

Chapter 1

Introduction

THERE HAVE BEEN MULTIPLE attempts to retrieve the patristic concept of “theosis” as a means of explicating Paul’s concept of “union with Christ.” This move is mainly associated with the work of Michael J. Gorman, Stephen Finlan, and Ben C. Blackwell. These recent works demonstrate the interest in deification as a widespread concept in Christian theology, one with significant ecumenical potential (as attested by the Finnish Lutheran School). It is argued that this concept allows bridging the gap between the historical reconstructions of Paul’s teaching on salvation by participation in Christ and the church’s doctrinal appropriation of it. M. David Litwa also employs this concept for understanding Paul in his historical and religious context. Unlike the scholars mentioned above, Litwa reduces his research to the antecedent material and considers subsequent Christian developments of *theosis* anachronistic.

To date, however, inadequate attention has been paid to the complex character and history of *theosis* in the theological tradition. This word has created much confusion in biblical studies.¹ For some theologians, the word points to widespread ancient beliefs about the transformation of worshippers into the likeness of a deity that influenced Paul’s thinking; for others, it points to a distinctive element in early Christian theology radically different from other ancient thought. For some, the word points to a single neglected strand of Paul’s soteriology; for others, it serves to bring all of the strands together. For some, the significance of the concept is purely historical; for others, the significance is theological or ecumenical. If the range of meanings

1. Wisse rightly points out how *theosis* may mean different things for thinkers. He distinguishes three boundary markers of deification: ontological (the realization of innate capacity), christological (participation in Christ), and soteriological (grace or synergy). In my view, any account of deification involves a combination of these types. Wisse, *Trinitarian Theology*, 304–9.

is not to confuse, there needs to be a study that examines its complexity, offering some criticism of the various approaches and their inadequacies.

This study is intended to probe the complexity of the term “theosis” particularly in Pauline studies, recognizing the ecumenical significance that the concept has.² As well known, *theosis* has become a point of contact between Protestant and Eastern Orthodox theologians in the discussion of soteriology in a broader sense than mere justification by faith.³ The exploration of patristic views on *theosis* will indicate that it is not exclusively a modern problem. Hence, this monograph will advocate for a nuanced definition of *theosis*, as a result of the Trinity’s salvific activity. For lack of a precise term in patristic scholarship, I tentatively called it *triadosis*. The concept of *triadosis* can serve better for the appropriation of the church’s doctrine in the quest for ecclesial unity.

The goal of this monograph is to assess how the concepts of *theosis* and the Trinity can inform and transform the traditional anthropocentric reading of Paul’s soteriology into one that is theocentric or even trinity-centric. On the one hand, previous attempts to retrieve the doctrine of *theosis* are pervasively christological or anthropological in nature. This shift from the traditional trinitarian groundings to isolated christological or anthropological inquiries can lead to “binitarianism” or anthropocentric soteriology respectively. As Ingolf Dalferth notes in his recent book *Crucified and Resurrected*, modern biblical studies tend to prioritize Christology at the expense of trinitarian moorings.⁴ Even when asserting and defending a high Christology, some scholars (most notably Larry Hurtado) present it in binitarian terms.⁵ English theology has played a big part in this, in its response to German theology, which was heavily shaped by the dominance of certain Anglican theological paradigms in the nineteenth century. The value of Christology and anthropology notwithstanding, once dislocated from the traditional identification with the Spirit, they suffer a truncated biblical presentation. Consequently, biblical scholars often identify *theosis* with Paul’s teaching on union with Christ and moral transformation of those, who are “in Christ.” On the other hand, theological reflections on Paul’s trinitarian theology are mostly perceived as foisted on the apostle and discussed (if at all) with some hesitation. In those rare occasions, when researchers acknowledge the full trinitarian account in Paul, they do not

2. As this was evident during a conference at the Catholic University of Leuven. “Theosis/Deification.”

3. This is true for Roman Catholics as well, although I will not engage with this group here.

4. Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected*.

5. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*.

explore the soteriological implication of such an account.⁶ By asserting the connections between *theosis* and the Trinity, this book will seek to redefine the former notion as an essentially trinitarian project, whereby believers experience transformation into the image of the triune God, not merely Christ or a new humanity. Also, it will have insightful bearings on Paul's soteriology and theology proper.

A potential contribution of this project is a re-appropriation of Paul in light of subsequent theological tradition. In particular, this book will seek to apply the relational model of the Trinity to Paul's teaching to see whether a trinitarian soteriology can make a coherent sense of the Paul of history and the apostle of the church. I intend to explore how a trinitarian dimension of *theosis* helps to unfold Paul's soteriology-talk. To do that one needs to take into account a patristic treatment of *theosis*.

Outline and Sources

Chapter 2 will deal with the question: How did the church fathers express the doctrine of participation in Christ? This study will focus on four main emphases or trajectories, how these early theologians understood human and divine union in Christ and humans with God, traditionally called deification or *theosis*. The degree of human transformation in the likeness of God varied from a mere moral imitation to a mystical union with the divine by the loss of human corporeality. The goal is to understand whether these fathers contended for a specific form of personal, natural or energistic union with God. Does the union of humanity with God occur on the level of natures, energies or persons? Is it fair to state that *theosis* is a process, which involves participation in the persons of the Trinity with the aim to become Trinity-like?

Is the concept of *theosis* crucial only for the Eastern fathers or can its theme be found in the Protestant Reformers? Chapter 3 will continue the historical analysis of *theosis* in the Reformation period. Notably, it will focus on a recent rereading of Luther and Calvin, both of whom, it is claimed, advocated for a participationist understanding of salvation. Christ is the gift and the giver of divine righteousness and holiness. Thus, the Finnish Lutheran School and J. Todd Billings, in particular, contend for the appropriateness of the term *theosis* to Luther and Calvin studies.

With the recent reformulations of personhood as a relational being by such theologians as John Zizioulas, the idea of personhood became a

6. For instance, Hill, *Paul and the Trinity*.

valuable aid not only in trinitarian but also in soteriological discussions.⁷ Hence, chapter 4 will critically assess the trinitarian relational model in the context of *theosis* to see whether this ecumenical concept should be nuanced before its application to Pauline studies.

Chapter 5 will engage in the evaluation of three recent Paul interpreters. Firstly, I will assess Litwa's historical approach from four angles: 1) the adequacy of purely historical background; 2) the legitimacy of posterior theology; 3) the use of later "essentialist" terminology for understanding Paul; and 4) the adequacy of Litwa's account of Paul's Christology, taking into account the discussion of "monotheism." Secondly, I will probe Blackwell's concept of *christosis* from the standpoint of theology proper, pneumatology and eschatology. Thirdly, Gorman's application of *theosis* as a hermeneutical lens for reading Paul will be examined on theological and patristic grounds.

It is evident that the patristic doctrine of *theosis* originated from the whole of Scripture, not only from Paul. This fact leaves no reasonable ground to claim whether Paul would definitely espouse this later development. Nevertheless, chapter 5 aims to engage critically recent publications that propose reading the apostle's soteriology in light of deification in Greco-Roman, patristic and exegetical studies. In my view, Wesley Hill and Chris Tilling are correct in advocating that Paul defined the identity of God by the mutual relationships of Father, Son, and Spirit.⁸ Therefore, Paul's soteriology is fundamentally trinitarian teaching. In the end, this book hopes to prove that a fresh reading of Paul's soteriology with the help of the historical-theological development of *triadosis* can become a helpful instrument to overcome old soteriological dichotomies and become a ground for further ecumenical appropriation and appreciation of Paul's multifaceted teaching.

Methodology

The approach undertaken in this book is complex. This is due to the fact that the retrieval of *theosis* in Pauline scholarship has itself been complex. The variety of approaches undertaken requires a variegated methodology. One strand will involve simple historical criticism, applied in response to the historical-critical (*religionsgeschichtliche*) work of Litwa. Importantly,

7. Vanhoozer develops a similar approach to the Trinity as being in communion, but more from a philosophical and apologetic angle. For him, the concept of the Trinity revealed in history allows upholding both oneness and plurality. The Trinity invites creation in a noncoercive communion of love between God and people that preserves the diversity of participants. Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, chap. 2.

8. Hill, *Paul and the Trinity*; Tilling, *Paul's Divine Christology*.

however, Litwa does not limit his research to pre-Pauline texts but looks at post-biblical/patristic literature as part of his historical research. Moreover, Litwa's historical investigation leads him to exegetical and theological claims about the identity of Jesus and the nature of salvation in Paul, which proves that historical criticism is unavoidably theological in nature. An adequate response to Litwa's project will include multiple layers of research: 1) a patristic account of *theosis*, to assess the fairness of his historical arguments, 2) an exegetical analysis of relevant Pauline material, and 3) a theological evaluation of his doctrinal conclusions.⁹

A second strand will involve looking at reception history, applied in dialogue with Blackwell. His approach corresponds to what is known as "effective history" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), which he discusses in the section on methodology.¹⁰ That section aims at developing further Blackwell's critical reflection on effective history. He ascribes a specific efficacy to the text that can be considered philosophically in terms of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, or theologically in terms of Scripture's efficacy, and can be investigated only through looking at the traditions shaped by the Word, i.e., by looking at its reception more broadly. This process involves more than just the tracing of the reception of particular verses, but rather the way in which the whole Scripture has been received. Blackwell's retrospective reading of Paul through Irenaeus and Cyril will be expanded to include a broader range of church fathers as well as Reformers and a contemporary Eastern Orthodox view. The inclusion of Luther, Calvin, and Zizioulas into the discussion is called to show a degree of similarity and continuity between different Christian traditions on the topic of deification. In contrast to Blackwell, this expansion will also include a robust theological account: this approach recognizes the place of the church's theological tradition within the rule of faith and the superintendence of the Spirit. A genuinely theological account of patristic (and arguably Pauline) view of *theosis* is characteristically trinitarian. By being sensitive to theological interpretations of Paul, New Testament scholars can gain not only the historical data and authorial intent but also the theological underpinning behind the apostle's writings. The theological interpretation of this monograph aims to contribute to a holistic understanding of Paul's big ideas about God and salvation through such concepts as *theosis* and the

9. Macaskill correctly reminds that background study, the value of it notwithstanding, should not overshadow the biblical context (of Paul, in this context) and the theological bearing of Scripture. Macaskill, *Union with Christ*, 2. Two pages later, Macaskill cautions against uncritical application of *theosis* to Pauline soteriology. This book attempts to avoid just that.

10. Blackwell, *Christosis*, 15–25.

Trinity. The adequacy of and objections to theological interpretation for Pauline studies will come to focus in the next section below.

A third strand proceeds from the one just outlined and involves an awareness of the fact that the theological traditions use the concepts of *theosis* and deification in ways that are more complicated and nuanced than some New Testament scholars recognize. These scholars use the word uncritically, naïve to the range of meanings and associations that it carries. In the case of Gorman, he recognizes the value of the tradition's reading of Paul for a theological hermeneutic. The critical task, however, will be to evaluate whether Gorman uncritically collapses tradition back onto Paul, neglecting the logic of *theosis* within diverse theological traditions. A more sensitive approach to *theosis* utilizes a synthesis of complex themes in Paul, without bringing unwarranted categories foreign to both Paul and tradition.

The second and third strand will operate distinctly from the first, but all are necessary to this project due to the diverse nature of Pauline scholarship on the topic. To be sure, these strands overlap in the areas of patristic accounts and anthropological soteriology. They naturally diverge, dealing with openly anti-theological and anti-traditional approach (Litwa) and openly theological and traditional (Blackwell and Gorman).

Potential Hermeneutical Objections

Most of the contemporary biblical studies employ different historical, linguistic, social, and other approaches to the biblical text (like to any ancient text), which often (intentionally) lack any theological implications. Biblical studies predominantly have become a study of the Bible as a human product and presumed a naturalistic account of religious history. The nature of this study is an attempt of a theologically informed interpretation of Paul that understandably is objectionable to those practicing the historical-critical approach. I want to address these objections before proceeding to the analysis of *theosis* in patristic and medieval writers.

The first hermeneutical objection relates to the legitimacy of theological interpretation in general. Is a theological approach to the Scriptures as treacherous as the proponents of the historical-critical method argue? On the one hand, scholars like Heikki Räisänen and Michael Fox, following Wrede, envision no place for “faith- or theology-based” academic biblical scholarship.¹¹ They bemoan the fact that for a long time the unadulterated historical study of the biblical text was hampered by theologies and traditions of the church. On the other hand, Richard B. Hays questions the

11. Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament*, 8; Fox, “Bible Scholarship.”

relevance of critical biblical scholarship advocated above for non-Christian and Christian audiences. For a secular audience, any biblical studies are superfluous, unimportant, and, therefore, leading biblical scholars to the dead-end. For a Christian audience, i.e., faith communities, a “secularist study” of the Bible is pointless and, therefore, leads Christian scholars to recover theological exegesis for the church.¹² Hence, Angus Paddison rightly contends that the reading of Scripture has its real meaning only in the church’s life and practice, “The church’s liturgical repetition of Scripture is not a returning again and again to the same ‘meaning’ but rather a deepening or a chastening encounter with the triune God who providentially orders the texts of Scripture.”¹³

During the past two decades, a movement that can be labeled “theological interpretation” has attracted a number of scholars from different Christian traditions. In the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer defines theological interpretation as an escape from the dichotomy between dogma and natural historicism.¹⁴ In my view, a problem of New Testament scholarship in some circles, in the past several decades, has been mainly to provide an a-theological reading of the Bible using historical criticism in a supposedly objective way.¹⁵ Particularly, in the

12. Hays, “Reading the Bible,” 10.

13. Paddison, *Scripture*, 26. I concur with Paddison’s assertion that the readers of ancient texts always start “in the middle,” rather than pretending to commence from the beginning. Paddison, *Scripture*, 7–8, 30. Paddison, I think, overemphasizes the eschatologically oriented reading of Scripture in the church, diminishing a proper value of the “archaeological” reading. There is no faithful eschatological reading without its roots in historical text and context.

14. Theological interpretation is not “an imposition of a theological system or confessional grid onto the biblical text,” whereby the Scripture is mainly used as a proof-text for a theological system. It is not “an imposition of general hermeneutic or theory of interpretation,” because the Scripture is a sacred text that poses theological questions. It is not “a form of merely historical, literary, or sociological criticism,” but presupposes an active divine agency in the production and interpretation of the Bible. Vanhoozer, “Introduction,” 19–20 (emphasis original). The editors of *DTIB* define “the ultimate aim of theological interpretation of the Bible: to know the triune God by participating in the triune life, in the triune mission to creation.” Vanhoozer, “Introduction,” 24. In addition, Gorman, in his review of the dictionary, calls such theological interpretation of Scripture “an inherently ecumenical and multicultural practice” and invites paying more attention to the Orthodox hermeneutics. Gorman, “‘Seamless Garment’ Approach,” 118.

15. Davies advocates for the separation of a “confessional” or ecclesial discourse on the biblical texts from a “non-confessional” discourse “outside” the canon and receptive community. Davies, *Whose Bible Is It Anyway?*, 13–14. In this call, it seems, Davies echoes Johann S. Semler’s (1725–91) and Johann P. Gabler’s (1753–1826) separation of the dogmatic reading of Scripture from academic biblical theology. An exception to this trend of a non-theological reading of the Bible is a theological interpretation

discussions of Paul's soteriological views, it is usually regarded anachronistic to use later theological concepts and developments. Hence, in the historical reconstructions of the Christ-event and salvation, some New Testament scholars present Christologies and soteriologies that are pneumatology-less, because the Holy Spirit is not a history-bound figure that can be studied using historical research. Since Jesus is the only "historically palpable" person of the Godhead, the historical studies of Paul are predominantly christological, rather than trinitarian. When someone presents Paul's theology based on the existent textual evidence and historical studies of the Jewish and Greco-Roman theologies and ideologies of his time alone, she can well depict Paul's God in binitarian categories¹⁶ or as the Metropolitan Zizioulas calls it "the 'christo-monism' of Western ecclesiology."¹⁷

The second hermeneutical objection relates to the use of later theological interpretations for Pauline theology. For a Western reader, the patristic formulation of deification might present a challenge and an opportunity to read Paul anew. It is evident that each Christian tradition brings its concerns and methodologies to the study of Pauline soteriology. The question is whether a historical and theological reading of ancient texts can be a legitimate and helpful methodology for the study of the apostle to nations. Scholars like Wright contend for studying the "Apostle of Faith" in light of the "Paul of History."¹⁸ Is not the former impeding the latter or the other way around? Can they be reconciled and mutually informative? Can the later dogma inform our understanding of Paul's soteriology? This study assumes that it can.

First, however, one needs to ask whether a non-contingent study of Paul is possible. As postmodern critics remind us, there is no such thing as an unbiased or unconditional reading of ancient texts by subsequent generations of readers. Deconstructionists particularly emphasize that there is no "single plain meaning" of a text contained in semantic boundaries. By acknowledging an "underdetermined" meaning of a text, however, this monograph seeks not to erase all hermeneutical boundaries or to violate the integrity of the text.¹⁹ The advocates of theological interpretation allow

approach advocated since the 1990s by such authors as Watson, *Text, Church, and World*; Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*. Even prior to that, Childs's work on canonical reading stood out in contrast to historical-critical approach, see e.g., Childs, *Introduction to Old Testament*.

16. For example, Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 127–28; Hurtado, *At the Origins*, chap. 3.

17. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 149.

18. Wright, *Paul and Faithfulness*, 69.

19. Rae, "Texts in Context," 25. Using Isa 53, Rae argues that "determinate"

for the “hermeneutical plurality” of meaning, which, according to Murray A. Rae, can be appropriated differently by subsequent generations of readers.²⁰ Although the historical-critical method proponents consider alternative approaches, such as theological interpretation informed by historical theology, anachronistic, they cannot avoid a fragmentary and disinterested reading of Paul.²¹

To demonstrate this, one can turn to the work of David C. Steinmetz, who notes the following points. He points that historians, who live after some events in question, cannot check their memory at the door. In like manner, biblical interpreters, who live after a long tradition of interpretation, cannot—and should not—ignore this tradition or not be influenced by the aftermath of the theological investigations of the past. Hence, Steinmetz concludes, “It is not anachronistic to believe such added dimensions of meaning exist. It is only good exegesis.”²² It is hopelessly idealistic to think that one can attain the single true inherent meaning of the ancient text by applying one method of interpretation. Even the first readers of Paul were not immune from misunderstanding him at first, as is evident in the Corinthian correspondence. Does this assessment discard any historical inquiry of Paul’s context?

Quite the contrary. A theological interpretation, according to Konrad Schmid, helps the historical-critical interpretation be historically faithful to the text because some texts could be rendered superfluous without an appropriate theological context.²³ Blackwell, following Gadamer’s incentive, remarks that the history of interpretation helps us to understand our own reading of ancient texts, why we understand Paul’s theology the way we understand it.²⁴ Since a reader cannot avoid coming to the text with personal presuppositions and theological context, she, at least, should be aware of

interpretation of a single meaning would have to read this passage either in its original *Sitz im Leben* or christologically, but never in a complimentary way.

20. Rae, “Texts in Context,” 39. Rae thinks that presumptuous mastery of the text by historical-critical method is misleading. See also the fourth thesis of the Scripture Project that states, “Texts of Scripture do not have a single meaning limited to the intent of the original author. In accord with Jewish and Christian traditions, we affirm that Scripture has multiple complex senses given by God, the author of the whole drama.” Davis and Hays, *Art of Reading Scripture*, 2–3.

21. Steinmetz, “Uncovering a Second Narrative,” 54; Barton, “Historical-Critical Approaches,” 11–13.

22. Steinmetz, “Uncovering a Second Narrative,” 65. For a similar point see Hays, “Reading the Bible,” 14–15.

23. Schmid, “Sind Die Historisch-Kritischen?”

24. Blackwell, *Christosis*, 12–14. Blackwell bases this argument on Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

such conditionality and recognize that alternative traditions can be a fruitful ground in the mutual quest for the understanding of Paul's writings and theology.

In this regard, Hays incisively criticizes Wright for not recognizing that the latter's religious convictions influenced his historical reading of Jesus. Hays writes, "But if that is the case, why not acknowledge that the church's tradition might provide aid rather than a hindrance in seeking to understand the New Testament's witness to the identity of Jesus?"²⁵ Further, he states, "Precisely because the church's dogma names a truth the world does not or cannot know, it rightly describes the truth about history in a way that secularist history is bound to miss."²⁶ More strongly, Brian E. Daley censures the historical study of the biblical text that presumes exclusively natural cause-effect relationships and rejects any possibility of a supernatural cause as "methodologically atheistic."²⁷ It seems that some biblical scholars lose the particularities of the personal identity of Scripture's God. They reduce the Trinity to undifferentiated sameness like pluralist theologians.²⁸

Another reason why subsequent interpretations can be useful for the interpretation of Paul is that a multilayered meaning of a text may not be fully comprehended and appropriated by the author and his or her contemporaries within their conceptual and linguistic framework. As the Russian literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, suggested, the subsequent generations of interpreters can discover or expound additional meanings as their corresponding conceptual and linguistic worlds change.²⁹ Frances Young rightly asserts that authorial intent does not exhaust the meaning of a text.³⁰ In addition, Rae "defend[s] the legitimacy of *variant readings informed by* and

25. Hays, "Knowing Jesus," 56–57.

26. Hays, "Knowing Jesus," 61.

27. Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?," 72. Daley argues not only for historical and theological interpretation but also for the theologically ecumenical reading of sacred text together with the previous generations of Christians. Daniel J. Treier considers typical scientific, historical reading "methodological naturalism" and advocates for reading that has "the trinitarian rule of faith" as its framework. Treier, "Biblical Theology?," 28–29. Kathryn Tanner echoes this assessment, calling historical criticism "methodological agnosticism (if not atheism)." Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and Trinity*, 7.

28. Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 52–54. It appears that, for some New Testament scholars, Paul's God is a rehashed version of the one God of Jews with unclear modifications in light of the Christ-event. In contrast, the church fathers spoke equally of the "oneness and threeness" of God against the subordinationism of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

29. Blackwell, *Christosis*, 16. This idea was developed in Bakhtin, "Response to a Question."

30. Young, *Art of Performance*, 12.

congruent with the original purpose to which the text was directed.”³¹ He assumes that an ancient text can play a different role in diverse contexts and yet comply with the authorial intent. Thus, church fathers can become “a heuristic device” in conversation with Paul.³²

If doctrinal developments can inform our reading of Paul—and I contend they can—then how should they be used? Blackwell states that new approaches to classical texts allow us to re-appropriate them in a new light.³³ A student of an ancient text should hold it in esteem as her dialogue partner. Paul’s patristic interpreters may challenge our traditional understanding of the apostle, uncovering our own biases and agendas. The later patristic concepts should not be above an uncritical appropriation, but always clearly defined and nuanced in their complexity.

The third hermeneutical objection relates to the employment of later concepts in biblical studies. It is often argued that ecclesiastical leaders coined these notions under philosophical influences unknown or even foreign to the biblical authors. However, the lack of later terminologies, such as *theosis*, in Paul does not mean necessarily the absence of the concept or, in David S. Yeago’s terms, “equal judgment.”³⁴ In the same regard, much of the theological vocabulary, with which scholars now operate, such as “Theology,” “Judaism,” “Christianity,” “Trinity,” “Christology” and so on, is not found in the Scriptures. Nonetheless, recognizing their limitations and anachronistic danger, these terms constitute much of contemporary theological jargon and can be used with appropriate definition and clarification. Whereas Hill uses the Trinity as a hermeneutical lens to read Paul’s theology, I will suggest using the same lens to reread Paul’s soteriology.

Limitations of This Project

One can reasonably suspect that the breadth of this study will not permit adequate treatment of such theologically loaded concepts as “theosis” and “Trinity” that deserve focused studies in their own right. However, this research aims to investigate the interrelation of the two doctrines and its implication for Paul’s soteriology. This book assumes that the relational model of the Trinity will inform the understanding of *theosis* as

31. Rae, “Texts in Context,” 25.

32. Blackwell, *Christosis*, 17.

33. Blackwell, *Christosis*, 15. On this point, Blackwell follows Jauss, “Literary History.”

34. Yeago, “New Testament and Nicene Dogma,” 159.

communion with and transformation in the likeness of the Trinity envisioned by Paul in his writings.

This study takes into consideration the Protestant and Eastern Orthodox understandings of deification and does not include the Roman Catholic treatment of the doctrine. One of the reasons for such a choice is the history of the Protestant-Orthodox dialogue in Finland and in the USA that raised interest in rereading the Reformed theologians in light of the Orthodox traditions of *theosis*.³⁵ The examples of Protestants engaged with the Eastern Orthodox ideas are present in the work of the Finnish Lutheran School (Tuomo Mannermaa, Carl E. Braaten, Simo Peura, and others) since the 1970s and those scholars, who interacted with their claims.³⁶ Some American Evangelical scholars advocate for the appropriate use of *theosis* in soteriological discussions,³⁷ but, as was indicated earlier, many of such studies lack either in historical grounding or a thoroughly trinitarian framework. It also bears a personal interest to me, who comes from a predominantly Eastern Orthodox culture. This research can be mutually beneficial for Eastern and Western thinkers.

The scope of the study does not permit engaging with many church fathers and Orthodox theologians, whose treatments of *theosis* were significant for Orthodox theology.³⁸ Admittedly, the Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas's view (b. 1931) did not constitute the consensus on the topic and was not met uncritically.³⁹ But even his critics recognize Zizioulas as one of

35. For *theosis* in Calvin see Mosser, "Greatest Possible Blessing"; Billings, "United to God"; Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and Gift*. On *theosis* in other Protestant traditions, Kärkkäinen, *One with God*.

36. See, for example, Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ*; Cavanaugh, "Joint Declaration?"; Metzger, "Luther and Finnish School"; Kärkkäinen, "Salvation as Justification and Theosis"; Jenson, "Response to Mark Seifrid"; Briskina, "Orthodox View."

37. Clendenin, "Partakers of Divinity"; Rakestraw, "Becoming Like God"; Wesche, "Eastern Orthodox Spirituality"; Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*; Mosser, "Earliest Patristic Interpretations"; Wesche, "Doctrine of Deification"; Christensen and Wittung, *Partakers of Divine Nature*; Finlan, "Can We Speak?"; Gorman, *Inhabiting Cruciform God*.

38. One could also discuss the views of Athanasius of Alexandria (296–373), Maximus the Confessor (580–662), Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022), and Seraphim of Sarov (1754–1833). Among prominent modern Orthodox thinkers, which could be included in this project, are Vladimir Lossky (1870–1965), George Florovsky (1893–1979), Dumitru Staniloae (1903–1993), John Meyendorff (1926–1992), Kallistos Ware (b. 1934), Christos Yannaras (b. 1935), and others.

39. A cluster of critical articles was published in *Heythrop Journal*. Ables, "On the Very Idea"; Loudovikos, "Person Instead of Grace"; Awad, "Personhood as Particularity"; Turcescu, "Person' versus 'Individual.'" Other critical sources will be mentioned in the fourth chapter.

the most prolific, provocative and stimulating Orthodox theologians of the last decades. Similarly, the number of *theosis* advocates is not limited to the three proponents discussed in chapter 5.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, these theologians are original thinkers, who break the mold of traditional approaches to trinitarian theology and Paul's soteriology. A selective, but hopefully fair, engagement with their ideas is essential for a critical analysis of the trend. Obviously, such eclecticism can be a potential problem to any construal, but it also can lead to a broadening of a typically narrow-focused perspective.

Finally, the treatment of Paul's recent interpreters in chapter 5 is threatened potentially by the lack of in-depth study of Pauline texts. However, the goal of this chapter is not to provide an exegesis of selected passages, but to demonstrate the appropriateness of historically and theologically informed doctrine of *theosis* and trinitarian language in expositions in the Pauline corpus. Through apparent assumption or direct reference to the Father (God), Son (the Lord Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit (the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ) Paul lays the ground for trinitarian soteriology or *triadosis*. Consequently, the chapter will focus only on Litwa's, Blackwell's, and Gorman's presentations of the idea primarily in the undisputed letters, but not to the exclusion of the so-called deuterio-Pauline.

Recent Scholarship on *Theosis* in Paul

For Paul, the dictum "in Christ" presupposed divine-human relationships. The character of these relationships has been discussed in a number of publications, which suggest articulating the apostle's soteriology in terms of deification.⁴¹ In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the contribution of several prominent scholars, which deal with the issue of *theosis* in Paul. As with many other concepts, there is a whole spectrum of positive and critical responses to *theosis* in Paul.⁴²

In his influential study, first published in French in 1938, Jules Gross discussed identification with, and conformity to, Christ in his death and resurrection.⁴³ The author described the character of the mystical union in the following words, "[A]ccording to the apostle [Paul] the glorified Christ, who

40. See footnote 37 above.

41. E.g., Billings, "United to God"; Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ*; Cavanaugh, "Joint Declaration?"; Christensen and Wittung, *Partakers of Divine Nature*; Gavriluk, "Retrieval of Deification"; Litwa, *Becoming Divine*; Mannerman, "Theosis as a Subject"; Marshall, "Justification as Declaration."

42. I will discuss the contribution of Michael J. Gorman, Ben C. Blackwell, and M. David Litwa in chapter 5.

43. Gross, *Divinization of Christian*.

has become a 'life-giving spirit,' is like an atmosphere in which the baptized ones are immersed; He co-penetrates them to the point of being 'one body' and 'one spirit,' and 'one new human being' with them."⁴⁴ The goal of spiritual transformation is the internalization and intensification of the status "in Christ," experienced psychologically and mystically, being "possessed by Christ," rather than a mere legal status (Phil 3:12; 2 Cor 5:14; 1 Cor 9:16–19; Gal 2:20). Following Wickenhauser, Gross clarified that a believer has indirect access to God, whereby the mediatory role of Christ is essential.⁴⁵ For Paul, deification was participation in a uniquely divine attribute, that is, immortality through "mystical assimilation" with Christ in baptism. The gentile converts who were familiar with pagan mystery religions were not surprised to hear that their destiny would coincide with that of Christ in his sufferings, death, resurrection, and incorruptibility. Unlike the members of a pagan cult, divinized Christians experienced no absorption of personality in Christ. Gross concludes, "In brief, it is in Christ that a person is assimilated to God, that is, divinized."⁴⁶ Gross thus finds it appropriate to use *theosis* to describe Paul's teaching on mystical union with Christ.

Norman Russell published an extensive treatment of deification in the Greek patristic tradition.⁴⁷ In the few pages that Russell dedicates to Paul, he argues that some themes in the apostle's theology were precursors to the second-century notion of *theosis*. Contrary to Gross, Russell agrees with Schweitzer that deification was a foreign idea to Paul because, though believers are made one with Christ, they are never one with God.⁴⁸ Russell indicates several other compelling reasons why deification was not part of Paul's world of thought: 1) the divinity of Christ was not clearly established until the second century; 2) a multiplicity of images for Christian relationships with Christ suggests that Paul did not have a specific technical phrase for this union; and 3) deification assumes a metaphysical framework and language used by later church fathers, which is anachronistic to Paul's metaphors of human filiation with God.⁴⁹ Therefore, *theosis* is a later development, and not of Paul's origin. It is evident that Russell lands on the critical side of the spectrum.

44. Gross, *Divinization of Christian*, 84.

45. "Since it is an assimilation to Christ which is the condition of our salvation according to Paul, Pauline mysticism is a union with Christ and not with God directly" Gross, *Divinization of Christian*, 85n56; Wickenhauser, *Die Christusmystik*, 104.

46. Gross, *Divinization of Christian*, 88.

47. Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*.

48. Schweitzer, *Mysticism of Paul*, 3, 26.

49. Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 85.

Albert Schweitzer, affirming the idea of believers's sonship in respect to God, was confident that Paul "does not conceive of sonship to God as an immediate mystical relation to God but as mediated and effected by means of the mystical union with Christ."⁵⁰ Following Schweitzer, Constantine R. Campbell concurs that the union of believers with God is not unmediated, but is an eschatological reality, possible only through the present union with Christ.⁵¹ Campbell assures that, while Paul expressed union with Christ and the Spirit, there are no passages that indicate believers are "in God" or "one with God," though such an idea might be implied. On the one hand, Paul may have avoided the "in the Father" phrase because of the unique role of the Son and the Spirit in salvation. On the other hand, the intimate union of the Son with the Father makes relationships of believers with the Father in the Son through the Spirit unavoidable. Again, the church is the body and the bride of the Son, not of the Father. One should not forget, however, that in Paul's mind, the Father is always in view and carries out his will, with respect to humanity, through the Son and the Spirit. Hence, Campbell states, "In the life of the believer, the Spirit becomes the means through whom union with Christ is lived out."⁵² The idea of union with Christ is not only crucial for divine-human relations, but also for relationship within the Trinity because Christ—and the Spirit—often plays an instrumental role in God's redemptive activity.⁵³ Therefore, union with Christ contains both the relationship between the Father and the Son, as well as the relationship between humanity and Christ. For Paul, to be in Christ is the same as to be in the Spirit.⁵⁴

While open to the idea Christocentric trinitarianism, Campbell, nonetheless, expresses reservations about the propriety of the term *theosis* for a Christian's union with God because of the asymmetry of the two unions. Campbell states, "While [a] believer's union with Christ is patterned after the Father's union with him, it is not equal to it; our union does not entail that believers become members of the Godhead. Rather, a carefully qualified sense of *theosis* points to human transformation that we might become

50. Schweitzer, *Mysticism of Paul*, 3.

51. Campbell, *Paul and Union*, 358–59; Stewart, *Man in Christ*, 170.

52. Campbell, *Paul and Union*, 362.

53. "Christ is the instrumental mediator of the Father's will toward humanity," Campbell, *Paul and Union*, 360, 367.

54. Campbell, *Paul and Union*, 362. It is appropriate to distinguish that "in the Spirit" language is more pertinent to the instances where the ethical outworking of salvific union of believers with Christ is discussed.

like God.”⁵⁵ Thus, for Campbell, *theosis* is a not an inappropriate term, but one that requires precise definition.

Grant Macaskill recently published an extensive study of union with Christ in the New Testament.⁵⁶ There he commends Campbell’s linguistic sensitivity and nuanced presentation of “union with Christ” as a multifaceted binding ingredient in Paul’s mysticism, derived from the Scriptures and the apostle’s Damascus experience.⁵⁷ Macaskill appropriately warns that *theosis*, being a theological and philosophical development of a biblical concept by the church fathers in the polemical contexts of the Cappadocians, Gregory Palamas, and others, acquired an extra-biblical meaning. The tradition of *theosis*, nonetheless, is helpful in providing a warrant against the confusion of the created and divine, as well as possible ways to understand transformation and relationships with the divine persons.⁵⁸ He concludes, “Participation in God, then, is participation in the community of God. Union with Christ demands unity in Spirit.”⁵⁹ This community of created persons with the divine persons is the idea behind *triadosis*, which will become the focus of later chapters in the present book.

In a recently published dissertation, Wesley Hill questions the traditional approaches of “low” and “high” Christologies that attempt to identify Christ on a “vertical axis,” spanning from God to creation.⁶⁰ In Hill’s view, a much more fruitful discussion of Pauline Christology would involve horizontal *relational* conceptuality between God, Christ, and the Spirit. In the second chapter, he argues that, for Paul, the identity of the God of Abraham was not expanded by the later Christ-event, but was defined from the beginning as the-God-who-raised-Jesus-from-the-dead. In fact, both God’s and Christ’s identities are mutual and asymmetrical, because they are known through their equality and are still distinct in their relationships or roles as the one who sends and the one who is sent. In a like manner, the Holy Spirit is essential in defining who the Father and the Son are, thus sharing in divine equality and distinct in divine relations.

Granted the absence of the term *theosis* in Paul and its philosophical and theological baggage acquired through time, one might look with suspicion to its appropriateness for the task of exploring Paul’s theology. Nevertheless, the ideas connected to *theosis*, such as attaining likeness to

55. Campbell, *Paul and Union*, 368.

56. Macaskill, *Union with Christ*.

57. Macaskill, *Union with Christ*, 39–40.

58. Macaskill, *Union with Christ*, 306–7.

59. Macaskill, *Union with Christ*, 308.

60. Hill, *Paul and Trinity*, chap. 1.

God, participation in the life of God, transformation into the image of Christ through co-crucifixion and co-resurrection, adoption as the sons of God, exchange of mortal bodies into glorious Christ-like heavenly bodies, becoming temples indwelt by God and so forth, are not foreign to Paul. What is missing or undervalued by many biblical scholars is a thorough treatment of the trinitarian dimension of Paul's soteriology, which I chose to call *triadosis*.

In the next chapter, I will discuss how the church fathers attempted to respond to the issues above, utilizing *theosis* in general, not limited to the Pauline corpus. The rationale for this historical survey is to show the complexity of the term *theosis* and to present a nuanced understanding of the term (as Campbell suggests) before it can be used to the study of Pauline interpretations in the penultimate chapter.

SAMPLE