The Christian Doctrine of Deification
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Matthew 5.48: ‘Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect’
Luke 6.36: ‘be ye therefore merciful as your Father in Heaven is merciful’
Gen. 17.1: ‘Walk before me, and be thou perfect’
Deut 18.13: ‘thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God’
Leviticus 11.44 and 19.2: ‘be holy for I am holy;’ this is quoted in I Peter 1.15-6
James 1.4: ‘let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire’

I Timothy 6.16 tells us that God dwells in “unapproachable light;” Isaiah 33.14-5 states that those “who shall dwell with everlasting burnings” will be those who “walk righteously, and speak uprightly; who despise the gain of oppressions, who do not take bribes,” in short, those who are worthy to live with God. Paul taught (Romans 8.17) that the righteous would become heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, who (Heb 1.2) was heir to all things. Galatians 4.5 tells of the saints being ‘adopted as sons’. The Savior himself taught that those who believed in Him would do the same works as He had, or even greater works (John 14.12). Revelation 3.21 teaches that those who overcome will sit on the throne with Jesus, who sits on His Fathers throne. I Corinthians 6.2: ‘the saints shall judge the world’ In short, the redeemed will indeed inherit the same power, glory and exaltation as the Savior. Most of these passages were used by the Church Fathers as the foundation for the Christian doctrine of deification, and will be discussed in this paper.

The Prevalence of Deification in the Early Church Fathers

Basil, Bishop of Caesarea (died 379) wrote that man is a creature who has received a command to become God.1 Ryk also refers to a statement in a work by Basil: “Man received order to become God.”2

Saint Augustine, during his debates with the Pelagians (from ca. 410 till his death in 430), wrote the following regarding the possibility of a human’s deification: “For my part I hold that, even when we shall have such great righteousness that absolutely no addition could be made to it, the creature will not be equal to the creator. But if some suppose that our progress will be so great that we will be changed into the divine substance and become exactly what he is, let them see how they may support their view. I confess that I myself am not convinced of it.”3

Crawford Knox writes that “virtually all the early Church Fathers” taught deification.4 French Jesuit Henri Rondet wrote that “[deification] is found in all the Fathers,” both the Alexandrians as well as the

Antiochenes.\(^5\) Another writer has written that it was the “universal teaching of the Catholic Church and her Fathers.”\(^6\) Jesuit Frans Jozef van Beeck wrote that it was the “most central theological theme of the patristic tradition ... a patristic common place.”\(^7\) Jesuit Jacques Dupuis has written that it was one of the “fundamental axioms for the early Church Fathers.”\(^8\) Jesuit G.H. Joyce wrote that “the Fathers of the Church from the earliest times with one consent take the apostle’s words [of II Peter 1.4: ‘participate in the divine nature’] in their literal sense. There is no question of any figurative interpretation. They do not hesitate to speak of the deification of men.” Joyce then quotes, and comments on, Irenaeus: “We are not made gods from the first, but first men, then gods’ [\(AH\) 4.38]. His testimony is of peculiar value: for we know that he imbibed his knowledge of Christian truth from St. Polycarp, himself a disciple of the apostle St. John. We cannot doubt that on a point such as this he is giving us the apostolic tradition.” Further, according to Joyce, “this they regard as a point beyond dispute, as one of those fundamentals which no one who calls himself a Christian dreams of denying.”\(^9\) The context of the passage by Irenaeus is also significant: God could have chosen to make us perfect at the beginning, but chose to provide us with opportunities to become perfect.\(^10\) Jesuit J. Mahe wrote long ago that the “deification of the just is a dogma universally known and admitted [by many of] the Fathers of the fourth century.”\(^11\) For Mascall it is a “persistent tradition in Christian thought.”\(^12\) Catholic scholar Thomas Weinandy has recently stated that Irenaeus’ statement that God became man that man might know how to become god “proclaimed a truth that would reverberate ever more loudly throughout patristic Christology.”\(^13\) Professor Mary Ann Donovan, in her recent study of Irenaeus, quotes the same statement from the \(Adversus Haereses\). She then writes that “this final line of the preface [to Book V] sounds a dominant theme that recurs throughout \(AH\) and traces its own path in Christian history, occurring in another form in Athanasius.”\(^14\) After referring to Irenaeus’ statement, Yves Cardinal Congar wrote that it was “a very frequent expression in patristic literature.”\(^15\) Jesuit Gerald O’Collins has recently referred to “that major patristic theme, the divinization of the redeemed.”\(^16\) Orthodox scholar Paul Evdokimov refers to the phrase by Irenaeus and Athanasius as “the golden rule of Eastern patristic thought.” Indeed, he writes that this particular concept “completely...

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\(^6\) Michael Azkoul, \textit{St. Gregory of Nyssa and the Tradition of the Fathers} (Edwin Mellen 1995): 15, note 6, where he cites, with references, the following fathers as having taught deification: Ignatius, Dionysius the Areopagite, Irenaeus, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzus (the Theologian), John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, Hippolytus, Cyprian of Carthage, Hilary of Poitiers, Pope Leo the Great, Ambrose of Milan, Peter Chrysologus, Ephraim the Syrian, Tertullian, Augustine.

\(^7\) Frans Jozef van Beeck, S.J., \textit{God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology. Volume One: Understanding the Christian Faith} (Harper and Row 1989): 63, 87. Elsewhere Beeck has written that “what Christ is by ‘birth’ or ‘nature’ we are by ‘adoption’ (Gal 4.5), ‘rebirth’ (John 3.3), or ‘grace’”, ‘sharers of the divine nature’ (II Peter 1.4), or, as the Church Fathers liked to say, ‘gods by grace’” (159-60).


\(^12\) E.L. Mascall, \textit{Via Media: an essay in Theological Synthesis} (Longmans 1957): 121.


determines [Orthodox] anthropology.” Vladimir Lossky begins an article on redemption and deification with the familiar quotations from Irenaeus and Athanasius, and then writes that “the Fathers and Orthodox theologians have repeated them in every century with the same emphasis, wishing to sum up in this striking sentence the very essence of Christianity.” Regarding the influence of deification on Eastern anthropology Evdokimov quotes Gregory of Nazianzus: “I love this life because I am made of the earth. But in my heart is the desire for another life, because I am also a part of the divine.” Commenting on this passage Evdokimov writes that “man is not only structured morally and attuned to the divine by decree; he is of the divine race [genos]. The image of God predestines the human being for deification.” He goes on to contrast Western and Eastern approaches to the nature of humankind. “The Western anthropology is thus essentially a moral anthropology…. The goal of the Christian life can only be the vision of God…. Man is ordained for beatitude.” On the other hand, “Orthodox anthropology…is ontological; it is the ontology of deification.” German Protestant Jurgen Moltmann wrote that deification was “accepted as authoritative in the patristic church.” Another influential Protestant theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg, agreed that the concept “determined the whole history of Christology” and that “there is no reason for denying every element of truth to the patristic idea of [deification].” Prominent U.S. Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr admitted that in the Fathers “salvation is frequently defined as the ultimate deification of man.” Several writers indicate that it was a common teaching for both the Eastern Orthodox Fathers, as well as for the Roman Catholic Fathers. Christoph Cardinal Schonborn refers to it as “one of the most influential formulations of the Christian message in that [patristic] period.”

Lutheran scholar Robert Jenson, in an article in a Lutheran journal on the very topic of theosis, concludes by asking: “Perhaps the question has at least become a bit more urgent: The patristic church proclaimed deification; why do not we?” Allchin, an Anglican, has written that “unless we affirm with Athanasius that God became man in order that man might become God, the language of incarnation is likely to lose its

true significance, as unfortunately it too often has done.”\(^{27}\) Robert Rakestraw, writing in the journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, after covering some of the evidence from the Greek fathers, as well as from Luther, and Charles Wesley, then writes: “Perhaps the most obvious deficiency is the terminology itself. To speak of divinization, deification, and human beings ‘becoming God’ seems to violate the historic Christian understanding of the essential qualitative distinction between God and the creation…. The strengths of theosis theology outweigh these weaknesses, however. The most significant benefit is that the concept as a whole, if not the specific terminology, is Biblical.”\(^{28}\)

Jesuit Brian E. Daley, Professor at the University of Notre Dame, has recently written a book on early Christian eschatological theories. While dealing with ‘the hope of the early Church’ he has a lot to say about the future deification of the Christian believer. He lists, in passing (!), some 32 such early writers who discuss deification (keep in mind that deification is not the motive for which Daley wrote this book): Athenagoras (177 AD); Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch (180), Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (180), Tertullian (c. 220), Hippolytus (d. 235), Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (248-58), Clement of Alexandria (d. before 215), Origen (d. 253/4), Gregory Thaumaturgus, disciple of Origen and later Bishop of Neoceaesaearia in Pontus (d. before 270), Methodius, Bishop of Olympus (died a martyr in 311), Marcellus, Bishop of Ancyra (d. ca. 374), Basil, Bishop of Caesarea (d. 379), Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 390); known as “The Theologian,” consecrated a Bishop by Basil, but never took charge of his church), Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa (brother of Basil; d. 394), Didymus the Blind (d. 398), Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers (d. 367), Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (d. 397), Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria (d. 444), Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia (d. 428), Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus, near Antioch (ca. 393-466), Macarius the Egyptian (d. ca. 390), Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, North Africa (d. 430), Quadvultdeus, deacon and probably later Bishop of Carthage, in North Africa (d. 453), Paulinus, Bishop of Nola (d. 431), Stephen bar Sudali (d. 543), Dionysius the Areopagite, Severus, Bishop of Antioch (d. 538), Theodore Askidas, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (ca. 540), Cosmas Indicopleustes (550), Maximus the Confessor (d. 662), John of Damascus (d. 750), Julianus Pomerius (late fifth century), and Caesarius, Bishop of Arles (d. 543).\(^{29}\) John Scottus Eriugena (mid-ninth century Irishman) taught that “by taking on human nature, Christ not only lifted it up ‘to a parity with the angelic nature…but also exalted it above all angels and heavenly powers’. …. The soul ‘passes beyond every created heaven and every created paradise, that is, every human and angelic nature’. …. Rising above equality with angels, he ‘enters into God who deifies him.’”\(^{30}\) To the above list Michael Azkoul adds some further names: Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (d. ca 110), Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria (d. 373), John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople (d. 407), Pope Leo the Great (d. 461), Peter Chrysologus, Bishop of Ravenna (d. 450), and Ephraim the Syrian.\(^{31}\) Yves M.-J. Congar repeats some of these, and adds

\(^{27}\) Allchin, Participation in God, 69.


\(^{29}\) Brian E. Daley, S.J., The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology (Cambridge University Press 1991), s. v. Notice how many of these were Bishops. Many of these are also discussed, with occasional reference to deification, in Quasten’s four volume study, Patrology. They are also referred to in many other articles and books. The bibliography at the end of this paper also identifies several articles or monographs on particular Fathers, as well as generalized studies on theosis. According to Daley, “John Damascene brings the early Church’s hope for human divinization to its final, unmistakable form as a vital part of the Christian tradition,” 204.


\(^{31}\) Michael Azkoul, St. Gregory of Nyssa and the Tradition of the Fathers (Edwin Mellen 1995), 15, note 6. Regarding Pope Leo the Great Gerhart Ladner writes: “Much as the Greek Fathers he sees the essence of redemption in the divinization of man, the possibility of which was brought about by Christ’s taking on
Simeon the New Theologian (d. 1022), Gregory Palamas (died 1359; frequently cited in Orthodox works); he also refers to the role of the Eucharist (Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper) in the deification of the individual.32 Stephen Duffy also cites many of the above, and adds Justin Martyr.33 Larchet adds Leontius, Bishop of Jerusalem.34 Potvin in a footnote taken from Congar, adds to the list the names of Amphipolychius, Bishop of Iconium (died 395), Fulgentius, Bishop of Ruspe (d. 533), and Theophylactus.35 J.N.D. Kelly refers to Irenaeus, Basil, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Athanasius.36

human nature, ‘so that we are found in the nature of Him, whom we in our nature adore,’” in Ladner, The Idea of Reform (Harvard 1959): 287, citing Leo, Sermon 28.1: 82.2.

32 Yves M.-J. Congar, I Believe in the Holy Spirit, translated by David Smith, three volumes in one (Crossroad Publishing 1997; 1st France 1979-80), Simeon: 195, with references; for more on Simeon, see Andrea Sterk, “Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church: Prayer in the Writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian.” Crux 24 (Regent College, Vancouver, B.C 1988): 17-25; Palamas: 3.65-6: “We become God and therefore we become, by grace, uncreated;” notice that that which was created has become, albeit by grace, ‘uncreated.’ Is this the type of ontological change which Augustine was rejecting, and therefore, being taught at that earlier date, as well as during Palamas’ lifetime? On the other hand, Mark Nispel has recently quoted Irenaeus as follows: “‘Man cannot become uncreated but through ascension and eternal progress he can gain immortality and likeness to God;’” Nispel, “Christian Deification and the early Testimonia,” Vigilae Christianae 53 (1999): 289-304, at page 300, quoting AH 4.38.3. On Palamas, see John Meyendorff, “Christ and Deified Humanity: Redemption, Deification and Eccesiology,” in Meyendorff, A Study of Gregory Palamas, translated by George Lawrence (New York 1964; Paris 1959): 157-184; for a more recent discussion, see A.N. Williams, “Light from Byzantium: The Significance of Palamas’ Doctrine of Theosis,” Pro Ecclesia 3 (1994): 483-406. Congar refers to the deifying aspect of the eucharist at Holy Spirit 3.231. Regarding the Eucharist, the Anglican Joseph Frary writes that “it is in the Eucharist itself that our reception of divinity is focussed and our deification is accomplished preeminently,” in Frary, “Deification and Human Freedom,” Sobornost 7 (1975): 117-126, at page 124. In an agreed statement between the Finnish Lutherans and the Russian Orthodox Church, on April 12-15, 1977 in Kiev, sections III.3-6 read in part: “We are justified in Baptism and deification begins…. Repentance of sin and fulfillment of God’s commandments are an essential part of deification…. In the Holy Communion more than anywhere else the mystery of justification and deification is revealed to us,” in Hanna Kamppuri, Dialogue Between Neighbors: The Theological Conversations between the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church 1970-1986: Communiqués and theses (Helsinki, 1986; Publications of Luther-Agricola Society B 17): 73-5. Some Catholic statements on the eucharist and deification are given below.

33 Stephen J. Duffy, The Dynamics of Grace (Liturical Press 1993), 48-9, citing AH 5.34.2.

34 Jean-Claude Larchet, La Divinisation de l’homme selon Saint Maxime le Confesseur (Paris 1996): 56-8. Larchet has a lengthy introduction in which he discusses the theory of deification as presented in several of the Church Fathers prior to Maximus the Confessor: Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch; Irenaeus (25); Clement of Alexander; Origen (30); “It is with Saint Athanasius of Alexandria that a true theology of divinization is developed” (31); Macarius the Egyptian; Basil; Gregory of Nazianzus; Gregory of Nyssa; it is “with Saint Cyril of Alexandria /that/ the doctrine of the divinization attains its fullest development” (46); Pseudo-Denys the Areopagite (also called Dionysius the Areopagite); Leontius of Jerusalem (56-8). Cf. the review of this work by George Berthold, Theological Studies 59 (1998): 145-7. Cf. Larchet, “Le Bapteme selon Saint Maxime le Confesseur,” Revue des Sciences Religieuses 65 (1991): 51-70, esp. 64 on the relationship of baptism to deification, and the influence of earlier Fathers on Maximus’ position (Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Cyril of Alexandria, all of whom taught deification). Deification and divine filiation are discussed throughout the article.

35 Thomas R. Potvin, O.P., The Theology of the Primacy of Christ According to St. Thomas and its Scriptural Foundations (Switzerland, 1973), 115-6, note 3; taken from Congar, Jesus Christ (Herder and Herder 1966; first published Paris 1965); Cardinal Congar writes, page 20: “we know how unwearily the Fathers repeated: ‘the Son of God became man so that men might become God.’”

Maximus, Bishop of Turin (d. before 423) wrote that “‘God has become a man so that man might become God.’”

Henri Rondet wrote that “there is no doubt that the Apostolic Fathers, with the exception of Ignatius of Antioch, furnish rather meager information on the divinization of the Christian” and then in a footnote gives evidence from the Didache, Epistle of Barnabas, Clement of Rome, and the Shepherd of Hermas.

Rondet then goes on to discuss ten Fathers on the subject. He also adds to the growing list the name of Thomas Aquinas, who is cited frequently in the bibliography below. Rondet also refers to Denis Petau, a seventeenth century patristic scholar who “rightly reminds us of the texts of the Fathers which prove the divinity of the Holy Spirit from the divinization of the Christian.”

Various scholars have added the names of Zeno, Bishop of Verona (362-71), Evagrius Ponticus (d. 399), Diadochos, Bishop of Photice (d. 468), Boethius the Christian philosopher (d. ca. 524), Procopius of Gaza (died about 529),

quotes Gregory of Nazianzus: “‘Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become gods for him, since he became man for us,’” in Young, “Panegyric and the Bible,” Studia Patristica 25 (1993): 195, quoting Oration 1.5. Cyril of Alexandria wrote: “‘We are made partakers of the divine nature [II Peter 1.4] and are said to be born of God; we are therefore called gods,’” [Commentary on John 1.9], quoted in John Barton, “The Holy Ghost,” in The Teaching of the Catholic Church: A Summary of Catholic Doctrine, arranged and edited by Canon George D. Smith, Volume I (New York 1949/1927):163.


37 The Sermons of Maximus of Turin, translated by Boniface Ramsey (Newman Press 1989 = Ancient Christian Writers volume 50): 249; sermon 45.1. In his note to this the translator writes that “this is a classic statement of the doctrine of the divinization of the human person” and refers to Athanasius, as well as the article by Dalmais, in Dictionnaire de Spiritualite 3.1376-98 for “the patristic evidence in general.”


40 Rondet, The Grace of Christ, 367. Denis Petau is also known as Dionysius Petavius. He died in 1652.

41 Martin F. Stepanich, The Christology of Zeno of Verona (Catholic University of America 1948): 64. For a recent discussion of Zeno’s baptismal sermons see Gordon P. Jeanes, The Day has Come! Easter and Baptism in Zeno of Verona (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn. 1995).


43 Ibid., 50-1, 54-5; Quasten, Patrology III: 512.

44 Henry Chadwick, Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology and Philosophy (Oxford 1981): 211, who also provides us with several references to Augustine’s teachings; Pelikan, Imago Dei (Princeton 1990): 141, quoting The Consolation of Philosophy 3.10.23f = Loeb Classical Library, page 271; the passage is quoted in Pelikan, Mary through the Centuries. Her place in the History of Culture (Yale University Press 1996): 105. Pelikan writes that “the idea [of divinization] could lay claim to explicit biblical grounding” with reference to Psalm 82.6, John 10.35 and II Peter 1.4 (104-8).
John of Scythopolis (d. 548),

Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (died 638).

Anastasius Sinaiticus (died ca. 700),

Honorious of Atun (1100 AD),

Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153),

Peter Lombard (d. 1160),

Roger Bacon (d. ca. 1292),

Nicholas Cabasilas (d. 1363),

several renaissance humanists,

John of the Cross (d. 1591),

Suarez (died 1617),

and Cardinal Cajetan (died 1534), Luther’s first nemesis.

55 Thunberg, Microcosm and Mediator: 432.


57 Schonborn, From Death to Life: 47-8.

58 Chaosborn, op. cit., 63, note 49; Lars Thunberg, Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor (Open Court 1995); 1st Sweden 1965): 427-32. Thunberg refers to, or quotes from, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, Pseudo-Denis (i.e., Dionysius the Areopagite), Pseudo-Leontius of Byzantium, Procopius of Gaza, Anastasius Sinaiticus, as well as Maximus the Confessor. For more on Anastasius’ christology, see Dominic J. Unger, “Christ the Exemplar and final scope of all Creation according to Anastasius of Sinai,” Franciscan Studies 9 (1949): 156-164.

59 Eugene TeSelle, Christ in Context. Divine Purpose and Human Possibility (Philadelphia 1975): 39. Jeremy Moiser, “Why did the Son of God become Man?,” The Thomist 37 (1973): 288-305, at page 289; TeSelle and Moiser state that Honorius was the first Latin to affirm that the cause of the incarnation was the deification of man, not the fall of Adam.


61 Nygren, op. cit., 655.


64 John M. McManamon, S.J., “The Ideal Renaissance Pope: Funeral Oratory from the Papal Court,” Archivium Historicorum Pontificiarum 14 (1976): 9-62, with reference to Marco Vigerio, who later became a cardinal, died 1516 (28, 34); John W. O’Malley, S.J., “Preaching for the Popes,” in The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion, ed. Charles Trinkaus and Heiko A. Oberman (E.J. Brill 1974): 408-440; he refers to deification having been taught by Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Cyril of Alexandria, 418-9; by Augustinus Philippus Florentinus, died 1518, 429: “we are transformed into Christ”; he also refers to Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Irenaeus as paraphrased by Florentinus, 430; refers to Petrarch, 430, note 1; to Bishop Stephanus Thegliatius, who amplified the statement by Irenaeus to the Fifth Lateran Council (1512), 430, note 1; to Giles of Viterbo, 432. See also Charles Trinkaus, In Our Image and Likeness. Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought (London 1970) who refers to Petrarch, I. 191; to Bartolomeo Facio, I.209; to Aurelio Brandolini, I.301, 304, 312, 316, II.475-6; to Marsilio Ficino, II.475-6, 487, 739-43; Lorenzo Valla, II.635. Paul Oskar Kristellar, Renaissance Concepits of Man and other essays (1972) refers to Ficino, 10; Nygren, op. cit., also refers to Ficino, 676-7; Schonborn, From Death to Life: “...found in one or other form in all the Church Fathers, in the Middle Ages, and into the modern period,” 41, note 1; he cites Pico della Mirandola: 43-4.

Indeed the doctrine of deification was so thoroughly embedded in Christian tradition, that it was not questioned by heretics within the Christian fold. The Jesuit Rondet wrote that it was a traditional possession, common to both heterodox and orthodox.\(^58\) Another Catholic writer states that the “early writers…took this to be an admitted principle amongst Christians, for they made it a basis of argument against those who denied the divinity of the Holy Ghost.”\(^59\) Deification was accepted and taught by the Arians,\(^60\) Pelagians,\(^61\) and Nestorius, who was the Bishop of Constantinople (died ca 451),\(^62\) as well as Apollinarius, who was the Bishop of Laodicea prior to being declared a heretic (died ca 390).\(^63\)


\(^{57}\) Jared Wicks, S.J., “Thomism between Renaissance and Reformation: the case of Cajetan,” \textit{Archiv fur Reformationsgeschichte} 68 (1977): 9-29, at page 19. Cf. John W. O’Malley, S.J., \textit{Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome: Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court}, c. 1450-1521 (Duke University Press 1979): 108-110, where O’Malley cites talks given by Cajetan, and others, before the Pope. He writes that other preachers before the papal court “do not insist on man’s excellence as created in God’s image and likeness but on his transformation and even deification as redeemed by Christ…. He is in fact divinized,” 149. Another preacher is cited as teaching that mortals “will transform themselves into gods,” 150. He refers to Irenaeus’ statement, as well as statements by Augustine and Aquinas. Cajetan was the first papal legate to interview Luther. Cf. Wicks, \textit{Cajetan Responds: A Reader in Reformation Controversy} (Catholic University of America 1978), introduction: 1-46. Cajetan was the Vicar General of the Dominican Order from 1508-18 and was made a Cardinal in 1517. He participated in the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517). He wrote a commentary on Thomas Aquinas’ \textit{Summa Theologica}, and was much sought after as a scholar. He died in 1534. He is referred to in the 1983 declaration between Catholics and Lutherans, \textit{Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII}, ed. H. G. Andersen, T. A. Murphy and J. A. Burgess (Augsburg Press 1985), 131-142, paragraphs 32-4.

\(^{58}\) Rondet, \textit{The Grace of Christ}: 80. See also the statement by Joyce, quoted above.


\(^{62}\) Henri Rondet, \textit{The Grace of Christ} (Newman Press 1967; Paris 1948): 82: “Cyril draws arguments against Nestorius from our divinization: If Christ is not really God, then we have not been divinized,” citing Cyril of Alexandria, \textit{Adv Nestorius} 3.3.

\(^{63}\) Frances M. Young, \textit{From Nicæa to Chalcedon} (Fortress Press 1983): 188; Jaroslav Pelikan, \textit{The Christian Tradition I: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)} (Chicago 1971): 233. A passage is quoted by R.A. Norris: “Christ became man ‘in order that we might receive the likeness of the heavenly One, and be divinized after the likeness of the true Son of God by nature,’” in Norris, \textit{Manhood and Christology. A Study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia} (Oxford 1963): 120; R. V. Sellers, \textit{The Council of Chalcedon. A Historical and Doctrinal Survey} (London 1961; 1st 1953): 132-3. A version of the creed attributed to Apollinarius reads in part: “We confess…one Holy Spirit by nature and in truth capable of sanctifying and deifying all things…”, in H.B. Swete, \textit{The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church} (London 1912): 287. W.H. Bates also referred to the deifying aspect of the Eucharist in Apollinarius’ thought: “Participation in the holy and life-giving flesh of Christ results in the divinisation of all who partake…. By their participation in it, the communicants take its divinity into themselves.” Bates states that this “is well attested in the patristic age, and is also a living idea in the Eastern Church today.” Bates also
Admittedly, not all these Fathers used the terms *theosis* or *theopoiesis*, but they all used terms for glorified humankind which are more properly reserved for Deity. As Daley writes, with regard to a specific Father, “the fulfillment of the Christian hope is the gift by the Holy Spirit to human beings of immortality, incorruptibility and immutability, qualities that are naturally characteristic of God alone…. The qualities bestowed in this renewal [of mortal humans] are, in fact, qualities characteristic of God rather than of creatures.”

Further, as we shall see in our discussion of the attributes of deification, while not all of these Fathers use the same terms, they all use or refer in one way or another to terms which are applied by other writers to those who are deified. It should be kept in mind that the Fathers were not systematic theologians. The comments of Jules Gross in his study of divinization are therefore of significance: “[The Fathers] interest themselves in the notion of divinization less for itself than for the fact that it offers them arguments to prove the divinity of the Word and of the Holy Spirit.”

We should not look for a systematic treatment of the concept of deification in the writings of the Fathers; but we should note its frequent occurrence. And we do! The Fathers all teach the doctrine of deification, and they teach it consistently. Jesuit Francis Clark in his exhaustive study of the Eucharistic debates during the early Reformation period wrote that “Athanasius in the East and Augustine in the West both consider that the foundation of the redemption and restoration of fallen man lies in this: that God became man in order that man might become divine.” That is, both East and West are represented. Later he wrote that “the Greek Fathers believed as firmly as their Latin brethren that Christ’s sacrifice was offered on the cross; and their concept of ‘deification’ of men through the assumption of human nature was not absent from Latin theology.”

**The Reformers**

The concept of deification was so much a part of the universal Christian tradition that the Reformers did not dispute it. Franz Posset has recently studied Luther’s superior, Johann von Staupitz (died 1524). Luther claimed that everything he had came from Staupitz, who was a ‘preacher of grace and cross.’ Staupitz had stated in a sermon in 1512 that ‘Christ’s suffering deified man.’ Elsewhere Posset quotes Luther himself to the effect that “‘to be born of God is to acquire the nature of God;’ ‘God’s grace makes man deiform and deifies him;’ ‘[Christ] becomes totally man and we become totally deified;’ ‘The person who is in the Father becomes deified. We are made ‘gods.’” Posset concludes: “Deification was for Luther the synonym for justification and sanctification.” Not only has it been determined that Luther taught indicates that the divinisation of humankind “is very common” in patristic literature, with specific reference to Athanasius, in Bates, “The Background of Apollinaris’s Eucharistic Teaching,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 12 (1961): 139-154, at page 140-1. His name is also spelled Apollinaris. Regarding Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia, Norris writes: “The pagan cried out for redemption from the body; the Christian writer sought a redemption of the body through its divinization” (154).


Ibid., 291-2. Clark also cites Harnack to the effect that the Catholic sacramental system “was rooted in the fundamental conception that religion is an antidote for the finiteness of man, in the sense that it deifies his nature”: 105, citing Harnack, *Lieberbuc der Dogmengeschichte* (1910), III: 851.


Posset, “‘Deification’ in the German Spirituality of the Late Middle Ages and in Luther: An Ecumenical Historical Perspective,” *Archive fur Reformationsgeschichte* 84 (1993): 103-25, at page 125; abridged in *Luther Digest* 3 (1995): 135-141.
deification, but so also has John Calvin, John Wesley, Menno Simon and the early Anabaptists, the radical reformer Michael Servetus, and Lancelot Andrewes, Martin Bucer, and Jonathan Edwards.

**Roman Catholic Church**


Ashianin, 90-1; Bassett; Christensen, 88, 91; Ford, 288; Maddox, *Responsible Grace*: 122; Kinghorn.


Willem van ’T. Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, translated by John Vriend and Lyle D. Bierma (E.J. Brill 1996): 40: “…In his commentary on the letter to the Ephesians: we are restored to a much more elevated and glorious position. He does not even shrink in this connection of speaking of the deification [deificatio] of the human being.”

In a sermon in 1731 in Boston Edwards stated that the redeemed are not just counted as righteous, but are themselves made excellent “by a communication of God’s excellency” and made holy ‘by being made partakers of God’s holiness’. Anri Morimoto explains: “This vision of salvation is attested to in Scripture (II Peter 1.4) and is shared by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches,” and refers to Thomas Aquinas, in Morimoto, *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation* (Pennsylvania State University Press 1995): 4-5; cf. 153: “Edwards’s concern for the creaturely reality of salvation is thus embedded in the grand scheme of the theology of divinization (theosis).”
The Catholic Church has recently continued in that same tradition, though perhaps at a faster pace, and from a more official level. In 1943 Pope Pius XII issued his encyclical Mystici Corporis ('Mystical Body of Christ'). Paragraph 46 reads in part: “And Christ not only took our nature; He became one of our flesh and blood with a frail body that could suffer and die. But ‘if the Word emptied himself taking the form of a slave,’ it was that He might make His brothers according to the flesh partakers of the divine nature [II Peter 1.4].” Let all those, then, who glory in the name of Christian, look to our Divine Savior as the most exalted and the most perfect exemplar of all virtues; but let them also, by careful avoidance of sin and assiduous practice of virtue, bear witness by their conduct to His teaching and life, so that when the Lord shall appear they may be like unto Him and see Him as He is [I John 3.2].”

Pope Paul VI, in a homily given 6 May 1973, on the 16th centenary of Athanasius’ death, referred to the Saint as “the intrepid, undaunted defender of the faith!” and later wrote that the divinity of Christ is the central point of St. Athanasius’ preaching to the men of his time. “He even declares, in a forceful expression, that the Word of God ‘became man so that we might be divinized.’” Pope John Paul II has made several relevant statements. In a general audience given December 9, 1981, he stated that “the state of man in the other world will not only be a state of perfect spiritualization, but also of fundamental divinization of his humanity…. The degree of his divinization [will be] incomparably superior to the one that can be attained in earthly life…another kind of divinization…. This is because that divinization is to be understood not only as an interior state of man…but also as a new formation of the whole personal subjectivity of man….. Divinization in the other world will bring the human spirit such a range of experience of truth and love such as man would never have been able to attain in earthly life.” He concludes by referring to the “divinization in which man will participate in the resurrection.”

In his encyclical Dominum et Vivificantem ('Lord and Giver of Life,' 28 May 1986) he refers to the effect of the Holy Spirit on the individual’s heart, and “there begins in the heart of all human beings that particular created gift whereby they ‘become partakers of the divine nature [II Peter 1.4].’” In a more recent statement the Pope again refers to II Peter 1.4, and then writes that “through the power of the Spirit who dwells in man, deification already begins on earth…. The teaching of the Cappadocian Fathers [Basil and the two Gregory’s] on divinization passed into the tradition of all the Eastern Churches and is part of their common heritage. This can be summarized in the thought already expressed by St. Irenaeus at the end of the second century: ‘God passed into man so that man might pass over to God.’” He goes on to say that “this theology of divinization remains one of the achievements particularly dear to Eastern Christian thought” and in the footnote to this he quotes Nicholas Cabasilas (died 1363), that “men become gods and children of God…. The dust is raised to such a degree of glory that it is now equal in honor and godliness to the divine nature.” In 1998 the Pope issued another statement in which he stated that “proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth, true God and perfect man, the Church opens to all people the prospect of being ‘divinised’ and thus of becoming more human.”

79 Ibid., 440-444, at page 442-3.
83 Ibid.
84 Pope John Paul II, incarnationis Mysterium ('The Mystery of the Incarnation'), 29 November 1998, in Briefing. The official documentation and information service of the Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of England and Wales and Scotland 28 (London 17 Dec 1998): 3-13. As the Pope’s statements of 1981 and 1998 just quoted in the text indicate, by becoming deified one becomes more truly human; that is, the purpose of creation, as well as of the Incarnation, is the deification of humankind (see next paragraph). One is not fully human until one has become deified, and while the process begins in this life, it is only completed in the next world. Catholic scholar Stephen J. Duffy has recently compared the Baptist and Catholic soteriologies. When discussing the latter he first cites II Peter 1.4, Gal 2.20, Irenaeus and Athanasius. He then writes: “paradoxically, the divinization of humanity (theopoiesis, theosis), which
Michael O’Connor has recently written that “the Orthodox theme of the divinization of humankind, introduced into Catholic thought most importantly in Dei verbum [Vatican II], is found in” the new Catechism of the Catholic Church.\footnote{Catechism of the Catholic Church} In the new Catechism not only are both Irenaeus and Athanasius quoted, but Thomas Aquinas also, with reference to why Jesus was born: “The Word became flesh to make us ‘partakers of the divine nature’” [II Peter 1.4]; ‘For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man; so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God.’ ‘For the Son of God became man so that we might become God.’ The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods.\footnote{Paragraph 398, dealing with Justification, also quotes Athanasius: ‘“God gave himself to us through his Spirit. By the participation of the Spirit, we become communicants in the divine nature [II Peter 1.4]. … For this reason, those in whom the Spirit dwells are divinized.”\footnote{Paragraph 398 states that “created in a state of holiness, man was destined to be fully ‘divinized’ by God in glory.”\footnote{Clearly these statements indicate that the purpose of the incarnation was the deification of humankind. There are contrary views as to whether the Incarnation and Atonement were part of God’s original plan, or were added as an afterthought following Adam’s sin. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas wrote that without sin there would be no need for the Incarnation.\footnote{On the other hand, Franciscan scholar Dominic Unger has written that several of the early Fathers taught that the Incarnation was part of God’s original plan.\footnote{Several writers, including John Henry Newman, believed that the Incarnation was introduced into Catholic thought most importantly in Dei verbum [Vatican II], is found in” the new Catechism of the Catholic Church. In the new Catechism not only are both Irenaeus and Athanasius quoted, but Thomas Aquinas also, with reference to why Jesus was born: “The Word became flesh to make us ‘partakers of the divine nature’” [II Peter 1.4]; ‘For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man; so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God.’ ‘For the Son of God became man so that we might become God.’ The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods. Paragraph 398, dealing with Justification, also quotes Athanasius: ‘“God gave himself to us through his Spirit. By the participation of the Spirit, we become communicants in the divine nature [II Peter 1.4]. … For this reason, those in whom the Spirit dwells are divinized.”}}}} When our divinization is complete, we will become completely divinized (Hebrews 8.10-11; II Peter 1.4). When our divinization is completely realized, sin will no more, for we will be like God;” in the footnote to this statement he quotes from Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Augustine, in Sungenis, Not by Bread Alone. The Biblical and Historical Evidence for the Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Catholic Mass (Queenship Publishing, Goleta, Calif. 2000): 69-70. He later quotes Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) who cited II Peter 1.4, 259-60.

part of the original plan. Roderick Strange, in his study of Cardinal Newman, writes and quotes as follows: “Newman declared that Christ came because from the first [God] ‘had had it in mind to come upon earth among innocent creatures,’ to fill them with grace and prepare them for the heaven for which they were destined…. Christ came to redeem as well as to sanctify, but he was to have come in any case.” Strange further writes that “many of the Fathers, among whom Athanasius was prominent, had described this state [of salvation] as divinization. Newman followed suit.” Christ was the lamb “slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13.8). He was the Creator (under His Father: John 1.3; Heb 1.2; I Cor. 8.6; Eph 3.9; Col. 1.16), He spoke to the Prophets (Heb 1.1-2), and He was the promised, therefore foreordained, Messiah.

The Biblical Foundation of Deification

Hamilton Hess says that the idea of deification “possesses a long lineage prior to Athanasius” with roots in “II Peter 1.4, as Athanasius himself acknowledges.” Kamppuri and the Lutheran scholars state that it is firmly based on the New Testament witness. Larchet says that it “possesses a solid scriptural foundation.” Evangelical scholar Rakestraw wrote that deification’s strongest point is that it is Biblical. Orthodox writer Bilaniuk writes that “it seems that the sooner the whole of Christianity regains the biblical and theological tradition of theosis, the better for the renewal of Christianity and even for the progress of mankind as a whole because modern man needs firm hope and a positive approach to contemporary and eschatological reality.” Catholic Louis Bouyer wrote that “we find ourselves at the term of the development in Patristics of a theme [divinization] currently presented as a typical borrowing from Hellenism. But a rigorous study of the lines of its development brings out the fact that, in the final analysis, this theme … is much more biblical and Christian than Hellenistic.” Bouyer goes on to state that it was Athanasius, “the doctor of our deification,” who effected the return of Christology back to “complete

from the exultant proclamation sung at the Easter vigil: “Father, how wonderful your care for us! How boundless your merciful love! To ransom a slave you gave away your Son. O happy Fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!”” in Grisez, The Way of the Lord, Volume III: Difficult Moral Questions (Franciscan Press 1999): 9.

92 Ibid., 116-7. Strange writes that “the theme of divinization … played so prominent a part in Newman’s understanding of man’s salvation,” 105. He quotes Newman: “‘Christ in rising, raises His Saints with Him to the right hand of power. They become instinct with His life, of one body with His flesh, divine sons, immortal kings, gods…. He is in them, because He is in human nature; and He communicates to them that nature, deified by becoming His, that them It may deify,’” 126. Newman translated a volume of Athanasius’ writings, and included a chapter on deification, see Newman, Select Treatises of St. Athanasius in controversy with the Arians (Volume II, 1895; 1st published in 1841-2).
93 Jesuit Avery Dulles has recently written that “according to Catholic tradition the essential goodness of human nature remains intact notwithstanding the grave consequences of the Fall. The liturgy proclaims the sin of our first parents as a ‘happy fault,’ since it provided the occasion for the sending of the divine Redeemer,” Dulles, “Principles of Catholic Theology,” Pro Ecclesia 8 (1999): 73-84, at 76.
96 Larchet, La Divinisation…, 21.
97 Rakestraw, op. cit., 266-7; recall also the comment, by the Catholic scholar W. Thompson, regarding Calvin and the biblical basis of deification, above at footnote 71: “Calvin was imbued with the teaching of the Greek Fathers and he considered the teaching on divinization to be, rightly understood, biblically grounded”.
98 Bilaniuk, op. cit., 356; he also writes that “the teaching on theosis is a legitimate successor…to many New Testament expressions and ideas…. Therefore, the doctrine of theosis is a systematized theological elaboration of the biblical data including realized eschatology,” 358.
fidelity to the biblical idea of God.” This he did by teaching the principle of deification. Orthodox scholar John Meyendorff agrees. He refutes those who state that the concept as found in Irenaeus and Athanasius was a “betrayal of a supposedly original, biblical understanding of the Christian faith in favor of a vague platonizing form of pantheism. Nothing is further from the truth.... The content of the doctrine of deification reflects the paradoxical Johannine affirmation that the ‘Word was God’ and that it ‘became flesh’ (John 1.1, 14).” Catholic Brian Davies says that “the language of deification is found in the New Testament” and cites I John 3.2 and II Peter 1.4. Franks finds “the influence of distinctively New Testament points of view [to be] strongly marked” in Irenaeus, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Cyril of Alexandria, all of them teachers of deification. Morna Hooker refers to the ‘marvelous exchange’ referred to in Irenaeus: “Christ became what we are, in order that we might become what he is.” This is of course the same theme found in all those who write on the subject. Hooker’s paper cites the biblical foundation for such an exchange idea. She refers to II Corinthians 5.21; 8.9; Galatians 4.4 ff.; 3.13; Romans 8; Phil 3.10; I Corinthians 1.30; I Cor. 15. “[Believers] must identify themselves with his shame and death if they are to become what he is in his glorious resurrection life.” With reference to II Peter 1.4 McDonnell writes “the bold expression ‘divine nature’ is found only here in the Scriptures. This biblical text attracted much attention from the early Christian and medieval authors, playing a large role in the development of the doctrine of Grace.... Similar ideas using other vocabularies are found elsewhere in Scripture” citing I John 3.2; John 17.22-3; Romans 8.14-7. Church of Christ professor F. W. Norris writes that “poorly read Protestants have insisted that the Eastern Orthodox idolatrously make us all little gods or that they think of participation in the divine nature only in physical terms. These charges are false.” Norris discusses the early church use of II Peter 1.4; John 10.34-6, where Christ cites Psalm 82.6 (‘you are gods’), with further reference to Romans 6; I Corinthians 10; II Corinthians 8. Catholic Professor Mark O’Keefe writes that “drawing on [II Peter 1.4] and other biblical passages, a number of Greek and Latin patristic authors affirmed that ‘God became human in order that humans might become divine.’” He later discusses the concept of theosis. “While a number of biblical passages (for instance, John 17.21; Romans 2.7; I Cor.

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100 Ibid., 418-9, quoting Athanasius, De Incar 54; Contra Arianos 1.70; Epistle to Serapion 1.24. Marta Ryk also refers to Athanasius as the ‘doctor of deification,’ in Ryk, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in the Deification of Man according to Contemporary Orthodox Theology (1925-1972),” Diakonia 10 (1975): 129, note 92. The significance of Athanasius’ and Nicæa’s rejection of Arius’ christology is borne out by Pannenberg: “The rejection of Arianism was primarily motivated by the soteriological interest of the substantial Christology: we can have full community with God through Christ, we can achieve deification, only if he is God in the fullest sense,” Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jesus—God and Man, op. cit., 124, citing Athanasius, De synod 51.


102 Davies, 251-2.


15.52; Eph 1.10; II Timothy 1.10) may suggest some aspect of *theosis*” it is primarily II Peter 1.4 that the early writers appeal to. With reference to the sacraments, the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that “the sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist [the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper] the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity.”

The Lutheran Rusch indicates that there are two main sources for the belief in divinization. From the Bible he refers to Psalms 82.6; II Peter 1.4; I Cor. 15.49; II Cor. 8.9; Romans 8.11; Genesis 1.26-7; Galatians 3.26; Matthew 5.48. Rusch cites Maximus the Confessor who wrote that “salvation, defined as deification, [is] the chief theme of the Christian faith and the biblical revelation.” Rusch’s second source is the Platonic tradition, which is not totally surprising, considering that Plato is cited often by several of the early Fathers. Kenneth Wesche, a Greek Orthodox, cites John 17.21, Gal 2.20, and then writes: “The concept of *theosis* roots the understanding of salvation in an earlier Old Testament meaning of ‘justification’ or ‘being made righteous.’” Timothy Ware, in his study of deification in the Orthodox Church, cites II Cor 8.9; John 17.22-3; I Cor. 6.19; Rom 12.1, as well as II P 1.4. Marta Ryk writes that “the idea of deification has its roots in philosophy, the Scriptures, the Patristic writings and Liturgy.” She then refers to the following scriptures: John 10.34 (= Psalm 82.6); I John 3.2; II Peter 1.4; Matt 5.48, citing further support from the Johannine writings: John 1.3, 12-3; 3.5, 15-6, 19, 36; 5.26; 6.35, 39, 63; 7.39; 10.34; 13.35; 14.15, 20; 15.1-9, 23; 17.21-3, 26; I John 1.5; 3.2, 9; 4.8-17, etc. She also refers to the Pauline literature: Rom 5.3-5, 10; 6.4; 8.14, 17, 29; I Cor 3.16, 19-20; 12.12-3; 13.12; 15.52; Gal 2.20; 3.26.

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108 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1212, quoting Pope Paul VI, apostolic constitution *Divinae consortium naturae*, (1971). Further references to II Peter 1.4 found in paragraphs 1265 and 1996.

109 Rusch, op. cit., 134-5.


111 Plato, *Timaeus* 28c: “The Father and Maker of all this universe is past finding out, and even if we found him, to tell of him to all men would be impossible.” Deirdre Carabine writes that this passage was cited more frequently by Christian writers than by non-Christian writers: Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic tradition: Plato to Eriugena* (Louvain 1995): 26, note 33; 224, note 6. See Justin, *Apology* II. 10, who quotes this passage from Plato.


113 Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Penguin Books 1991; 1st 1963): 28-9; 236 ff., especially 240-242. Timothy Ware is also known as Bishop Kallistos, or as Kallistos Ware.
Ephesians 1.13-4; 2.16, 22; Phil 2.5-11; 3.21; 1 Thess. 4.17; 1 Tim 6.16. She also discusses several of the Church Fathers, referring to the “patristic adage: ‘God associates only with gods.’”\footnote{14}

There have been several references already to what is called the ‘exchange principle,’ the idea that God became what we are so that we may become what He is. In an interesting discussion Frans Jozef van Beeck has combined this concept with the problem the West has with the doctrine of deification in general. He first quotes from Clement of Alexandria: “Now the Word himself speaks to you in visible form, putting your unbelief to shame—yes, I mean the Word of God that has become Man, so that you in turn might learn from a man just in what way man can become God.”\footnote{15} In a footnote to this quotation van Beeck refers to a French translation of the same passage, which he translates as “‘the Logos of God [that has] become man, so that it would be a man that would teach you in your turn how a God has become man.’” He then writes: “This translation reduces the meaning of the subclause to a redundancy. Is this an example of theological trepidation before the boldness of the exchange principle?”\footnote{16} Apparently there are those in the West who would mistranslate certain texts simply to avoid teaching certain principles which they did not accept or understand. The copyist who cannot read may not know what he is doing when he makes a mistake; but can the same be said of a translator? Rufinus (died 410) openly admitted that he changed some of Origen’s text when translating from Greek to Latin, to spare the sensibilities of his reading audience.\footnote{17} In the preface to his translation of Origen’s De Principiis Rufinus wrote that he was

\footnote{14} Ryk, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in the Deification of Man,” op. cit., esp. 119-125; quotation, 122, with notes 88 and 90. Ryk gives no references here, but Gregory of Nazianzus is quoted by Ware, to the effect that “God is joined in unity with those who are gods and is known by them,” Kallistos Ware, “Christian Theology in the East 600-1453,” in A History of Christian Doctrine, ed. Hubert Cunliffe-Jones (Edinburgh 1978): 218, citing Theological, Gnostic, and Practical Chapters 3.21. Regarding the philosophical roots Dr. Ryk refers us to the article by the Greek theologian, Andrew Theodorou, in Kerygma und Dogma 7 (1961): 283-310, cited below in the bibliography.


\footnote{16} ibid., 299, note 40. The exchange principle has been cited frequently in the literature; see Morna Hooker and the references cited above. Jesuit Gerald O’Collins, Christology, 156-7 writes: “From Irenaeus (Adversus haereses 3.19; 4.20) and Athanasius, through to its high point in the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, and beyond in the teaching of Augustine of Hippo, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great [Pope, 440-461], and others, the experience of becoming ‘godlike’ or being ‘deified’ through Christ in a ‘wonderful exchange’ (admirabile commercium) underpinned the conviction about his identity: ‘It was God who became human that we humans might become divine.’” At page 198 he refers again “to the way Irenaeus and many others interpreted the experience of salvation as a ‘wonderful exchange’ in which the Son of God’s incarnation brought our divinization.” Cf. Duffy, The Dynamics of Grace: 78-9; van Beeck, 63; 86, note i (on Aquinas).

merely following Jerome’s example by “emending theologically offensive passages in the process” of that translation. Jerome (died 420) had been at one time an ardent admirer of Origen and had even translated some of his works. But he had come to believe that Origen was a heretic, at least in some of his teachings. He took great umbrage at Rufinus’ comments, and decided on a translation of his own of Origen’s work. Unfortunately both the original Greek of Origen is lost (except for some fragments) as is the Latin translation by Jerome (except for some fragments). According to Joseph Trigg there is enough remaining to determine that Jerome was “as biased in [his] accentuation of Origen's alleged deviations from orthodoxy as Rufinus’ was in its concealment of them.” Rufinus was not the first to translate according to his own vision of orthodoxy, and certainly was not the last. Saint Augustine’s doctrine of original sin was based on a faulty translation of Romans 5.12. He could not read Greek sufficiently, and had to rely on an earlier Latin translation, and commentary thereon.


Several of the Fathers above referred to the passage from II Peter 1.4 (“participation in the divine nature”). As a defense for the Christian doctrine of deification it was first used by Clement of Alexandria. It became the mainstay of the Fathers subsequent to that time. The fact that it was not put to that use until the early third century, long after the doctrine had become an accepted teaching, by having been taught by several previous Fathers, suggests that the doctrine was part of that tradition which was passed down from teacher to catechumen. It was part of what the student or potential convert was taught, prior to their being baptized, or at least shortly afterward. It was only later that it was deemed necessary to seek out scriptural ‘proof-texts’ for the doctrine. Regardless of what modern exegetes might make of the passage and its ‘original’ meaning in the text, the doctrine was already in place prior to its first use by Clement.120

Mark Nispel has recently studied the extensive use of Psalm 82.6 (“ye are gods”) in early Christological contexts, and has suggested that this may be the origin of the idea of deification. “The evidence of the Latin authors, who know of ‘becoming god’ only in the context of the Christological argument of Psalm 82…indicates that the theology of Christian deification, when drawing upon Hellenistic ideas, arose chiefly out of the exegetical debate over Psalm 82.”121 Arthur Darby Nock writes that the concept of deification “admitted of a wide range of variations and was often expressed with a boldness which surprises moderns who have been brought up to think of the category of divinity as infinitely remote…. It had its roots in Gen. 1.26 and Psalm 82.6.”122 F. W. Norris states that “a second scriptural text provides a clear example of how we read scripture through some tradition. Conservative Protestants often use John 10.34-6. Most defenses of Biblical inerrancy employ the Johannine word from Jesus: ‘scripture cannot be broken.’ But few of those presentations notice that the phrase is an aside. The most striking line from this portion of the opera is elsewhere. According to John certain Jews accuse Jesus of blasphemy; he has allowed himself to be called God. His reply is simple and unexpected. In Psalm 82.6 God says to humans: ‘you are gods.’ What a remarkable reply to the charge of blasphemy. Scripture itself says people are gods.”123 Stephen Duffy refers to Psalm 82.6 as “the well-worn patristic proof text for deification” and refers to its use by Irenaeus and Origen.124 According to Eric Osborn “for Tertullian, the exclusive unity of God does not exclude, but

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120 For instance, see the comment by Anglican R.P.C. Hanson, *The Attractiveness of God* (John Knox Press 1973), 38: “One verse in II Peter is not a sufficient basis for the doctrine that we are all destined to share God’s nature rather than God’s life, as the rest of the New Testament teaches.” The same point is made by Evangelical Al Wolters, “‘Partners of the Deity:’ A Covenantal Reading of II Peter 1.4,” Calvin Theological Journal 25 (1990): 28-44, at page 44. Conversely, Orthodox scholar Nicholas Lossky has written recently with regard to “Westerners” who have trouble accepting the Orthodox view of salvation, which is based on this passage. He writes: “the argument of some biblical scholars, trying to refute the Orthodox view of salvation—that this is a unique occurrence in the New Testament—is not very convincing. ‘The Word became flesh’ is also unique! As everyone knows, St. Peter’s bold statement was expounded in the patristic adage that unsettles so many ‘Westerners’: ‘God became a human being that the human being may become God.’” He goes on to refer to Irenaeus, the Greek-writing Bishop of Lyons in France, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas, the Wesley brothers, Richard Hooker, Lancelot Andrewes, and others.” “Is this really only a ‘typically Eastern Orthodox’ view of salvation?,” in Lossky, “Theology and Prayer. An Orthodox Perspective,” in Sacramental Theology in Worship, Doctrine, and Life. Essays Presented to Geoffrey Wainwright on his Sixtieth Birthday, ed. David S. Cunningham, Ralph Del Colle, Lucas Lamadr (Oxford University Press 1999): 24-32, at page 28-9. The present paper has cited many of the “western” catholic writers on the subject of deification. It is indeed not simply an Eastern Orthodox view of salvation!


124 Duffy, op. cit., quotation from 55. Norman Russell has recently pointed out that Irenaeus was the first to equate Ps 82.6 with Paul’s teaching about the adoptive sonship of mortals. It was then taken over by Clement of Alexandria and Athanasius as a major defense for the teachings on deification, in Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria* (London 2000): 229, note 17, and 240-1, note 28. Kilian McDonnell reminds us that “Origen
rather defines, the deification of men. What belongs to God belongs to him alone; all that we have of him comes from him alone. So, while ‘we shall even be gods’ (according to Psalm 82), ‘this comes from grace, not from some property of ours, since it is he alone who can make gods.’”

125 Johannes Quasten cites Clement of Alexandria’s use of Psalm 82.6. Widdicombe cites Athanasius’ use of the same Psalm in his teaching regarding deification. 127 Gerald Bonner, who has written frequently about deification in Augustine, writes that “the text which Augustine, in common with the Greek Fathers, takes as specifically teaching deification is Psalm 82.6…. While no modern scholar could build a theology of deification on Augustine, writes that “the text which Augustine, in common with the Greek Fathers, takes as specifically different.”

128 Walter Princeps has also cited Augustine’s use of Ps 82.6 as the grounds for his doctrine of is the most influential theologian in the East during the first thousand years,” in McDonnell, “Does the Theology and Practice of the Early Church confirm the Classical Pentecostal Understanding of Baptism in the Holy Spirit?,” Pneuma. The Journal of the Society on Pentecostal Studies 21 (1999): 133. Jaroslav Pelikan has referred to Origen as “the greatest Christian thinker in the first three centuries of the history of the church, perhaps in all of Christian history,” in Pelikan, Imago Deo. The Byzantine Apologia for Icons (Princeton University Press 1990): 2. Catholic scholar Walter Kasper referred to Origen as “the most famous theologian of the third century and perhaps the greatest theologian of all time,” in Kasper, Transcending All Understanding, trans. B. Ramsey (Ignatius Press 1989): 37. Brian Daley, S.J., has referred to Origen as “the first fully professional thinker” in the Church; in Daley, The Hope of the Early Church, 59. Johannes Quasten wrote that Origen is “the first scientific exegete of the Catholic church,” in Quasten, Patrology, II: 45. Didymus the Blind (d. 398) referred to Origen as “the chief teacher of the church after the Apostles,” quoted in Kallistos Ware, “Dare we hope for the Salvation of all? Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Isaac of Nineveh,” Theology Digest 45 (1998): 303-317, at 306. The fifteenth century Byzantine scholar George Scholarius wrote: “Where Origen was good, no one is better, where he was bad, no one is worse,” in Kilian McDonnell, “Does Origen Have a Trinitarian Doctrine of the Holy Spirit?,” Gregorianum 75 (Rome 1994): 5-35, at page 5


127 Peter Widdicombe, Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius (Oxford 1994): 233, citing c. Arianos 1.39; 1.9; 3.19; 3.25; for more on Athanasius cf. 97, 236-7, 226, 249; he also cites Origen, 86-7, 99, 239.

deification. In Norman Russell’s recent study of Cyril, the Bishop of Alexandria (died 444), there are several references to his use of this Psalm as a defense of the deification of humankind. It is evident that the early Fathers taught that the Old Testament, especially this particular Psalm, was sufficient to develop, or perhaps better, to defend, the doctrine of deification which they had inherited from their apostolic ancestors.

Irenee-H. Dalmais, in his article on ‘divinisation’ in the Dictionnaire de Spiritualite, begins with reference to Gen. 1.26-7, II Peter 1.4; I John 3.2 and Matthew 5.48. He then discusses the various Greek Fathers who taught the principle (Ignatius, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hippolytus, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, John of Damascus, Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, Evagrius Ponticus, Symeon the New Theologian, and Gregory Palamas). Those who have cited Matt 5.48 (“be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect”) in their defense of deification include Origen, Athanasius, Clement and Augustine. John Wesley also used the Savior’s command to be perfect in defense of his own theology of perfection. The fourth Lateran Council (1215) states that Christ says “you must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”, as though he were saying more explicitly: ‘you must be perfect’ in the perfection of grace ‘as your heavenly Father is perfect’ in the perfection of nature, i.e., each in his own way.” Pope Paul VI in his Profession of Faith (1968) wrote that the Holy Spirit “purifies [the Church] members if they do not refuse his grace. His action, which penetrates to the inmost of the soul, enables one to respond to the command of Jesus: ‘you must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.’ Pope John Paul II in his text Dominum et Vivificantem quoted Matt 5.48 as the “model of our

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121 Norman Russell, Cyril of Alexandria (London 2000): 20-1 (=101). 107, 126. Deification is referred to throughout the book: 21, 30, 45-6, 235, note 44. Cyril also uses II Peter 1.4 for this purpose.


124 Widdicombe, op. cit., 242, quoting contra Arianos 3.34.


perfection.” Matthew 5.48 is also quoted, paraphrased, or referred to several times in the new Catechism. It is written there that “‘the Church on earth is endowed already with a sanctity that is real though imperfect.’ In her members perfect holiness is something yet to be acquired: ‘Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state—though each in his own way—are called by the Lord to that perfection of sanctity by which the Father himself is perfect.’” 139 Another paragraph (1693) reads in part that “Christ’s disciples are invited to live in the sight of the Father ‘who sees in secret,’ [Matt 6.6], in order to become ‘perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.’” Paragraph 1968 states that “the Gospel brings the Law [of Moses] to its fullness through imitation of the perfection of the heavenly Father, through forgiveness of enemies and prayer for persecutors, in emulation of the divine generosity.” Another paragraph reads: “‘All Christians in any state or way of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity.’ All are called to holiness: ‘Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’” 140 With reference to that portion of the Lord’s prayer which reads “…as we forgive those who trespass against us” the Catechism reads: “This ‘as’ is not unique in Jesus’ teaching: ‘you, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect;’ ‘Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful’ [Luke 6.36]; ‘a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another’ [John 13.34].” 141 Clearly Matthew 5.48 is a significant text for the concept of deification, even in the modern Catholic Church.

In addition to the sources primarily outlined above, that is Psalm 82.6, II Peter 1.4 and Matthew 5.48, there is also “the Pauline teaching on adoptive filiation and re-creation in the likeness of Christ (I Corinthians 15.49, on bearing the image of the heavenly; II Corinthians 8.9, through Christ’s poverty we may be made rich; Romans 8.11, etc.).” 142 Kilian McDonnell adds Ephesians 4.22-4, on putting on the new man; Romans 6.5; 8.14-7, on adoption as sons. 143 Ephesians 2.6 indicates that Christ will raise us up and give us a place at the right hand of God. 144 Jesuit Frans Jozef van Beeck has recently written that “there are a hundred ways to become better, more just, and more humane, but only one way to become gods,” referring us to John 14.6: ‘Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.’ 145

Church Tradition and Deification

It should be evident that the early church taught some concept of the deification of the human person, beginning during this life but only being perfected in the life to come. It has been taught through the Middle Ages and into the Reformation; indeed, the Orthodox churches have taught it from the beginning to the present; and it appears to be gaining prominence in Roman Catholic literature. All of them base it on at least a certain amount of scripture, but not entirely so. Tradition passed down from the earliest Christians also played a large part in the development of the concept. The fact that the first Father to quote scripture in defense of the concept was Clement of Alexandria (citing II Peter 1.4) suggests that some of it was oral or written tradition, rather than strictly scripturally based.

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139 Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 825, quoting a document from the Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium, paragraphs 48.3 and 11.3. LG 11 is also referred to at 1251, footnote. Lumen Gentium in its entirety is found in Flannery, I: 350-426.
140 Catechism, paragraph 2013, quoting Lumen Gentium, 40.2. LG 40 is also cited in the footnote to paragraph 1426.
141 Catechism, paragraph 2842, which goes on to cite Gal 5.25, Phil 2.1, 5 and Eph 4.32.
142 Stephen J. Duffy, The Dynamics of Grace (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn. 1993): 65. Peter Widdicombe writes that Athanasius “argues that our adoption as sons and divinization was prepared in the eternal purposes of the Father in anticipation of the Fall”, Widdicombe, Fatherhood of God: 235-6, citing Athanasius, Contra Arianos 2.75-76.
144 Schonborn, From Death to Life: 40, note 45, quoting John Chrysostom, Sermon on Genesis 2.1.
145 van Beeck, God Encountered, 1.168.
Robert Arida concludes his study of the Second Council of Nicaea (787), which dealt with the iconoclastic controversy, by stating that “What has been accomplished in Christ’s deified humanity is what all of us are called to grow into for all eternity.”

George Schurr has stated that “very early in Christian tradition the end and goal of Christian life was called, among other things, ‘deification.’” He then makes reference to Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus and Athanasius. He continues: “This Greek affirmation of the transformation of human life, and its apparent elevation to divinity, if not deity, is the steady background of the ontological problems involved in the Christological debates of the fourth through sixth centuries.” Then notice the following: “Since Leo I [Pope from 440-461], however, the notion of the ‘deification’ of man seems to have been unintelligible to Western Christians.... From Leo on, Western theology has interpreted salvation more in moral than in ontological terms. The presumption of a fixed ‘infinite distance’ between God and man has made the idea of the ‘deification’ of man at best problematic, and at worst blasphemous, to Western Christians down to the present day.”

Schurr refers the change to the person of Pope Leo the Great. It could just as easily be placed on the shoulders of the Council of Chalcedon (451), which was held under Leo’s influence. As Morna Hooker will tell us below, since that time scholars, both east and west, have studied the scriptures through “Chalcedonian spectacles.” The West especially has continued to problems with the concept of deification, despite the fact that so many of them did in fact talk about it, at least in passing. In the second half of the ninth century Irish philosopher and theologian John Scottus Eriugena visited the East, and gained a great deal of insight into their thinking by means of their own writings. The writings of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor especially excited him. In the works of those Fathers he found much on the concept of deification. It troubled him that his own Roman tradition did not talk much of it. He wrote, as a possible explanation of that fact: “This use of this word, Deification, is very rare in the Latin books…. I am not sure of the reason for this reticence: perhaps it is because the meaning of this word theosis...seemed too profound for those who cannot rise above carnal speculations, and would therefore be to them incomprehensible and incredible.”

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147 Arida, “Second Nicaea: The Vision of the New Man and New Creation in the Orthodox Icon,” Greek Orthodox Theological Review 32 (1987): 417-24, at 424. Earlier he had written that “Christ has opened the way for the deification of all humanity.... This deified humanity of the historical Christ is the model and goal of our humanity” (422).

148 George M. Schurr, “On the Logic of Ante-Nicene affirmations of the ‘Deification’ of the Christian,” Anglican Theological Review 51 (1969): 97-105, at page 97-8. Over a hundred years ago German theologian Albert B. Ritschel wrote about the Eastern concept of deification, and the fact that several in the West had also taught it (Augustine, Aquinas and Luther). “Nevertheless the combination has remained on the whole unproductive for the Western Church, because the latter, since Augustine, has pushed into the foreground the human personality of Christ and His corresponding activity as mediator between God and man…. It followed that the result of the mediatorial activity of the man Christ could not be described as the bestowal of Godhead upon men,” in Ritschl, The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, translated by H.R. Mackintosh (Edinburgh 1900; 1st 1874; 2nd 1883): 389-90.

149 Quoted in John Meyendorff, “Remarks on Eastern Patristic Thought in John Scottus Eriugena,” in Eriugena: East and West, edited by Bernard McGinn and Willelmen Otten (University of Notre Dame 1994): 51-68, at page 56; the quotation is from Eriugena, Periphyseon, Book 5. The statement by Eriugena is also referred to by Deirdre Carabine, John Scottus Eriugena (Oxford 2000): 22, and more fully on 101-2, where she also quotes Eriugena’s comments regarding the Latins: “weak eyes cannot bear the brilliance of the light.” Eriugena wrote that only Ambrose, among the Latins, could see clearly. According to Peter Brown, “unlike Augustine, [Ambrose] could read Greek fluently. He could comb the books of a brilliant new generation of Greek bishops and a whole tradition of Greek Christian scholarship, to give his congregation some of the most learned and up-to-date sermons in the Latin world,” in Brown, Augustine of Hippo (Dorset Press 1967): 82-3; Brown’s statement is quoted in William Harmless, Augustine and the Catechumenate (Liturgical Press 1995): 85-6. For more on Ambrose and deification see the statement in
The fact that deification was taught so openly and widely by the early Church was the work of the Fathers. If it was taught so consistently, and by so many of the Fathers, why is it not the ‘official doctrine’ of the Church; why is there nothing about it in the major creeds, or in the conciliar statements? Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) wondered the same thing. Maximus was one of the last of the Fathers who was conversant in both the Eastern and the Western systems. With reference to the creed Maximus has the following to say, as reported by Jaroslav Pelikan: “In a remarkable passage in his Ambigua, Maximus raised, but left to ‘wise men’ to answer, the question why ‘if this dogma [of theosis] belongs to the mystery of the faith of the Church, it was not included with the other [dogmas] in the symbol expounding the utterly pure faith of Christians, composed by our holy and blessed fathers.’ The symbol had declared that the Son of God came down ‘for the sake of us men and for the purpose of our salvation,’ but it had not specified the content of that salvation as healing, forgiveness, and divinization. Yet this content clearly belonged to the faith and doctrine of the church. But dogma was not very well equipped to define it.”

It is not the purpose of a Council to define the doctrines of the Church; as Bishop (and later Cardinal) Christoph Schonborn said, “it is the role of a Council to profess the Faith, not to explain it; this would be the task of theologians and doctors of the Church.” This was of course part of the problem that Maximus was dealing with: the Fathers clearly taught the doctrine, even if the Councils and Creeds did not. Thirty years after Maximus died a council did in fact have something to say about deification. It was mentioned above...
that one of the means by which the faithful begin their process of deification is the Eucharist. The Council of Trullo (in Constantinople, in 692) stated that “God deifies those who receive Him” in the Eucharist. As noted, the Council of Trullo was an Eastern Council (with decidedly Eastern biases). Deification for the ancients began with baptism, continued through the eucharistic participation, and found its fulfillment, or better perhaps, its continuance, sometime in the eternity that followed. This brings up the subject of the role of the priest in the deification of the mortals who participated in the Eucharistic celebration. Cardinal Schönborn quotes and discusses the following from Gregory Nazianzen: “‘One must first purify oneself before one purifies others; one must be formed before one forms others…. One must be sanctified in order to sanctify.’ Here is the greatness of the priesthood: the priest is ‘the defender of the truth, who stands together with the angels, gives glory together with the archangels…shares the priestly office with Christ, models anew the creative clay, preparing it for the world above, and—more than all this—the priest becomes God and deifies others.” Father Polycarp Sherwood cites a similar passage from Maximus the

153 Cited in Matthias J. Schönenberg, S.J., Mysteries of Christianity (St. Louis 1946): 488. The introduction to the canons reads: “For everywhere has reasonable worship been ordained and the perfect sacrifice is offered; and God, as he is sacrificed and distributed for the care of both bodies and souls, makes divine those who partake of him,” in _The Council in Trullo Revisited_, ed. George Nedungatt and Michael Featherstone (Rome 1995): 46-7. The term _in trullum_ means ‘in the dome’; the council took place at the Imperial Palace, in Constantinople. Kenan Osborne, after citing several third century writers, writes that “we are divinized in the eucharist…,” in Osborne, _The Christian Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist_ (Paulist Press 1987): 182-3. This deification takes place due to the unique Catholic belief that the substance of the bread and wine are literally transformed into the body and blood of Christ; cf. _Catechism of the Catholic Church_, 1374, quoting the Council of Trent; cf. the quotations from the Lateran IV Council (1215) and Trent, in Pelikan, _The Christian Tradition: I. The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600);_ 44. Cf. Paul Meyendorff, “Liturgy and Spirituality I: Eastern Liturgical Theology,” in _Christian Spirituality I: Origins_, ed. B. McGinn and J. Meyendorff (New York 1985): 356: “This process of divinization fulfills itself in the Eucharist;” Lorenzo Valla (ca. 1450) preached a sermon in which he stated that the eucharist provides for “man’s divinization,” in Charles Trinkaus, _In Our Image and Likeness_ (London 1970): 635; cf. P. T. Wild, _The Divinization of Man according to St. Hilary of Poitiers_ (Mundelein 1950): 19: “The Eucharist also divinizes us because it makes us partners of God’s immortality.” For more on the deifying power of the eucharist see the comments mentioned above.


155 Schönborn, _From Death to Life_, 55-6, quoting Gregory Nazianzen, _Oratio_ 2.71.
of this passage in Christopher Kirwan, only in jest) that God was creating a hell in which to place those “pryers into mysteries,” in Hebrews book 11; employed about before this event,’” referred to in Yves Congar, 1967): 35; citing Irenaeus, “time before” the creation of this world wherein He might be “doing” something at all. See the discussion of this passage in Christopher Kirwan, Augustine (London 1991; 1st 1989): 159-63. Origen and Augustine are discussed relative to this statement, in Jean Danielou, Origen (New York 1955): 255-6. John Calvin

On the Redeemed

There is more to be said about the condition of the redeemed. Clement says regarding those who become deified that “‘they will be enthroned along with the other gods, who are set first in order under the Savior.’” Melvin Lawrenz writes that a primary image of salvation for John Chrysostom is “that of human nature itself seated on the royal throne of Christ: ‘It is a great and wonderful thing, and full of amazement that our flesh should sit on high, and be adored by angels and archangels,’” Christoph Schonborn quotes from another Homily of John Chrysostom: “‘God gave us a share in his throne. The sitting at the right hand is the greatest honor, with nothing to equal it. This statement holds true of us also: we too are to sit with him on thrones…. Think of where Christ sits on his throne! ‘Above all principalities and powers! And with whom are you to sit on the throne? With him’”

Clement of Alexandria is said to have taught that God had created other worlds prior to the creation of this one. Origen, in response to the question of what God was doing before He created this world, responded that “we say that God did not begin to work only when he created this visible world; rather, just as there will be another world after the end of this one, so other worlds, in our opinion, existed before this one.”

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157 Ryk, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in the Deification of Man,” op. cit., 120. Paul Meyendorff writes the following regarding the Eastern liturgical practice: “Baptism was the means by which one was made a member of the Church, and the Eucharist was the means by which one affirmed this membership and experienced it. For the experience of the liturgy was precisely the experience of Christianity, and thus it became the very possibility and source for the knowledge of God and for participation in divine life itself. This is the meaning of the Eastern concept of theosis, or divinization,” in Meyendorff, “Liturgy and Spirituality I: Eastern Liturgical Theology,” in Christian Spirituality I: Origins, ed. B. McGinn and J. Meyendorff (New York 1985): 350-363, at page 350-1; 356: “divinization fulfills itself in the Eucharist.”
158 George W. Butterworth, “The Deification of Man in Clement of Alexandria,” Journal of Theological Studies 17 (1916): 157-69, at page 161, quoting Stromateis 3.41.23-5. Note that the “other gods” are clearly subordinate to the Savior, but yet are still entitled to be designated “gods.”
159 Melvin E. Lawrenz, The Christology of John Chrysostom (Mellen Press 1996): 153, quoting Homily on Hebrews 5.1. Notice that worship by the angels is offered to those deified mortals on their thrones.
160 Schonborn, From Death to Life, op. cit., 39-40, quoting Homily on Ephesians 4.2. Once again, notice that the principalities and powers are subject to these deified mortals.
162 Aloys Grillmeier, S.J., Christ in Christian Tradition, Volume Two: From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590-604), Part Four: The Church of Alexandria with Nubia and Ethiopia after 451, translated by O.C. Dean (Westminster John Knox Press 1996; 1st German 1990): 190-1, citing Peri Archon (or De Principiis); he also wrote that “there were earlier worlds and will be later worlds.” Earlier, Irenaeus had answered the same question by simply stating that “no scripture reveals to us what God was employed about before this event,” referred to in Yves Congar, Tradition and Traditions (New York 1967): 35; citing Irenaeus, AH 4.38.1. Augustine was later to respond to the same question by saying (if only in jest) that God was creating a hell in which to place those “pryers into mysteries,” in Confessions, book 11; The Confessions of Saint Augustine, translated by Edward B. Pusey (New York 1964): 222-3. Augustine’s concern was that if God were the Author of Time itself, then it cannot be said that there was a “time before” the creation of this world wherein He might be “doing” something at all. See the discussion of this passage in Christopher Kirwan, Augustine (London 1991; 1st 1989): 159-63. Origen and Augustine are discussed relative to this statement, in Jean Danielou, Origen (New York 1955): 255-6. John Calvin
John Wesley said in a sermon that if God loves this world, did He not love a thousand other worlds; did He not care for the inhabitants of other planets as much as those of this.\textsuperscript{163} Evangelical scholar Loraine Boettner wrote some time ago, with reference to the Redemption, that “through a covenant voluntarily entered into, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit each undertake a specific work.”\textsuperscript{166} Origen said that the principle which Augustine had suggested in jest, that God was preparing a hell for those who asked about such matters; in William A. Christian, “Augustine on the Creation of the World,” \textit{Harvard Theological Review} 46 (1953): 1-25, at page 5, citing Calvin, \textit{Institutes} 1.14.1. See also Anthony N. S. Lane, \textit{John Calvin. Student of the Church Fathers} (Baker Books 1999): 221, where he points out that both Calvin and Luther were familiar with the discussion by Augustine; Calvin also attributes it (mistakenly) to Cassiodore. The Emperor Justinian in 543 wrote that one of the heresies taught by Origen was “the plurality of worlds which God created before ours and will create after ours,” in Grillmeier, \textit{The Christology of Emperor Justinian}, translated by Kenneth P. Wesche (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, New York 1991). This is one of the complaints Jerome found against Origen also; see Elizabeth Clark, \textit{The Origenist Controversy} (1992): 12, citing Jerome, \textit{Epistle} 124.5. The Council of Constantinople II (553), which officially condemned some of Origen’s ideas, was called by the Emperor Justinian, partly because his letter of 543 had failed to do the job; \textit{ibid.}, 403-4. The fifteen anathemas are listed by Grillmeier in \textit{ibid.}, 404-5. Nothing is said in them, however, regarding Origen’s teaching regarding previous creations. See further on this in Kallistos Ware, “Dare we hope for the salvation of all? Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Isaac of Nineveh,” \textit{Theology Digest} 45.4 (1998): 303-317, at 306-7, and 316, note 9.


\textsuperscript{166} E.P. Meijering, \textit{Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity. De Trinitate 1.1-19; 2; 3} (E.J. Brill 1982): 154, with reference to Tertullian, \textit{Adv Marc} 1.13.2; 2.4.3; 2.4.5; \textit{De Spec} 2.4; \textit{De Put} 5.5; Irenaeus, \textit{AH} 2.41.1; 4.14; 5.29.1; 4.8; Theophilus of Antioch, 2.10; \textit{Epistle to Diognetus} 10 (“If you too yearn for this faith, then first of all you must acquire full knowledge of the Father. For God loved men, and made the world for their sake”); Lactantius, \textit{De Ira} 13 (“the world was arranged for our benefit”); 14 (“He fashioned the world for the sake of man”); \textit{Epit.} 24. 63 ff.; \textit{Divine Institutes} 7.4. Oden quotes Lactantius, \textit{Divine Institutes} lxviii ff. “God made all things on account of man,” in \textit{The Living God}, 268. Gerard Watson cites Celsus’ complaint that Christians “assert that God made all things for man,” in Watson, “Celsus and the Philosophical Opposition to Christianity,” \textit{Irish Theological Quarterly} 58 (1992): 165-79, at page 173, citing \textit{contra Celsum} 4.74. Cyril of Jerusalem wrote (\textit{Catechesis} 12.5) that “the universe was made for the sake of mankind,” in Edward Yarnold, S.J., \textit{Cyril of Jerusalem} (London 2000): 142.

that God could, if He chose, create others after this one.\textsuperscript{167} Theodore Askidas, Bishop of Caesarea (ca. 540 AD) went so far as to suggest that those who are deified, thereby becoming equal to Christ, will join in creating other worlds.\textsuperscript{168} Over one hundred years ago J. D. Davis wrote an intriguing article on the possibilities of sanctification after death. He concluded by writing: “who shall say that God may not safely go on creating new beings whom the host of those who are already perfected by trial and experience shall teach and train, thus filling up the great universe of God, whose limits no human eye has ever yet discovered? Nay, more, may he not go on forever enlarging and forever peopling this universe with happy beings?”\textsuperscript{169} Dionysius the Areopagite suggested long ago that nothing could be more divine than to become ‘a fellow worker with God.’ Some are purified, he wrote, some purify others; some are being perfected, while others complete the perfecting initiation for others.\textsuperscript{170} In 1967 Pope Paul VI stated that the saved in heaven may “cooperate in saving their brothers.”\textsuperscript{171} The idea that the redeemed may help to save others is common in the patristic writings.\textsuperscript{172}
Jesus taught that “he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do” (John 14.12). Thomas Oden remarks that this is “one of the most astonishing statements reported of Jesus.”

If the redeemed are to be enthroned with Christ, and do greater works than even Christ Himself did, is it not possible to conclude that they will at least also do the works of Christ—create additional worlds as He had done, and is still doing? May they not people those new worlds, and teach their inhabitants, and ultimately redeem those who are willing to keep the commandments, and live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God? Maximus the Confessor wrote that “all that God is, except for an identity in ousia [substance], one becomes when one is deified by grace.”

Philip A. Khairallah presents some interesting thoughts on the above ideas. He is a priest of the Melkite Rite, of the Holy Orthodox Church of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem, in communion with the Church of Rome. He cites II Peter 1.4, and Athanasius, and then writes that “the one and only aim of human life on earth is union with God and deification.” “Marriage is eternal…. [and] is another channel God has given to us for our deification.” He writes that “parents have a responsibility to their children in aiding them to grow in faith and wisdom, to achieve responsible adulthood, so that they too may seek their deification.”

Donald Winslow in his study of Gregory Nazianzus has a great deal to say about deification as taught by all the Fathers, and this one in particular. His conclusion is instructive: “Theosis…is not solely a soteriological term …[nor yet a] christological or anthropological [term]…. It is more properly understood as a theological term. That is, it helps us the better to know who God is; what God has done for us, and therefore who we are and can be.” Gregory Nazianzus wrote that the Incarnation was accomplished “in order to make men God to the same extent that He was made man.”

The Creeds make it clear that in the...
Incarnation God was made “true man.” Indeed, the Council of Chalcedon in 451 defined Jesus, “following the holy Fathers,” as “the same one in being [homoousios] with the Father...and one in being [homoousios] with us as to the humanity, like unto us in all things but sin.”\(^{178}\) We have seen that the creation was for the deification of mortals; we have seen that God became man so that mortals could become God; can we, then, assume anything regarding the future destiny of humankind other than that they will also then become “true God?” The ‘marvelous exchange’ cannot be said to have taken place unless that becomes the reality, for us as it was for Him.

**Bibliography on Deification**


\(^{178}\) Neuner-Dupuis 614; *Sources of Catholic Dogma* 148. One might ask: if we are homoousios with Jesus; and if Jesus is homoousios with God, are we then also homoousios with God? Would this not then suggest that there is a relationship between God and mortals on earth which is much closer than the terms Creator and creature would imply; that perhaps after all mortals are of the same race as God, that He is in reality the Father of the spirits of all humankind (Heb 12.9; Numbers 16.22; Acts 17.28; John 20.17; Ephesians 4.6; Romans 8.16).

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49. Flogaus, R., Theosis bei Palamas und Luther (Gottingen 1997).
58. Hartnett, Joanne J., Doctrina S. Bonaventurae de deiformitate (Mundelein 1936).
74. Larchet, Jean-Claude, La Divinisation de l’homme selon Saint Maxime le Confesseur (Paris 1996).


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