

Preface

IN RECENT YEARS, AS supposedly “Lutheran” readings of Paul’s doctrine of “justification by faith” have increasingly come under attack, and as the weaknesses of the New Perspective on Paul have been identified, there has been a growing interest in reading the apostle as teaching something best understood in participationist terms. Particularly, there have been multiple attempts to retrieve the patristic concept of “theosis” as a counterpart of union with Christ. This move is particularly associated with the work of Michael J. Gorman, Stephen Finlan, M. David Litwa, and Ben C. Blackwell and is connected to the recent interest in deification as a widespread concept in Christian theology, one with significant ecumenical potential (as attested by the Finnish Lutheran School).

To date, however, inadequate attention has been paid to the complex character and history of *theosis* in the theological tradition, meaning that the word is used in biblical studies in a way that is over-simplistic. All of the studies to read Paul in terms of *theosis* have been too over-imposing (Litwa), too narrow (Blackwell), or too general (Gorman, Finlan) in their comparison of Paul with the Jewish, Greco-Roman, and Orthodox traditions to adequately address the validity of the category of *theosis* for the analysis of Paul. This study will deal with this deficiency by tracing the four trajectories of *theosis* in the patristic era and beyond. This monograph proffers a concept, tentatively labeled *triadosis*, which intends to present the whole complex that is treated elementally in the various trajectories. Further exploring what we have labeled *triadosis* in the later theological traditions, the study rereads Luther and Calvin with the help of the Finnish Lutheran School and J. Todd Billings. These scholars argue that the idea of union with Christ is central for both Luther and Calvin and always includes the Father and the Spirit, hence presuming a Trinitarian dimension.

The final chapter addresses the deficiencies of three significant *theosis* proponents as an appropriate category to describe Paul's soteriology. This analysis stresses that the historical rediscovery of deification in surrounding culture should not minimize the apostle's distinction from his polytheistic contemporaries (Litwa). Equally, the Christocentric soteriology misplaces the appropriate emphasis on the Father and the Spirit (Blackwell). Finally, the use of essentialist terminology should be grounded in patristic and contemporary theological discussions (Gorman). Thus, the theme of *triadosis* helps the reader to view Paul's soteriology as the Father's endeavor to bring redeemed humanity in union with himself in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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