Christ requires active human participation. It is a transformative experience that enables human beings to "become not 'who' Christ is but 'what' he is."[8] Thus, theosis is not merely another term for salvation and sanctification.

Already in the patristic period, Russell observes two patterns that define the role of theosis within divine economy. One, predominantly expressed by Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria, is more biblically oriented, with emphasis on justification, sanctification, divine filiation, and participation in the divine nature. Another, represented by Maximus the Confessor and the later Fathers, is more speculative and philosophical, with more explicitly stated eschatological cosmic fulfillment. A similar tendency, according to Russell, continues among modern Eastern Orthodox theologians, the majority of whom are patristic scholars.

After discussing the scriptural foundations of theosis (predominantly the two key texts: Ps 82 [81 LXX]:1, 6–7 [cf. John 10:33–36] and 2 Pet 1:4) and their exegetical application in patristic theology, Russell emphasizes the testimonial importance of "the overall structure of the Bible"[9] to the representation of deification, both for patristic and modern Orthodox thought.

The remainder of the book deals with the primary theological themes closely connected with theosis: image and likeness of God, the transfiguration of the believer, self-transcendence, participation in the divine life, and union with God. In each of these themes, Russell draws heavily on Greek patristic and monastic tradition and its appropriation in modern Orthodox, again, predominantly monastic and Neopatristic expression.

6. Russell, *Fellow Workers*, 30.
7. Ibid., 35.
8. Ibid., 36.
9. Ibid., 69.

While some patristic authors did not draw a distinction between the image and likeness of God, for others the image of God was understood as setting the structural (ontological) basis for our relationship with God with its dynamic realization in divine likeness. The transfiguration of the believer is presented extensively in the context of the hesychastic tradition of unceasing prayer where Russell also briefly touches on the role of the vision of God in theosis.

Human self-transcendence, as fullness of human self-realization, occupies an important place in theosis that links human knowledge of the self with God and, through mystical rapture, establishes a deificational relationship between God and the human person. This transcending self-realization, transformative and christological in its character and manifestation, is not the inherent potentiality of human nature, but the result of participation in divine grace through intellectual, ascetic, and liturgical aspects of Christian life. This apophatically expressed speculative mysticism of self-transcendence—deeply embedded in Neoplatonic philosophy, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and Maximus the Confessor with subsequent influence of hesychasm—acquires the leading role in the Eastern Orthodox understanding of theosis. Russell briefly points out how the influence of Berdyaev's existentialist philosophy, significantly reinterpreted in the Neopatristic perspective by Vladimir Lossky, Christos Yannaras, and John Zizioulas, shapes the modern Orthodox response to personalist philosophy and its attempt to explain "how finite human beings can attain communion with a God who is personal and yet also infinite and supremely transcendent."[10]

In the discussion of participation in the divine life, after briefly pointing out the meaning of the word "participation" in English and Greek, Russell concisely summarizes the main points of the patristic approach to participation in the context of deification, with its culmination in Gregory Palamas and subsequent influence of Palamism on modern Orthodox theology. Some uneasiness with Palamas's essence/energy distinction in God—some offer the distinction full-hearted support (Lossky, Yannaras, and the majority of other modern Orthodox theologians) whilst others express reservations about it (Zizioulas)—in Russell's opinion, is not so much evidence of divergence, as "the fruit of

10. Ibid., 126.

profound meditation on different strands of the patristic tradition" that are mainly complementary.[11]

The theme of union with God, according to Russell, was systematically introduced to patristic theology by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and from him firmly integrated in the Orthodox understanding of theosis. The nature of divine-human union, which neither presupposes identification of human beings with God nor human dissolution into the divine, is predominantly interpreted in later patristic and modern Orthodox thought in Palamite terms: "We become the same as God but different, a unity-in-diversity through participating in the divine energies."[12]

Especially useful in this context is Russell's summary-discussion-analysis of the somewhat "dissident" or maverick and, at the same time, innovative and original contributions to the theosis discourse made by Nicholas Berdyaev and Sergey Bulgakov, that still continue to stir tensions in Orthodox circles. Russell concludes his book by pointing out the practical aspect of theosis as the soteriological dimension of Christian life within the ecclesial community, with an eschatological perspective. This aspect of theosis is not the prerogative of spiritual elite, but "it is intended for all believers without exception."[13] On the theological side, the multi-faceted and dynamic character of deification discourse within Eastern Orthodoxy, and inter-denominational interest in theosis, should be welcomed as this discourse is far from being finalized.

The Eastern Orthodox interest in theosis, without doubt, makes an important contribution to the study of this subject. However, it does not hold anymore to the exclusive role often claimed by Orthodox theologians. As it has been already pointed out by Russell, even in modern Orthodox theology, theosis is far from being an univocally settled issue. Recent interest in deification also confirms that this theme attracts attention for its own sake, sometimes without a direct connection to Orthodox tradition. In this regard, I especially welcome the conclusion that one of the Eastern Orthodox theologians has recently drawn with respect to deification: "Clearly, the notion of *theosis* is no longer 'owned'

11. Ibid., 141.
12. Ibid., 146.
13. Ibid., 169.

by the Christian East, if such one-sided ownership was ever a historical possibility."[14] Even though Gavrilyuk's re-visitation of contemporary discourse on the deification theme is still overshadowed by implications of past ecumenical developments, and the presumption that Eastern Orthodoxy has a "copyright" on it, his assessment is particularly helpful in emphasizing theosis as a significant issue of ongoing theological conversation on its own grounds, apart from denominational boundaries and a directly ecumenical incentive.

One noteworthy recent publication on theosis that attempts to offer a constructive theological examination is Paul Collins's *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion* (2010). Collins briefly reviews deificational precedents in popular pre-Christian Roman and Greek piety, Greek philosophy, Christian Scripture, and early patristic theology. His main focus is on an analysis of deification in Eastern Orthodoxy, which he presents in a reverse historical perspective, starting with the modern period and sequentially moving back to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor. Acknowledging the central role of theosis in Eastern Orthodox theology, often viewed as the core expression of self-understanding and the peculiar identity of this tradition, Collins proceeds to survey theosis in Western theology. His overview of Western Christian tradition includes not only medieval witness to deification, but also examination of explicit and implicit evidence of what he terms as "an architecture of the metaphor of deification" in the Reformation (including the Radical Reformation), Pietism, the Oxford movement, the Holiness movement, and concludes with contemporary Roman Catholic expression.

In this book, Collins is drawing a survey of deification that stretches over two-and-a-half millennia. This does not leave much room for a detailed assessment of peculiarities related to theosis diversity; nevertheless, his book presents an important reminder of, and testimony to, the vitality of the deification theme in both Eastern and Western Christian traditions. Particular interest in this book is due to Collins's methodology of functionalization, and construal of the deification metaphor for contemporary theology, within the methodology of mystical theology, dynamic participation in the Trinity, sacramental theology, and the practice of virtuous life in Christ. This book presents one of the first

14. Gavrilyuk, "Retrieval of Deification," 657.

theological constructive assessments of theosis and its importance for contemporary Christianity.

Michael Gorman's well researched, annotated, and contextualized book, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (2009), presents a comprehensive assessment of the main Pauline tenets, such as kenosis, sanctification, justification, holiness, and participation, where theosis receives central treatment in the integrated soteriological perspective of Paul's theology. In the beginning of the book Gorman offers a trinitarian and christocentrically-minded definition of theosis: "Theosis is transformative participation in the kenotic, cruciform character of God through Spirit-enabled conformity to the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected/glorified Christ."[15] And throughout his book Gorman is successfully arguing, as he sums it up: "for a single Pauline soteriology of participation in the life of the triune cruciform God known in the cross of Christ, and we have called this theosis."[16]

Portraying God's kenotic descent in Christ, and his acting in what can be seen as a shockingly ungodly manner for the common human perception of divinity, Paul elevates the significance of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, and proclaims Christ to be the Lord, in contrast to the typical Roman understanding of imperial power and honor. The contrast between the divinity of Christ, kenotically manifested in his humanity, and the divinity of the Roman imperial cult, is especially important for an understanding of vertical and horizontal dimensions of divine economy and its manifestation in Christian community. It is also important for understanding the role of Christian community in the participatory and reciprocal process of transformative deification: a process that is both reminiscent of traditional Christian understanding of the *imitatio Christi*, and the representation of theosis as christification.

Gorman's dealing with justification in Paul is exceptionally good. He proposes very valuable methodology for his interpretation of justification, the cross, and salvation in Paul, that also can be effectively applied to the study of theosis.[17] Implementing his five-principle methodology:

15. Gorman, *Inhabiting Cruciform God*, 7.
16. Ibid., 162.
17. Ibid., 46–48.

1) recognition of contextual specificity; 2) the practice of prudent connectivity; 3) recognition of theological complementarity; 4) recognition of the experiential character of Paul's theology; and 5) recognition of flexible coherency, allows Gorman to construct Paul's understanding of justification in a very deiforming perspective. Gorman masterfully argues against reducing justification to a simply forensic expression that significantly minimizes the soteriological importance of this theological theme in the context of Christ's salvific mission. Gorman expands the common Protestant cliché of forensic justification to a more complex, but well grounded in Pauline and Christian tradition, understanding of justification as a participatory and transformative experience, closely connected with sanctification and holiness. Thus, justification is understood as deification, where there is no separation of God's justice from love, and love from faith, and faith from action. Holiness and sanctification are not additions to justification, but its actualization. The interconnectedness of justification, sanctification, and holiness with kenotic, transformative, reconciliatory and theoforming participation in faithfulness of Christ, expressed in the trinitarian contextualization of cruciform theosis in Pauline theology, presents one integrated soteriology.

Gorman's interpretation of Paul's understanding of kenosis, justification, reconciliation, sanctification, holiness, participation, co-crucifixion, and theosis, reciprocally tied together not only sheds a new light on the contemporary field of Pauline studies but also allows us to see Paul and the coherence of his theology in a more historically and theologically adequate perspective. Intentionally or unintentionally, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God* creates a bridge from exclusively New Testament Studies, to the role and influence of Paul's writings on the development of patristic theology; or at least how early Christian authors read and understood Paul.

In my book, *"The Beauty of the Unity and the Harmony of the Whole:" The Concept of Theosis in the Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite* (2009), I attempt to trace the emergence and development of the deification theme in Greek patristic theology with its subsequent transformation into the theology of theosis in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. The main focus is to present the deification theme as it is situated in the complex context of its historical development and, thus, to avoid the commonly stated tendency to treat this notion of Christian

theology in an anachronistic manner. In my opinion, the universal presence of deification in early Christian writers was often overstated. Historical analysis of the development of the deification theme, and the formation of a specific terminology associated with it, shows that it was a gradual process, far from being homogeneous. The notion of deification in the first five centuries had a very marginal character and was often addressed on the periphery of other theological issues. This marginal application of the deification theme indicates that it was predominantly used as a rhetorical tool and a notion of popular theology, as it still lacked coherent systematic theological treatment.

The role of Pseudo-Dionysius in the consolidation of theosis is crucial, but it is by no means final. Nevertheless, after Pseudo-Dionysius, theosis experienced not only more systematic treatment as an independent subject of theological discourse, but it becomes one of the basic principles of Byzantine theology, and consequently of Eastern Orthodoxy.

The peculiar character of Dionysian theology could not be accurately appropriated without study of its relationship to later Neoplatonism. Therefore, significant attention in my book is given to the aspects of the influence this tradition had on Pseudo-Dionysius, in connection to the deification theme. Pseudo-Dionysian theology is justified neither as essentially "orthodox" Christian nor essentially "orthodox" Neoplatonic. Dionysius' intricate synthesis of Christian and Neoplatonic elements, especially in his exposition of theosis, pays better justice to this anonymous author's originality, and demonstrates the significance of his influence, both on the further development of Christian theology, and the advancement of Neoplatonic tradition.

The enigmatic nature of the *Dionysian Corpus* does not cease to puzzle scholars. Generally, Pseudo-Dionysius is approached from a solely Neoplatonic, or solely Christian, perspective. The outcome of this tendency obviously predetermines the treatment of his works, and in neither case pays proper justice to this body of literature. In my book, I attempt to research both lines of influence in the context of the overarching cultural background that was a significant aspect for the formation of a Christian imperial identity, and the development of Late Antiquity. This approach helps to situate and appropriate the *Dionysian Corpus* in a more accurate historical context, and to throw some additional light on the possible attribution of these works to Dionysius the

Areopagite, not as a conscious forgery, but as a literary device, not an uncommon feature of the time.

Another recent book that mostly deals with Pseudo-Dionysius, but also touches on deification, is *Divine Light: The Theology of Denys the Areopagite* (2008) written by William Riordan. In *Divine Light*, the reader finds a friendly treatment of Dionysian theology presented in very accessible, but well researched and documented, form. The author attempts, and to some degree succeeds, to present this enigmatic corpus of Christian literature in its adequate historical and theological context. Treating the content of the corpus as unquestionably Christian and orthodox, Riordan clears, often without sufficient argumentation, Pseudo-Dionysius of all unfavorable charges.

Overall, the author presents a very attractive and innovative, although frequently speculative, synthesis of Dionysian theology, at times interpreting Dionysian theology in the context of its later appropriation in Christian tradition and contemporary scholarship. He even goes as far as trying to fill in gaps in Dionysian discourse; in other words, trying to state affirmatively what Pseudo-Dionysius might have been thinking, where the text of the corpus does not state it explicitly. His analysis of the relationship between Pseudo-Dionysius and Neoplatonic philosophy often betrays rather sketchy and limited, rather than comprehensive, engagement with Neoplatonic sources, and the tremendous complexities of this philosophical tradition in Late Antiquity and its impact on Pseudo-Dionysius.

The central role of theosis in Dionysian discourse is properly acknowledged, but its treatment is predominantly contextualized to the main exposition of Dionysian theology, rather than giving it a detailed and systematic assessment for its own sake. Riordan's analysis of the Dionysian view of God, and God's relation to the cosmos, as a sacred theatre of divinization, and his analysis of the human divinizing ascent of the soul, at times seems unintentionally slipping into the typically Neoplatonic form of paradoxical, but pantheistic, understanding of divine unity. Riordan's handling of deification, as well as his general outlook on Dionysian theology, will be more reminiscent of the eclectic synthesis of the mystical spirituality of Plotinus, an understanding of the role of theurgy in Iamblichus, and the pantheistic metaphysical structure of Proclus than an accurate appropriation of this theme in the text of the *Areopagitica*.

The appendix to his book, on the treatment of rites of initiation in the work of Mircea Eliade, is remarkable in itself. It is probably the first precedent in Dionysian scholarship to draw a comparative analysis "between the Buryat shamanic initiation ceremony and the mystical initiation described by Denys." Only one thing remains, what would the author of the *Mystical Theology* think about it?

Among other recent publications on theosis, I shall mention the thorough treatment of Thomas F. Torrance's approach to deification in Myk Habet's book, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance* (2009); the published dissertation of William Schumacher, *Who Do I Say That You Are? Anthropology and the Theology of Theosis in the Finnish School of Tuomo Mannermaa* (2010); and Stephen Davis's book, *Coptic Christology in Practice: Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt* (2008), that, through the narrative of Coptic Christology, extensively touches on the deification theme.

The last, but not the least, recent book on theosis I would like to discuss briefly in this introduction is Daniel Keating's *Deification and Grace* (2007).[18] Keating offers a very thoughtful and clear introduction to the basic aspects related to the deification theme/doctrine "as the full outworking of grace in the Christian life."[19] Starting his exposition with variations of the deification exchange formula and the language of deification, with its scriptural and christological significance in the history of Christian theology, Keating turns to the discussion of soteriological implications, where deification is closely linked to divine filiation and sanctification. The direct divine agency in the initiation of human deification as the "effective indwelling in us"[20] and "participation in the divine life"[21] is closely connected to the regenerating efficiency of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. Continuous human progress in theosis that culminates in transformation into full maturity of Christ's image, is intimately connected to divine indwelling, that both initiates divine filiation, and sustains human progress in the divine life of Christ. Such important traditional theological language that is closely affiliated with theosis, as "image" and "likeness," "human perfection," "virtue," "par-

18. See also his, *Appropriation of Divine Life*.
19. Daniel Keating, *Deification and Grace*, 5.
20. Ibid., 41.
21. Ibid., 48.

ticipation," sharing in Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, the role of prayer and asceticism, just to name a few, is adequately expounded in overarching biblical and christocentric perspectives. Keating's book presents a good summary of theosis that in well-balanced and concise form outlines and explains the main elements intrinsically connected to the Christian understanding of human deification. I highly recommend this book for anyone who is interested in theosis.

With such ostensive number of publications on theosis that have sprung up in recent years, our current volume attempts not to summarize, or repeat, what has been already expounded on the subject, but to contribute to the ongoing interest in Christian understanding of deification. The complex terminological, experiential, speculative, mystical, soteriological, historical, and theological intensity that are inherently present in understanding the meaning of theosis in Christian theology, manifested themselves from the early patristic period, and never ceased to amaze and bewilder anyone who approached this theme.

This book is aimed at both those who are already students of theosis and those who are looking for an introductory text. For example, Ivan Popov's essay on history of theosis in the early Eastern Church—virtually inaccessible before and known only to a very few experts—presents a valuable analysis of deification that is for the first time available in English. Other contributions to this volume cover subjects that in the opinions of their authors have not yet received sufficient attention, or were under-represented. They comprise both historical analyses and theological developments on the appropriation of theosis in Christian tradition both past and present. The volume is supplied with a comprehensive up-to-date bibliography for resources on theosis.

Fully aware of the specificities of any particular Christian tradition, the contributors to this volume, without minimizing the complexity of the subject, attempt to work in the context of prudent connectivity, theological complementarity, and flexible coherency.[22] We begin this volume with Stephen Finlan's essay, "Deification in Jesus' Teaching," that focuses predominantly on three vivid deification passages in the Gospels: one that speaks of the kingdom of God within, another that commands dis-

22. Here I am adopting Michael Gorman's methodological principles that he proposed for the treatment of justification, the cross, and salvation in Paul, which in my turn I find very applicable to integrating different aspects of the deification discourse. See Gorman, *Inhabiting Cruciform God*, 46–48.

ciples to be perfect like the Father, and one where Jesus quotes "you are gods" from a Psalm (Luke 17:21; Matt 5:48; John 10:34). The notion of the kingdom within is not alien to Luke, which contains many passages about being filled with the Spirit, with "good treasure" or "light" (Luke 1:15; 6:45; 11:36; 12:12; etc.). Matthew's perfection saying indicates a never-ending process of taking on God's character, consistent with the emphasis on honesty and good works. In John 10:35, Jesus connects deification with the reception of revelation, pointing out that the phrase "you are gods" was uttered to "those to whom the word of God came." This may be synonymous with the notion of receiving the "power to become children of God" (John 1:12; cf. 1 John 3:1–2), of doing "greater works" or being guided "into all the truth" (14:12; 16:13). While Mark lacks any overt deification references, human deifying transformation is suggested in this Gospel in remarks about healing, people doing the will of God, and people becoming Jesus' brothers and sisters.

Finlan concludes that many Gospel passages support, or at least allow for, the idea of deification: Synoptic references to the kingdom "near," to being pure of heart or doing the will of God, and Johannine references to the indwelling presence of Jesus and the Father. Finlan also analyzes two sayings in *The Gospel of Thomas* that refer to the kingdom within, and comes to the conclusion that Gnostic texts do not always have more inwardness than orthodox texts.

Ivan Popov's essay, "The Idea of Deification in the Early Eastern Church," rendered in English by the leading translator of Russian religious philosophy and theology Boris Jakim, requires a little introduction to its author. Ivan Vasilevich Popov (1867–1938) is one of the prominent Russian patristic scholars of the early twentieth century. He was the son of a parish priest in Vyazma, Smolensk region. Popov followed an education pattern typical for the clergy class in the imperial Russia. He studied at the Vyazma Spiritual School, then in the Smolensk Spiritual Seminary, wrapping up his education at the Moscow Spiritual Academy. He was invited to join the faculty of the Academy upon graduation. Additionally, Popov studied in Germany, where, among other things, he attended lectures of Adolf Harnack. Popov taught in the Moscow Spiritual Academy until it was closed by the Bolshevik government in 1919. After 1919, Popov was systematically arrested, exiled, imprisoned, and released. While in exile, in September of 1937, he was arrested again, and on February 5, 1938, sentenced to be shot. Popov was executed in

Eniseysk on February 8, 1938. In 2003 he was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church.

Ivan Popov is the author of numerous articles and monographs that broadly cover both Latin and Greek Fathers. His academic and research interests were not limited only to the study of early Christianity. Popov published a number of works in ethics, philosophy, and psychology. Among his major works in patristics are *The Religious Ideal of St. Athanasius of Alexandria* (1904), *Mystical Justification of Asceticism in Works of St. Macarius of Egypt* (1904), *St. John Chrysostom and His Enemies* (1908), *Personality and Teaching of the Blessed Augustine* (1917). His two extensive biographies of Amphilochius of Iconium and Hilary of Poitiers were written during the Soviet period and published posthumously (1968–1971). Popov's "The Idea of Deification in the Early Eastern Church" presents the first comprehensive and critical theological assessment of this notion in modern patristic scholarship. Published in Russian and not translated in any Western languages, this seminal work remained virtually unknown outside of Russia until now.

In my essay, "Clement of Alexandria on Trinitarian and Metaphysical Relationality in the Context of Deification," I assess an intricate application of a metaphysical aspect of theosis in Clement and its contextualization in Clement's trinitarian theology. In Clement's understanding of God the Father as unoriginated First Principle without beginning or end, God is portrayed as a transcendent monad—one as one, solitary unity without distinctions or intervals. The Logos of God is also monad, but in a different way. The Son becomes an interesting point of both connection and distinction between one and many—the one as all things. In the Son Clement has a monadic transition from one to many, incorporated with his understanding of *apocatastasis* as a return from many to one. The role of the Holy Spirit is intimately correlated with this process. The Holy Spirit, as the co-educator with Christ, is the unifying principle of soteriological significance. Metaphysical unfolding of trinitarian interrelation serves in Clement, in my opinion, as a principle of unity and a vehicle of the return from many to one, to the harmonious unity of the universe, and provides a unifying and deifying human cosmic identity.

My second essay, "Basil of Caesarea and the Cappadocians on the Distinction Between Essence and Energies in God and Its Relevance to the Deification Theme," is predominantly a critical response to the

Neopalamite argument that we should view Basil of Caesarea and the Cappadocian Fathers as precursors of the Palamite distinction between divine essence and divine energies. After a brief overview of Palamism and particular emphasis on the essence/energy distinction in Neopalamism, as well as the importance of this distinction for Eastern Orthodox understanding of deification, I discuss claims proposed to sanction this distinction as a normative element of Cappadocian theology. Then I review the role of *energeia* in the Cappadocian trinitarian discourse and their general application of *energeia* terminology. The final part of my essay deals with the importance of the notion of participation in God for the Cappadocians in the context of divine essential incomprehensibility and human theosis.

While not necessarily denying the theological legitimacy of this distinction for Gregory Palamas and subsequent development of Eastern Orthodox theology, to see in Basil and the Cappadocians the articulation of this distinction is not only anachronistic, but also misleading. Properly situated in the context of the fourth-century Christian theology and anti-Eunomian polemics the Cappadocian limited evidence for the support of the essence/energies distinction is, at best, inconclusive, but more likely accidental. Even in Basil's *Ep*. 234.1, the key text for the evidence of this distinction, this distinction is only conceptual, with very limited application for human epistemological and contemplative realization of the divine reality. If, for Palamas, the essence/energies distinction is a characteristic of real authenticity within God, in the case of the Cappadocians we can only speak about the cognitive differentiation between the essence and energies that refers to a human's earthly ability to know God, but not to the divine reality itself.

Joel Elowsky in his essay, "Bridging the Gap: Theosis in Antioch and Alexandria," analyzes the difference between Theodore of Mopsuestia, a key representative of the Antiochene approach to Scripture, and Cyril of Alexandria, who represents the zenith of Alexandrian interpretation, in their treatment of theosis. Preceding trends in christology, anthropology, terminology, and exegetical approach informed by the differing Christian cultures of Alexandria and Antioch demonstrate a marked influence on the commentaries on the Gospel of John of Cyril of Alexandria and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Their exposition and commentary of Jesus' words, "That they may be one," in John 17 in particular reflect an approach to the text that is focused on our union with God and secondarily on our union with one another—the exact opposite

of how this passage is interpreted in most contemporary ecumenical discussions.

Theodore of Mopsuestia interprets this union in terms of a conjunction, or connection between the human and divine in Christ and between human beings and the Father. Such a union is at heart relational, reflecting Antiochene two-subject christology expressed in a single person, although the Greek word Theodore used was *prosōpon*. Alexandria understands the union with the Father to entail not just an association or relationship, but essentially a deification of the human nature that "well-nigh" transforms it into another nature. Cyril speaks of Christ in terms of a single subject as God and Man in the one Nature of God the Word. In Elowsky's opinion, Theodore and Cyril offer two contrasting approaches to deification: the acceptance of theosis by Alexandria along with the visceral rejection of theosis by Antioch, that reflect, in many ways the contemporary tendencies of Protestants and other Western churches in contrast to the churches of the East.

Paul Collins' first essay, "Theosis, Texts and Identity: the *Philokalia* (1782) a Case Study," investigates the construal of the doctrine of deification in the context of the framing of Orthodox identity in the twentieth century in relation to the reception of the *Philokalia*. He begins with an examination of imperatives, which led to the publication of the *Philokalia* in 1782, and of the rationale, which the editors Makarios and Nikodimos provide for its publication; and then he reviews the reception of the *Philokalia* in Russia during the course of the nineteenth century. Further, Collins discusses how the use of the *Philokalia* by Russian Orthodox theologians who emigrated to the West after the Bolshevik revolution informed these constructs. The *Philokalia* as a "canon" of the hesychast tradition and the doctrine of deification, in his assessment, produces a "hermeneutical filter," which has formed and informed a Neopalamite construal of modern Orthodox identity.

Collins' second essay, "Between Creation and Salvation: Theosis and Theurgy," explores the potential to construct an understanding of "Christian Theurgy" as the expression and means of deification, which provides the basis for a synthesis of the doctrines of creation and salvation. This construction Collins develops over five steps. Firstly, he discusses the reasons for the polarization of the doctrines of creation and salvation in mainstream Western theological discourse. Secondly, he investigates the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist as instances in

which created matter is used to celebrate the salvation of the cosmos. In the third section, he draws on Bulgakov's construal of a theurgic understanding of theology in which "God only reaches us through the liturgical invocations latent in all human creative bringing forth of the unanticipated."[23] In the fourth section, Collins draws together the sacramental understanding of matter with Bulgakov's understanding of theurgy to establish the grounds for understanding the sacraments as instances in which the divine purposes of creating and redeeming suggest the deification of the cosmos. Finally, he draws out the implications, which emerge from this construction of a theurgic understanding of theosis, in which doctrinal construals of creation and salvation are brought together in synthesis.

Mark Medley in his essay, "Participation in God: The Appropriation of Theosis by Contemporary Baptist Theologians," offers a detailed assessment of several modern Baptist theologians who, by applying the concept of theosis, have challenged the common contemporary Baptist approach to salvation as a transactional, immediate, voluntary, individual moment of conversion. If in North American Baptist theology salvation has been understood, for the most part, in such a way as to overemphasize justification, where justification is conceptualized as a legal-forensic remedying of the defective human condition through the atoning death of Christ—Clark H. Pinnock, Stanley J. Grenz, Paul S. Fiddes, and Doug Harink proffer an understanding of salvation as participation in God. These four Baptist theologians do not develop their own approaches to theosis, rather they thematically appeal to the broad soteriological significance of the deification theme, especially as it is represented in Eastern Orthodox theology.

Medley describes how: (i) Pinnock appropriates theosis in developing a pneumatic soteriology; (ii) Grenz appeals to deification to extend insights in trinitarian theology to anthropology in order to offer a vision of theological personhood as ecclesial selfhood in terms of participation in God in Christ through the Spirit; (iii) Fiddes constructively turns to theosis as he offers a Baptist interpretation of the ancient dictum "no salvation outside the church," and he appeals to the concept in his ongoing development of a theology of participation in God; and (iv) Harink, in his theological commentary on 1 & 2 Peter, considers the meaning of "sharing in the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4) and the connection

23. Milbank, "Sophiology and Theurgy," 36; see Bulgakov, "Unfading Light," 149–59.

of this unique New Testament phrase to living the virtuous life and to the glimpse of humanity's eschatological existence in the transfiguration of Jesus in 2 Peter.

While soteriological concerns are important to these Baptist theologians, theosis also assists their thinking about theological anthropology, ecclesiology, and pneumatology. Their thematic appropriation of theosis corroborates the continued development of a more truly "catholic" theology among Baptists. Engagement with theosis, according to Medley, also has the potential to release Baptist theology to expand its reflection on christology, on the one hand, by turning to a "new" source for theological reflection, Orthodox theology, and, on the other hand, by giving due attention to the transfiguration of Jesus.

By offering in this volume both historical and innovative approaches to the deification theme, we hope that the significance of this issue of Christian theology can provide not only a refreshing, but also a constructive perspective on Christian spirituality and practice. The theological complexity of theosis should not be underestimated. However, we hope that the essentially scriptural, soteriological, trinitarian, christological, anthropological, ecclesial, metaphysical, and ontological importance of the deification theme can help to view cultural and denominational theologies in a new and unifying way as the common ground that transcends boundaries and divisions.